

# North Carolina Grants Management System

## Enterprise IT Management Initiatives

2010-2023

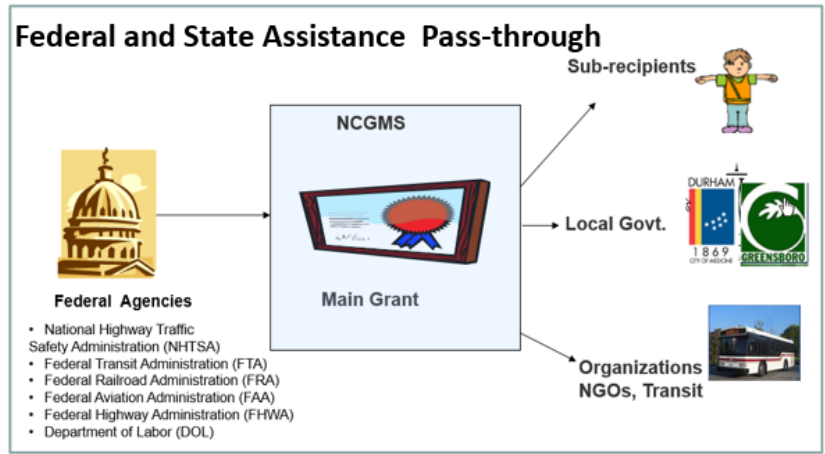
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# Executive Summary

Since 2010, the N.C. Department of Transportation (NCDOT) has maintained a state-of-the-art grants management solution to support applications, contracts/awards, reimbursements, drawdowns, allocations, loans, and reporting requirements for multiple state agencies.

The grants management system was developed to address the considerable complexity of the grants landscape. North Carolina processes billions of dollars in federal and state assistance each year. Federal assistance is a pass-through for several federal agencies. State appropriations are routed through the state budget bill to the respective agencies. All funding must be used in accordance with federal and state rules and guidelines, and funding assistance is allocated in the form of reimbursements, drawdowns and loans. With such a complex grants landscape, there was a critical need to create a system to manage and ensure these resources are spent in accordance with federal and state guidelines. The North Carolina Grants Management System (NCGMS) was



implemented by NCDOT in 2010 and soon became a statewide initiative, transforming operations and services related to federal and state grants funding and program management. In 2021, NCDOT implemented a major upgrade to the NCGMS user interface and expanded the system to include important partner agencies such as the Council for Women and Youth Involvement under the N.C. Department of Administration, the Broadband and Digital Equity Office through the N.C. Department of Information Technology, and to the North Carolina Pandemic Recovery Office under the Office State Budget and Management. NCGMS replaced multiple, disparate systems and manual worksheets with a modernized, integrated Enterprise Grantor Management System from SAP.

Today, NCGMS is the state’s primary grants management system for both dissemination and reporting ([NCGMS-CRIS](#)).

To date, \$18 billion of passthrough funding from federal agencies and state-funded/assisted programs have been processed through the system. This system is heavily utilized by more than 12 agencies and 20 departments. Additionally, several agencies rely on the system’s user-friendly reporting capabilities to assist with operational management and monitor the progress of projects and

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<b>Total</b>		<b>8009</b>	<b>\$14840</b>
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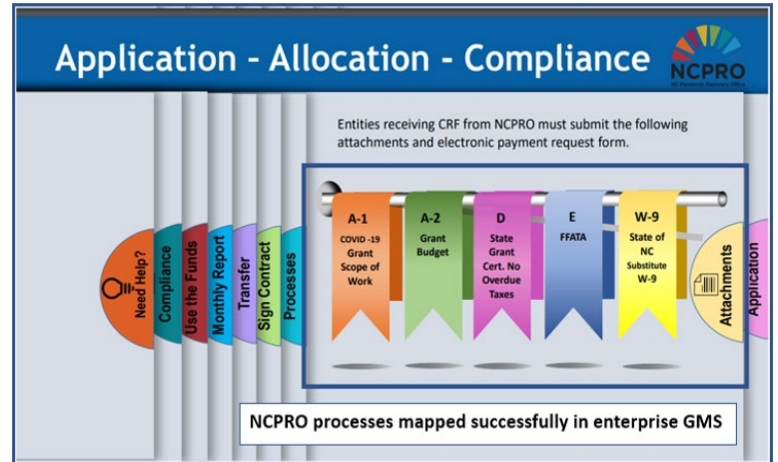
programs. Agencies now have user-friendly gateway for applications, reimbursements, and document management that is also available on mobile devices.

The value of the NCGMS was never more evident than when the global pandemic hit. It became critical to manage pandemic-related funding efficiently and effectively, including money provided by the Covid-related American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. This plan included \$350 billion in emergency federal assistance to private and public organizations. During this challenging time, the NCGMS team was asked to implement the grants system for OSBM in record time to get funds distributed quickly and continue managing other important non-pandemic programs, including those supporting women and expanding broadband service to rural areas.

## Concept

Every state had a massive influx of grant funding during the pandemic. It was critical that these funds were distributed quickly and cost-effectively. North Carolina had an advantage as the state already had the North Carolina Grants Management System (NCGMS), owned, designed and operated by the state and designated by the State Chief Information Officer (SCIO) as the state's enterprise grants management solution. The solution had already been scaled across multiple agencies and multiple programs. A process was also in place so agencies can sign statements of work (SOW) to engage with the NCGMS development team for specific implementations. By using NCGMS, the state was able to get the new grant programs established and funds disbursed more cheaply and quickly.

1. **North Carolina Pandemic Recovery Office (NCPRO):** was tasked with providing American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) assistance to the North Carolina constituents to fight the pandemic and fund necessary services including vaccinations, medical support, and other pandemic-related assistance. The timeliness of this assistance was critical to the wellbeing of our state's residents.
2. **Council for Women and Youth Involvement (CFWYI):** required a system to support programs related to domestic violence, sexual assault, a youth internship fund, and federal programming under the Family Violence Prevention Services Act (FVPSA). The need for a system to facilitate these services was even more essential during the pandemic lockdown.



3. **North Carolina Department of Technology (NCDIT):** as the state's technology hub, NCDIT administered broadband-related grants to internet providers to implement these important services efficiently in rural and under-served areas. The increased availability of broadband connected people to schools, employment and government so they could access benefits and other important resources during the pandemic. Without these broadband services, many North Carolinians would not have been able to access valuable information and resources.
4. Since its creation in 2010, the grants management system has provided a user-friendly interface with interactive PDF forms using Microsoft's Internet Explorer. In 2021, integration between SAP's grant solution and these PDF forms became inoperable. This meant that PDF forms impacting 5,000+ users were unusable, and further issues developed when Microsoft discontinued support of Internet Explorer. Without a timely solution to make the forms available again with an updated user interface, state agencies and organizations would have been severely hindered.

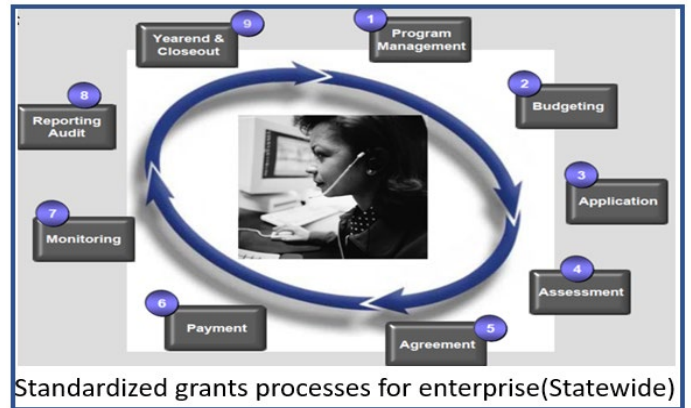
NCDOT worked with agencies to standardize business processes and address the varied requirements of grant programs and legislation. The grants team relied on its considerable experience to adjust programs, phase in requirements, design highly usable forms with minimum data entry, use upfront checks for errors, provide better data integration/testing, and generate valuable reports. As additional agencies use the services of the NCGMS team, these refinements strengthen the template used to build additional grant management solutions.

The foundations underlying the North Carolina grants management system require less development time and fewer budget requirements for implementation and support. The NCGMS implementation provided these distinct improvements to the grants landscape:

1. **Process Standardization:** NCGMS has standardized several key processes such as program management, application, award/agreements, allocations/budgets, reimbursement/drawdown, expenditures, document submission, monitoring, reporting, integration with accounting, and payments. This is key to maintaining NCGMS as the state's enterprise grants management solution.
2. **Short implementation cycles:** NCGMS's rapid implementation allowed for better return on investment, focused, actionable results, meeting various federal and state grant application deadlines, and proper phasing of requirements.
3. **Grants scenarios:** NCGMS has pre-defined different grants scenarios such as reimbursement, fund allocation, drawdowns and expenditures, and loans and repayment. These existing scenarios can be easily customized to meet

the requirements of new agencies. This design allows the NCGMS solution to be quickly leveraged across agency environments.

4. **Low Cost:** The initial cost of implementation for a new program is low compared to standing up program-specific solutions. By acknowledging that there are similarities across grants management processes and leveraging NCGMS's pre-defined scenarios, we have been able to reuse and update existing resources and processes rather than developing new ones from scratch for each implementation. The annual support costs are a maximum of \$25,000 per agency as a result of using existing resources. This helps to maintain low total cost of ownership (TCO) for this enterprise-wide system.



5. **Experienced Resources:** Our team of experienced subject matter experts is well-versed in all aspects of grant management, including identifying requirements, establishing valid timelines, outlining the required sources, budget, milestones, risk, assumptions, design, mapping, conversions, and training/support needs.

6. **Implementation Methodology:** New agencies can be onboarded quickly using the SAP Activate framework.

SAP's Fiori user interface tool allowed the team to replace outdated PDF forms quickly with a more user-friendly, portable (mobile devices), modern and innovative design. Without much training, users were easily able to adopt new forms.

## Implementation

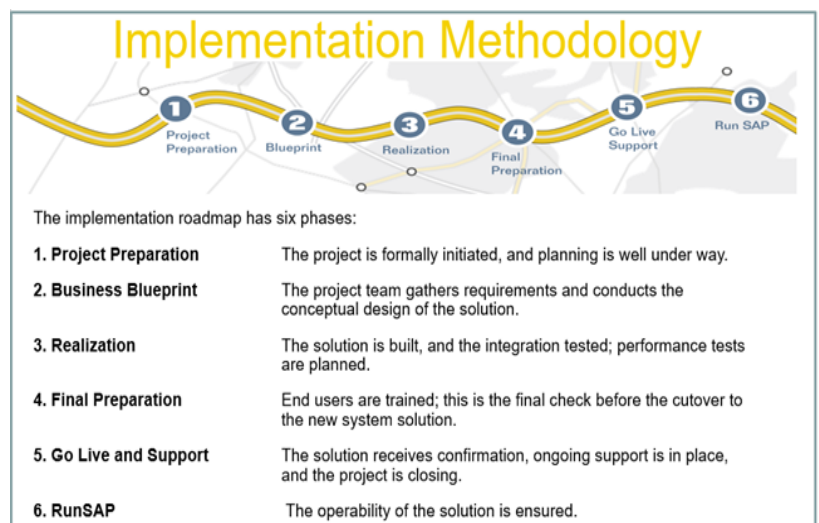
SAP Activate is the methodology road map used to bring agencies onto the enterprise grant management system. There are typically six important project phases as depicted in the image, with an implementation cycle of 6-8 months. If the project scope is larger, the phases can be extended. To date, the team has been able to manage all implementations within the planned timelines. Additional reporting and dashboard changes can happen in response to discoveries made during go-live. NCGMS has modified the SAP Activate methodology to create a template appropriate to the rules governing state agencies. The key project phases include:

Agency	Time (Months)	System Users	Agency Team	NCGMS Team
CFWYI	8	244	4	7
NCPRO	6	267	3	5
Broadband (II)	2	150	2	2

1. **Blueprint:** The implementation team conducts requirements workshops with process-driven scenarios. **We utilize NCGMS test systems effectively and model the scenarios quickly for workshops. This helps establish users' confidence, trust and buy-in.** This project phase results in a statement of work that clearly defines requirements, the project plan, milestones, necessary resources, training needs, conversions, business roles, reporting and support, as well as the role played by each stakeholder involved in the implementation.

2. **Realization:** NCGMS implementation uses a template based systematic phase to configure and develop the agency's grants system. Rigorous testing includes multiple cycles and scenarios.

3. **Preparation and Go Live:** Conversion, reports, and training follow successful testing. Use of





experienced teams and standardized processes allow us to manage this phase thoroughly and in a timely manner. The NCGMS team created standardized conversion programs that can be modified easily for use with new agencies. The training team uses SAP EnableNow to develop training documentation and self-help tools that are integrated into the system for easy accessibility. Organizational change management is a key part of the preparation and allows for timely adoption of the new processes.

4. **Support:** The NCGMS has a support desk users can access through e-mail or phone. The program consists of three tiers. First, agency super users are trained to support end users. The NCGMS help desk provides help at the next level. Any unresolved issues can be addressed at the third support level, which is provided by NCGMS subject matter experts. This support structure facilitates quick adoption of the system by end users.

## Why is CFWYI, NCPRO & Broadband GMS Implementation Successful?

✓ Improved user experience	✓ Standardization of Grants processes across the State Agencies
✓ Online & faster access	✓ Reduced redundant and manual processes
✓ Increased efficiency	✓ Streamline audit requirements with better oversight, budget control
✓ Digital Transformation	✓ Integration with accounting and other State Systems
✓ Responsibility matrix to determine role-based access	✓ Use of productive tools- workflow, alerts, action, security, case management, document management, Fiori, PDF, dashboard etc.

## Impact

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NCGMS has been an ongoing initiative for more than a decade, and with the SCIO's designation as the state's enterprise solution, more agencies are turning to NCGMS for their grants management needs. Currently, 12 agencies with more than 25 programs use the NCGMS platform. The state has been awarded more than \$18 billion since 2010. Of that, \$6 billion has come through pandemic-related programs since 2021.

The work of the NCGMS team was impactful during the pandemic, facilitating critical access to information and resources for North Carolinians. Implementations for grants systems were completed on time and within budget. Through our statewide enterprise system, the NCGMS provided considerable value to several state agencies and to residents. The impact of this work is highlighted below:

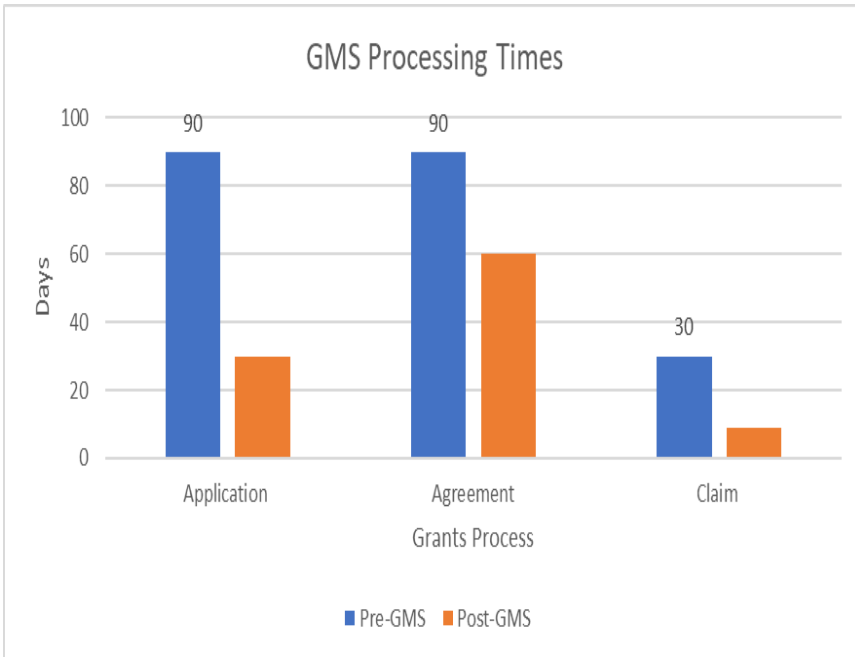
**Statewide standardization and simplification of grants processes:** Most state agencies have multiple grant programs, each with their own separate business process. These processes are often manual or outdated. The NCGMS platform allows the processes to be standardized, consistent and simpler to use.

**Minimization of erroneous payments:** Most grant programs have restrictions and regulations regarding

how funds may be spent. NCGMS systems provide program restrictions and award-level tracking of funds. The system

eliminates agency personnel and grantee errors by automatically calculating remaining balances for each category and limiting access to those items outside of the scope of the contract.

**Complete submissions:** Grants processes require completion of forms and submission of supporting documentation such



as authorization letters, plan documents and invoices. The NCGMS allows for online documentation submission and checks for completeness, which saves time and reduces errors.

**Reduced processing times:** Application, agreement and claims processing times are reduced significantly, thanks to complete submission of documents and the online review process. Also, integration with DocuSign has improved the turnaround times for executing agreements and

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*"I found the NCGMS to be well organized and efficient, allowing me to know exactly what was needed to be successful in the application process."*

- Layton Hower, Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce

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contracts.

**Paperless environment:** Grants application review and assessment, contract creation, and claims review and approvals are completed online. The integration with **DocuSign** enables contract document generation, signatures and contract execution in a paperless environment.

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*"I appreciated the fact that the system made attachments and follow-up communications easy to keep track of. Additionally, having finalized agreements and confirmations within a few clicks has been very convenient."*

- Carter Sprading, Piedmont Triad

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**Transparency:** The use of multiple grant management systems makes it difficult to properly track the expenditure of funds by grantees, since each system has differing levels of accessibility and transparency. NCGMS offers full transparency, enabling the

grantee and the agency to see everything associated with the grants process. In addition, the enterprise system has role-based access that enables state and federal auditors to follow every transaction, leading to better oversight on grants assistance.

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*"Recent updates to the Powell Bill reporting system have dramatically improved the process. The site has a clean and easy to follow look, making reporting much faster & efficient."*

- Chad Fox-Burnsville

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**Improved user experience:** Migration to the enterprise system provides grantees with an around-the-clock, one-stop-shop grants experience, making it easier to apply for and report on grant funds. A new app developed using SAP's Fiori made a huge impact, especially for the Powell Bill Program, as forms were designed to be more user-friendly.

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*"2022 was my first year in local government after spending 28 years with NCDPD/NCDOC. Specifics about the Powell Bill and reporting procedures were new to me, so it was a tremendous help when I was introduced to the Powell Bill Reporting System online.*

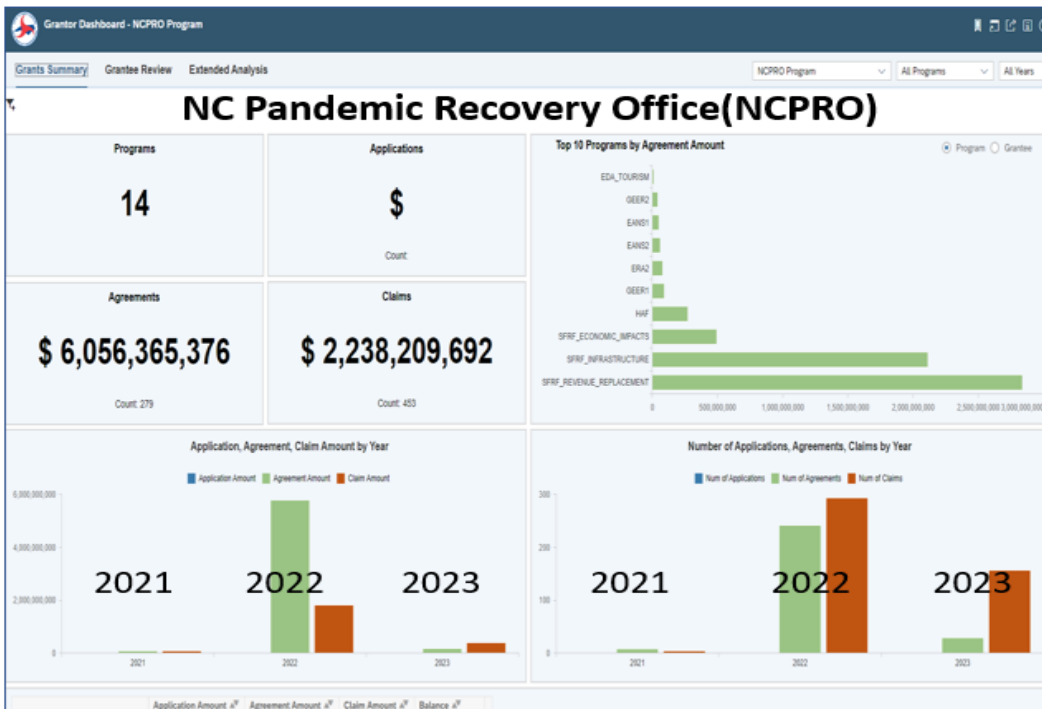
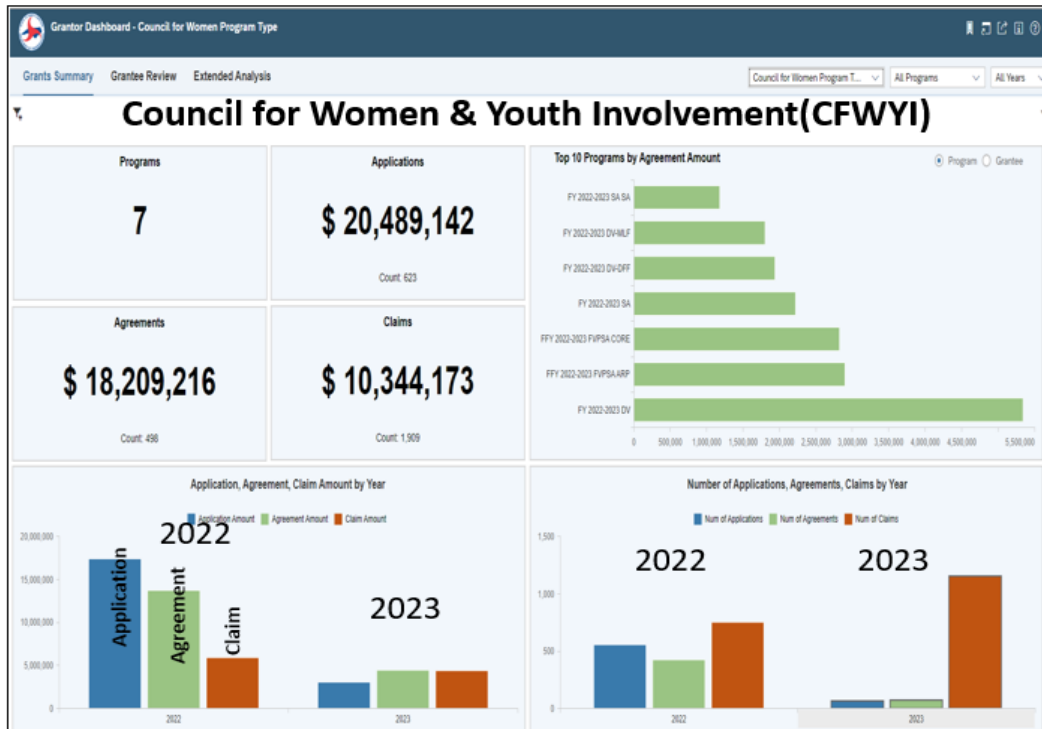
*It's very user friendly, easy to navigate, and ideal for record keeping. It certainly made my job easier."*

- John Godfrey, Broadway

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**Improved customer service (public, grantees, legislators, etc.) through consolidated reporting:** The enterprise system also enables state agencies to provide more detailed information to

the state legislature and the public. Council for Women went live in March 2022 with seven programs. The program has awarded \$18 million. Of that money, \$10 million has already been distributed. NCPRO went live in December 2021 with 14 programs and has been awarded \$6 billion and distributed over \$2 billion.



NCGMS offers an inspiring example of a proven, pragmatic and collaborative approach that North Carolina agencies can easily adopt. Having an officially designated enterprise grants management solution has allowed the state to save considerable time and resources and made it significantly easier for current and potential grant recipients to manage their applications and awards.