

CAROLINA
DEMOGRAPHY



YEAR IN REVIEW

2020

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Morehead-Patterson Bell Tower, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. (Johnny Andrews/UNC-Chapel Hill)

About Carolina Demography

We use population-level data to answer the question: **Where is North Carolina heading?**

Carolina Demography is a team of demographic researchers, evaluators, spatial analysts, coders, designers, and storytellers, working at the Carolina Population Center at UNC Chapel Hill. We provide people with the data and analysis they need to make sense of population-level changes.

Collectively, we have decades of experience making population estimates and forecasts, analyzing population-level and economic trends, and communicating that data back out into the world in a way that's easy to understand and act upon. Our work informs decision-making, evaluation, and policy across North Carolina, where we serve organizations and people in all 100 counties.

Way back in 2019, which now seems like eons ago, I wrote a [column for Vox](#) about the importance of the upcoming 2020 Census. It started off like this: “For demographers like me, the census is kind of like our Super Bowl, if the Super Bowl only took place once a decade — and if the foundation of your representative democracy hinged on the winner of the game.”

The 2020 Census kicked off its nationwide efforts to count every person in the United States during the second week of March 2020. If that week rings a bell, it’s because it’s also the week that many of us — Carolina Demography included — started working remotely as the pandemic ravaged the world around us and everything drastically changed overnight.

So much of our lives and our livelihoods depend on a deeper understanding of data and underlying population dynamics. Nowhere was that more evident than throughout 2020, as we all struggled to make sense of the stream of data around COVID-19 and the 2020 election.

The core mission of Carolina Demography is to provide accurate and specific information about demographic change in North Carolina and interpret what those changes mean for our communities. This work took on new dimensions in 2020 as we worked with partners across North Carolina to better understand:

- [How COVID-19 affected each area of the state](#)
- [How high school and college students navigated each step of the educational attainment pipeline](#)
- [How to increase Census participation in communities across the state](#)
- [How school districts can best track their students’ progress and increase FAFSA participation](#)

And still, 2020 will reverberate in our work for years to come. Dozens of data products have been impacted by this pandemic. Some data streams have been temporarily disrupted, leaving a gap in our knowledge. Release of other data has been delayed, meaning we will not know the impact of 2020 for some time.

This report looks at the work we accomplished in 2020 and the questions we answered alongside many of you. We’re looking forward to continuing these efforts, and to work that much harder to answer the ongoing question: “Where is North Carolina headed?”



Rebecca Tippett Ph.D. is the founding director of Carolina Demography, an applied demography unit based at the Carolina Population Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rebecca Tippett'.

Rebecca Tippett, PhD
Director of Carolina Demography
Carolina Population Center, UNC Chapel Hill

Research and Impact



Interpreting the data behind COVID-19 in NC

Carolina Demography worked closely with researchers from the Gillings School of Global Public Health on a dashboard providing centralized information about COVID-19 in North Carolina for policy makers, researchers, and the public.

Our work for this project involved data acquisition, cleaning, and integration – and drew on our deep knowledge of contextual datasets.

We used population estimates for local demographic context, covariates related to county health, and county economic indicators, along with data from multiple state agencies to produce multiple contextual data sets. These data sets were given to researchers for use in interactives on the site. In addition, we made GIS maps to make interactives on the website, including mapping data for nursing homes, meatpacking plants, colleges and universities, and child care facilities and schools.

[Read the full case study](#)



Improving NC's FAFSA completion rate

We partnered with myFutureNC to develop the NC First in FAFSA tracker, which supports school districts and schools in accessing FAFSA completion data. The tracker provides educators across the state with visualizations that can be used by counselors and other college access professionals to better target their efforts.

[Read the full case study](#)

Providing real-time response rates for the 2020 Census

In 2020, the NC Counts Coalition provided funding to more than 60 NC-based organizations working to reach the communities most at-risk of being undercounted in the 2020 Census.

As Census collection efforts began, the Coalition asked Carolina Demography to provide their grant recipients with real-time Census response information for targeted communities so that they could better understand how to allocate their limited resources.

We identified the type of information that would be most useful for communications and outreach organizations throughout the state. We developed a weekly email summary, report, and social media cards to share this information. In addition, we realized many people across the state — in addition to the NC Counts Coalition’s grant recipients — would benefit from having this information about their county response rate. Scaling these efforts across all 100 counties provided county officials and key Census outreach communities with detailed guides to target and prioritize communities at high risk of being undercounted in the Census.



[Read the full case study](#)

Understanding a community after redistricting

Mandatory redistricting in 2019 changed the boundaries of North Carolina’s 4th congressional district, currently represented by Congressman David Price. His office approached Carolina Demography because they wanted to better understand the context of their new district and learn more about who their new constituents were.

We identified key data elements from a variety of sources and wove these into a cohesive, integrated picture of the district. We provided this as a formatted databook and presented key findings to the staff.

[Read the full case study](#)

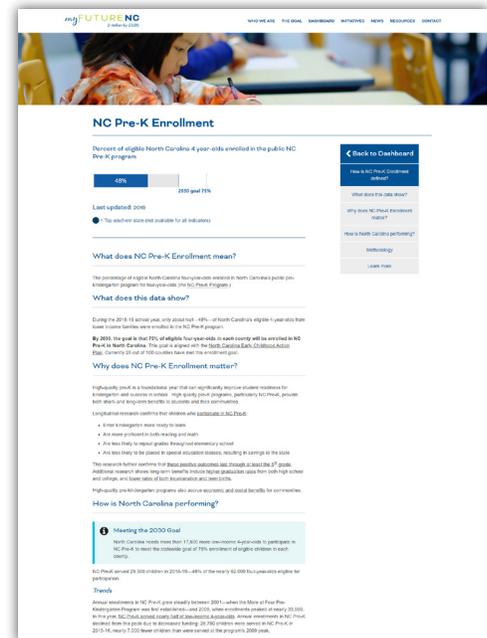


Monitoring progress towards a statewide attainment goal

We partnered with myFutureNC to launch a statewide attainment dashboard to serve as a shared, nonpartisan source of information about the state of education in North Carolina. The dashboard tracks proven indicators along the education continuum, capturing key transition points for students from NC Pre-K enrollment through degree or credential completion and into the labor market.

We also created customized attainment profiles for all 100 counties to inform ongoing efforts across the state. These profiles were refined through a series of virtual focus groups; Carolina Demography and myFutureNC met with nearly 400 county leaders across the state to understand local needs and used this feedback to inform the development of the local profiles.

[View the dashboard](#)



Measuring the data that matters to a community

Our clients, several local governments in Orange County and the Chamber for a Greater Chapel Hill-Carrboro, were, in their words, “swimming in data soup.” Their goal: to align around their work and their messaging around that work.

Carolina Demography streamlined their existing processes for acquiring, updating, and maintaining data. We combined data from public sources with data contributed by our partners to create new indicators, implemented regular data updates, and provided background information on the meaning of the statistics. We also wrote analytic memos to highlight significant trends and provided instruction on how to use the database. We worked continually to ensure that the data and communications efforts met needs.

Our broad range of community data and analyses have supported public policy and business decisions in Orange County, NC. They have also provided the data content for the Chamber’s annual State of the Community presentation to help local governments and businesses better understand existing and future demographic trends in the county and its surrounding region.

[Read the full case study](#)

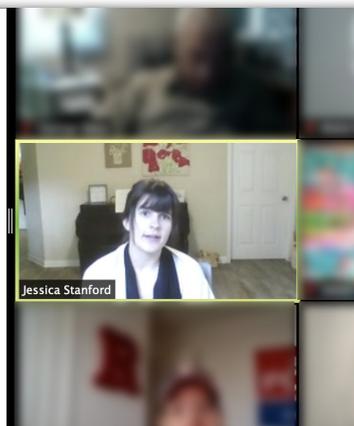
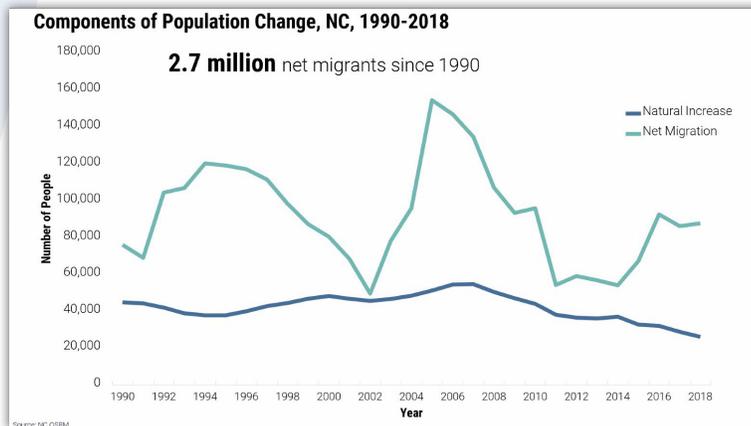


Public outreach and presentations across the state

We present to and engage stakeholders and decision-makers to facilitate understanding of population-level change. Audiences in 2020 included:

- Americorps**
- Black Census Summit**
- Charlotte Donors Forum**
- College Advising Corps.**
- East Chapel Hill Rotary Club**
- Emerging Executives Forum**
- NALEO**
- National Federation of Businesses**
- NC Census Task Force**
- NC State University's Institute for Emerging Issues**
- NC TraCS ISP Spring Seminar Series**
- Network for Southern Economic Mobility**
- North Carolina's Adult Promise: The Higher Education and Workforce Imperative**
- North Carolina Association of County Commissioners**
- North Carolina Community Colleges**
- North Carolina Healthcare Association**

- Public School Forum of North Carolina**
- Sanford School of Policy, Duke University**
- Second Harvest Food Bank**
- State of the Census Briefing**
- Tar Heel Circle**



Our work across North Carolina

In 2020, Carolina Demography worked in all 100 counties in North Carolina. We completed research for the following organizations:

Carolina Common Enterprise

The Chamber for a Greater Chapel Hill-Carrboro

GEAR UP, Appalachian State University

Gillings School of Global Public Health, UNC

John M. Belk Endowment

Juntos Program, NCSU

MDC, Inc.

myFutureNC

NC Counts Coalition

NC Local News Lab

NCSU Belk Center for Community College

Leadership and Research

North Carolina Department of Transportation

North Carolina Institute of Political Leadership

Office of Congressman David Price

Orange County

Research Triangle Regional Partnership

Town of Carrboro

Town of Chapel Hill

Town of Hillsborough

Wake County Public School System



By the Numbers

In 2020, Carolina Demography staff provided pro bono technical assistance to hundreds of local and statewide non-profit organizations, journalists, researchers, and NC residents:

300+ data requests from organizations and individuals across the state

20+ presentations on topics ranging from migration to urbanization to population trends

50+ data requests from reporters for background information or context for data-based reporting

250+ [media mentions in publications](#)

Work With Us

We help you evaluate population data, engage and make decisions.

Our process:

Initiate

You contact us and tell us what questions you're trying to answer about your community. In this stage, we'll also discuss your timeline, budget, audience, and the best way to package information for your use.

Define

We work with you to determine the scope of work, which can include any or all of the services we offer: everything from basic data acquisition to a fully custom presentation or online interactive.

During this stage, we also finalize the cost and schedule of the work. We assign members of our team to work with you and determine whether we need to bring in additional experts or resources from the Carolina Population Center or larger UNC community.

Design

We identify the best data sources and analytical and communications methods to answer your questions. A detailed project plan and work assignments are also completed during this phase.

Execute

We do the agreed upon work. We stay in frequent communication to ensure that we're meeting your requirements, doing so on your timeline and within your budget. Especially, in larger projects, we provide preliminary materials for you to review.

Deliver

This might be where we deliver a presentation for you, provide a database and documentation, or provide final materials.

Evaluate

We follow up to make sure that you're satisfied.

Our products:



Data acquisition

We know where to find relevant data and can translate complex information based on the questions you need to answer. We can also help you determine what questions you should be asking.



Custom population estimates & projections

Using Stata, SAS and R, we can project populations or school enrollments that give insight into how your community will shift in the coming years.



Analysis & interpretation

We can identify potential policy responses to demographic change and analyze the impact of current or proposed policies on specific populations.



Workshops, training, & presentations

We convene and engage your stakeholders and decision-makers to facilitate understanding and dialogue and strengthen the capacity of your organization to communicate data-driven ideas.

Contact us:

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Who We Are

Rebecca Tippett, PhD, Director, is founding director and principal research lead of Carolina Demography at the Carolina Population Center. She is a nationally recognized expert in applied demographics research and methods. Her work helps leaders across North Carolina make sense of population-level changes throughout the state.

Elliot Kent, PhD, Project Manager, ensures that client work is correctly scoped, priced and delivered with the highest quality. Elliot has an extensive background in operations and project management, as well as social science, local government, and private business.

Jessica Stanford, Demographic Analyst, finds, assesses, and analyzes data to help clients answer their pressing questions about demographic, social, and economic trends. Jess has a broad knowledge of community population and economic development data and frequently presents on demographic topics across the state.

Joanne Brosh, PhD, Research Associate, focuses primarily on the North Carolina education pipeline, education issues and programs (early childhood, secondary and post-secondary). Joanne has extensive experience in applied research and program evaluation in state and federal government as well as in academic settings.

Melody Kramer, Communications Director, is responsible for communications and content design across all platforms for Carolina Demography. In previous roles, Mel led teams and projects in the federal government, at global non-profits, and at local and national media organizations.

Chris Busbin, Web Developer, works with the Carolina Demography team to develop and implement useful and effective websites. Chris brings a fusion of interface design and software development skills to his work for a user-experience driven approach to web development.

Trevor Berreth, Graphic Designer, is responsible for data-visualizations, digital interactive tools, and iterative fact sheets. Carolina Demography clients benefit from his experience in UI/UX, systems, and publications design.