



## "A Model of Democracy in Action"

Author : Mike Smith

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A few years ago our strategic foresight process identified expanding our work on public policy issues as one of our highest programmatic priorities. Building on earlier work by Aimee Wall and others, Anita Brown-Graham is leading our policy initiative—[ncIMPACT](#). It is a statewide initiative to help local communities use data and evidence to improve conditions and inform decision making. ncIMPACT focuses on local government as the center of gravity for experimenting with new ideas and approaches. Of course the School still works directly with state leaders on policy issues, and we recognize that innovative local solutions may affect state and national policy.

One role for ncIMPACT is to expand the School's policy work by supporting faculty members who otherwise might not have the resources, capacity or expertise to work on an important issue. A good example is the Drinking Water Working Group. Jill Moore is the lead faculty member on this project to "provide practical tools to assist local governments in responding to incidents affecting the availability or safety of drinking water for residents in their jurisdictions." In some ways this is a classic School project—work on a core government service that everyone takes for granted until it is no longer available.



Two Famous West Charlotte High Lions, Kennedy Meeks and Jill Moore (Jill's on the right)

Jill told me that this project would not be happening but for the support of ncIMPACT. Anita helped to secure \$50,000 from the UNC Policy Collaboratory to convene and support the Working Group. Emily Williamson Gangi, ncIMPACT's Engagement Director, worked with others to identify and bring together a diverse group of subject-matter experts, local and state government officials, and other stakeholders. ncIMPACT has provided similar support to the School's [Opioid Response Project](#). Kim Nelson, Adam Lovelady, Jill Moore, Anita, and Emily are the project's core team members, along with David Brown, ncIMPACT's Research Director. Anita also was instrumental



in securing funding for the opioid project from [Blue Cross NC](#).



Emily Williamson Gangi

In addition to drawing on the School's expertise, another goal of ncIMPACT is to draw on other faculty at Carolina and at other universities—as well as people with expertise from the private and nonprofit sectors. In addition to Jill and Jeff Hughes from the School, the Working Group includes faculty members from the Gillings School of Global Public Health and the Department of Marine Sciences, as well as a professional from the UNC Institute for the Environment. The Working Group's first meeting included an overview of law and regulations affecting drinking water by Richard Whisnant and Jeff Hughes.

ncIMPACT also is experimenting with new ways to share information and make connections with people who need data to support their work on policy issues. Anita hosts a new TV show for UNC-TV, cleverly titled [ncIMPACT](#), focused on how local collaborators are developing civic solutions in response to specific community challenges. [The first episode](#) looked at how Pittsboro is turning to women as skilled workers to fill nontraditional jobs in the construction industry. The second episode will feature the revitalization of Kinston, including the work of the School's [Development Finance Initiative](#). The program is sponsored by [CIVIC Federal Credit Union](#), which is the online partner of the School's long-time supporter, [Local Government Federal Credit Union](#). This new television program is just one of the ways that ncIMPACT is working to share information about how innovative solutions in one community can be shared with others across North Carolina.





Anita Brown-Graham

ncIMPACT is doing a wonderful job of supporting faculty members in expanding our work on policy issues. Our work on policy issues comes about in many ways, however. A good example is the [Social Service Regional Supervision and Collaboration Working Group](#) (SSWG). The General Assembly directed the School to convene the group, facilitate the meetings, and provide staff to support the project. Aimee Wall and Margaret Henderson stepped up and brilliantly managed a complex and politically charged process to a successful conclusion. Here is praise from one of the group members, Page Lemel, a Transylvania County Commissioner: *"I was challenged to think deliberately and deeply, and for that, I am very grateful. I appreciated the free exchange of ideas to provide better service to the most vulnerable of our great state. We were a model of democracy in action. I valued the respect we had for one another and for our shared vision. We accomplished so much in an amazingly short amount time."*



Aimee Wall



Margaret Henderson

The School identified expanding public policy work as a high priority, and we are doing it. Our development team, led by Jen Willis, Associate Dean for Development, is another key partner in supporting our policy work. They were involved in helping to generate support for the Opioid Response Project and the new UNC-TV program, and they are actively working with other faculty to support their work. For example, Jen also is working closely with Jessie Smith to secure foundation funding for her work on criminal justice policy issues.



All of the projects I've mentioned in this post illustrate the School's unique role as a trusted source for convening, facilitating, and supporting groups working on important policy issues. It is the perfect time to expand our work in the policy area, and it is a reminder that a continued commitment to our core values of non-partisanship and policy neutrality is important in giving all officials the confidence to seek our expertise.