

NC Office of Strategic Partnerships Monthly Connect: North Carolina County Profile Data: Promises and Pitfalls for Collaboration Relevant Resources

This is a follow-up to the [NC Office of Strategic Partnerships](#) (OSP) October 2022 Monthly Connect: **North Carolina County Profile Data: Promises and Pitfalls for Collaboration** ([recording](#)).

OSP regularly shares information and resources after Monthly Connect sessions. Typically, panelists or participants shared the information and resources in the virtual “chat.” This is not intended to be a comprehensive list of resources. More about the Monthly Connect series [here](#).

Speakers at this Monthly Connect were:

Anita Brown-Graham (moderator), Director, nIMPACT Initiative and Professor, UNC School of Government

Denise Canada, Fiscal and Policy Research Director, NC Association of County Commissioners

Mike Cline, State Demographer, Economic Analysis Section, NC Office of State Budget and Management

Jessica Dorrance, Research Director, nIMPACT Initiative, UNC School of Government

Eliza Edwards, Deputy Director, NC Office of Strategic Partnerships

Alisha Friday, Executive Director, Lincoln County United Way

Rebecca McCall, Vice Chair, Henderson County Board of Commissioners

Resources

Descriptions are paraphrased and come directly from active links as of October 27, 2022.

[Carolina Across 100 County Data Profiles](#)

Synthesize data on topics such as population changes, local economic conditions, health, civic engagement, and other key metrics. The profiles may serve as a tool for residents, decision makers, and others to learn about their own communities and those around them. Carolina Across 100 partnered with Carolina Demography to create the visualizations.

[KIDS COUNT Data Center](#)

KIDS COUNT is a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and a source of data on children and families. It includes information on a range of indicators and can be filtered by state, county, school district, city, and congressional district.

[myFutureNC County Attainment Profiles](#)

myFutureNC is a statewide nonprofit organization focused on educational attainment. The county attainment profiles highlight county-level educational attainment and key education and workforce performance metrics. They include 57 indicators from 13 different state and federal data providers.

[NC Association of County Commissioners \(NCACC\)](#)

NCACC provides advocacy, education, research, and members services for North Carolina counties.

- [County data profiles](#): Explore each of North Carolina’s 100 counties’ data fact sheet.
- [2022 County Map Book](#): Compiles the most relevant NC county data maps into one publication. These data and map visualizations highlight demographic, economic, health, and educational information from all 100 counties.

[NC Community College System Office Dashboards](#)

Dashboards on a range of themes including access, enrollment, college and career readiness, and more.

[NC Department of Commerce](#)

NC Commerce works with local, regional, national, and international organizations to improve the economic well-being of North Carolinians. The agency publishes data, statistics, information, and reports that are relevant to the state’s economy.

- [Labor and Economic Analysis Division \(LEAD\) Research Manual](#): Includes data sources relevant to economic and workforce development.
- [LEAD Area Profiles](#): Includes county-level data on jobs, workforce, business establishments, wages, and more. NC Commerce will soon make the data available by regional prosperity zone and workforce development board.

[NC Department of Health and Human Services \(NCDHHS\)](#)

NCDHHS, in collaboration with many partners, provides essential services to improve the health, safety, and well-being of North Carolinians.

- [NC Early Childhood Action Plan Data Dashboards](#): Developed to track progress toward the targets and sub-targets of the ten 2025 goals in the [North Carolina Early Childhood Action Plan](#).
- [NC Early Care and Learning Dashboard](#): NC's high-quality early care and learning network helps parents raise their infants, toddlers, and preschoolers into healthy children, strong students, well-rounded individuals, and productive citizens. This dashboard shows enrollment and program site information for the state.
- [NC Medicaid Dashboards](#): Include dashboards for enrollment, claims, annual reports and tables, payments to providers, and expenditures.

[NC Department of Public Safety \(NCDPS\)](#)

NCDPS works to safeguard and preserve the lives and property of the people of North Carolina through prevention, protection, and preparation.

- [Governor's Crime Commission Justice Data Portal](#): Developed by the Criminal Justice Analysis Center – part of the Governor's Crime Commission – to centralize criminal justice data collected by agencies across the state. The portal's reporting tools provide publicly available analysis at the state and county level.
- [Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention \(JJDP\)](#)
JJDP is committed to the reduction and prevention of juvenile delinquency by effectively intervening, educating, and treating youth to strengthen families and increase public safety.
 - [Annual county databooks](#): Includes county-level data on offenses, admissions to facilities and community programs, supervision cases, and more.
 - [School-justice partnership dashboard](#)

[NC Early Education Coalition: COVID-19 Child Care Crisis](#)

Data and resources on the impact of COVID-19 on the child care sector and information on efforts to stabilize it. See also [Child Care Connections](#), a child care resource and referral service funded by Smart Start through the Cleveland County Partnership for Children and the North Carolina Division of Child Development & Early Education.

[NC Homeless Education Program \(NCHPEP\), UNC Greensboro](#)

NCHPEP is the Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program for North Carolina. NCHPEP works to ensure that North Carolina policies are in compliance with federal law, provide technical assistance to local homeless education liaisons, and provide informational and awareness materials to educators and other interested community members. See also data on [Student Homelessness in America](#).

[NC Office of State Budget and Management \(OSBM\)](#)

OSBM serves North Carolinians by providing objective information and analysis to ensure a balanced budget and effective stewardship of public resources. Developing and executing the state budget drives much of the work at OSBM.

- [Log Into North Carolina \(LINC\) data portal](#): Contains over 900 data items pertaining to population, labor force, education, transportation, etc.
- [State Demographer data platform](#): Houses the latest data produced by the Office of the State Demographer. The platform allows users to create visualizations, download datasets, and create maps.
- [Five Things to Know About County Profiles](#): Benefits and limitations of data profiles, dashboards, and other data compilations. (Compiled by Mike Cline, State Demographer)

[University of North Carolina System County Connections Fact Sheets](#)

This interactive map provides a snapshot of the system's 16 universities' contributions to urban and rural parts of the state at the county level. Fact sheet information includes number of resident undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in UNC System institutions, number of UNC System employees residing in each county, and total dollars in economic impact made through NC Cooperative Extension.

Five Things to Know About County Profiles

Benefits and limitations of data profiles, dashboards, other data compilations.

Compiled by Mike Cline, [State Demographer, NC Office of State Budget & Management](#)

1. Profiles are an easy way to share key statistics of your area with decision makers.

Profiles are an easy way to compare your area with others or with itself (how does my county rank with other counties, neighboring counties, similar counties, and/or the state; how has this indicator changed over time?)

2. Profiles are like peering into a community through a small window.

They are limited by purposes for which the profiles were created; resources of the organization providing the profiles; and/or data availability.

1. **General purpose profiles are created to provide a resource for commonly asked questions.** As such, they serve as a first stop for accessing data. [County Map Book - The Most Relevant North Carolina County Data Maps: NC Association of County Commissioners \(ncacc.org\)](#); [AccessNC Community Demographics Search \(ncommerce.com\)](#); [Log Into North Carolina \(LINC\)](#); [County Profiles - Carolina Across 100 \(unc.edu\)](#)
2. **Some profiles/dashboards may be created to focus on a key demographic group, activity, or to trace pre-determined key indicators.** Example: [KIDS Count Databook](#); various public health dashboards (highlighting key indicators for COVID).

3. Any given indicator in a profile provides *an answer but not a comprehensive answer*.

For instance: Showing median household income can provide a general indicator about household incomes in your county – but it does not provide any information about income disparities. Does your county only have very high income and very low-income households? How many low-income households? **BUT good profiles provide source information** so that you can dig into the data beginning with that source.

4. Data profiles of a selected geographic area can mask differences within that geographic area.

Profiles usually provide data for a specific geographic area such as counties and municipalities. Counties are the most used because their boundaries are generally stable over time enabling you to compare indicators to historical periods. Counties are also the smallest geography for which most administrative data are reported (e.g. vital statistics, vehicle registrations, etc.).¹ Survey based estimates such as the American Community Survey (ACS) are also more reliable at the county level than estimates made for subcounty areas such as census tracts (i.e. the margins of error are larger for subcounty areas).

However, county characteristics can mask differences within the county. Overall, 10% of the population of a county could live in households with incomes below poverty. Within the county, there could be one or two neighborhoods (or census tracts) where 90% of the population lived in households with incomes below poverty. Geographers call this the modified area unit problem (MAUP).

5. Profiles are only as good as their source data.

“...the more the data, the surer we fool ourselves.” [Xiao-Li Meng](#) (reflecting on Big Data usefulness)

Lots of pretty visualizations don't make up for bad data. And data can be bad. Severe deficiencies can limit the usefulness of a dataset. Good profiles will provide some background material that provides information about the limitations of any given dataset within the profile OR provides a link to the original source so that you can read about the methodologies, assumptions, and limitations of the data. You can also access more detailed data on a specific subject that may be provided by the original source.

¹ More and more data are available for smaller geographies – sometimes down to the parcel. However, data are not always published for detailed geographies and is thus only available by request from the data owner.

Along with the source data, it is important to know the date of the estimate and/or production date/vintage. For instance, NC OSBM produces annual [population estimates AND projections](#). The State Demographer revises previous estimates and projections based upon new input data, corrections to previous input data, model improvements, and/or (for projections) updates to trends shown in new estimates (for instance more counties showing growth in the past year than experienced during the depth of the pandemic).