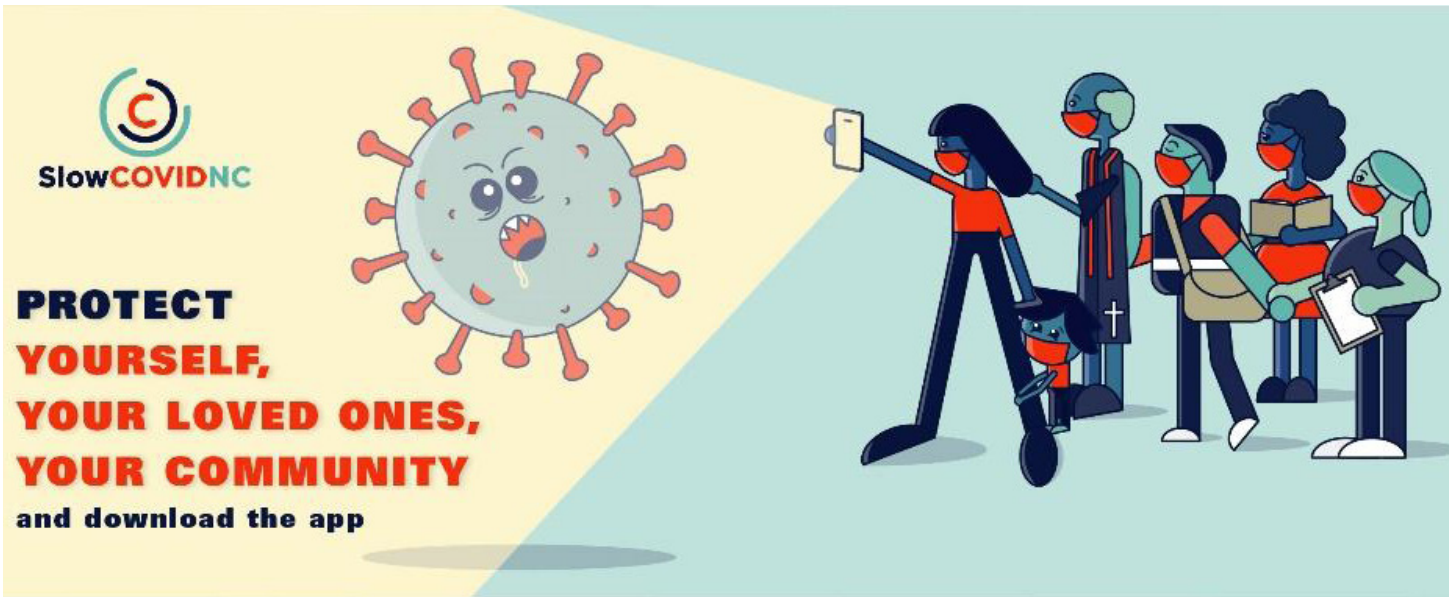




# **HOMEGROWN TOOLS** **for ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

[homegrowntools.unc.edu](http://homegrowntools.unc.edu)

Homegrown Tools tells the story of small towns that have successfully stimulated private investment and job creation. The tool is meant to connect public officials, practitioners, and researchers to successful small town economic development strategies and inspire small towns to leverage their unique assets. Homegrown Tools is managed by NCGrowth, an EDA University Center at UNC Chapel Hill, in partnership with the UNC School of Government, the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, the NC Rural Center, and the UNC Department of City and Regional Planning.



# The Center for Advanced Hindsight

NCGrowth | UNC | SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT  
nclIMPACT Initiative

## Keys to Economic Recovery from COVID-19

This case study was developed by NCGrowth and the nclIMPACT Initiative as part of the Testing the Keys for Economic Recovery project supported by the North Carolina Policy Collaboratory at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with funding from the North Carolina Coronavirus Relief Fund established and appropriated by the North Carolina General Assembly. Learn more about project findings, upcoming webinars, case studies and resources at <https://go.unc.edu/KeystoRecovery>.

## Synopsis

The Center for Advanced Hindsight (CAH) at Duke University partnered with the NC State College of Design, Cabarrus County, Catawba County, Gaston County, Haywood County, and Union County to use insights from behavioral science and design to improve community response to COVID-19.

## Introduction

The Center for Advanced Hindsight at Duke University seeks to use behavioral science to make people happier, healthier, and wealthier through research and human-centered design. With this project, CAH sought to provide behavioral science tools to county governments that would lead to long term behavior change, allowing for safe re-opening and realization of economic opportunities that have been delayed due to COVID-19. Recognizing that a majority of the federal relief funding was targeted to cities, CAH designed the project for counties to test solutions, promote collaboration, and learn from each other.

The six-month long project was structured as a working group with five county-level project teams spanning North Carolina. As interventions were tried locally, best practices and learnings were shared back to the working group. Alongside this, CAH conducted lab and field testing to further understand community response and provide evidence for successful interventions. Policy briefs and webinars are still being developed from the teams' work and accompanying research. This case study shares insights from the process, as well as some of the tools and learnings shared with the participating county governments.

## The Strategy

The project launched on August 27, 2020, about five months into the pandemic, and ran through February 2021. Five county governments participated: Cabarrus County, Catawba County, Gaston County, Haywood County, and Union County. Each county had its own project team, with the cities of Concord and Kannapolis as part of Cabarrus' team. The teams had representation from key departments within each county, including public health, communications, marketing, public information, and county manager's offices. The NC State College of Design was brought in as a partner to provide expertise on human-centered design, a problem-solving approach that centers the human perspective in all steps of the design process.

Once everyone was on board, an initial survey was sent to the county teams to learn more about each location's COVID-19 response so far, and plans for the future. CAH staff also held meetings with each county team to assess project goals and expectations.

From this assessment, three work streams were developed that the working group decided to focus on: 1) continued distancing and mask compliance, 2) vaccine adoption, 3) combating misinformation. In addition, the inclusion of underserved and marginalized communities was recognized as a cross-cutting theme incorporated into all work streams, and key materials were translated into Spanish. For each work stream, the CAH team conducted literature reviews to

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understand the role of individual behaviors and potential interventions. These literature reviews introduced the counties to different ways of thinking about these initiatives and provided evidence for specific interventions.

Alongside this, the CAH team conducted research to inform the overall work, and to develop materials that could be pushed out to the counties. They conducted a North Carolina- specific study on motivations for mask wearing and social distancing. Recommendations on how to target messages to those that are not complying and ready-made fliers were shared back to the counties. They launched a lab-based study to look at public perception of the NC Department of Health and Human Services new contact tracing app, SlowCOVIDNC. From this research, they shared back with the counties the best messaging to use to promote the app (shared in Appendix 1 at the end of this case study).

## How and Why the Strategy is Working

### Why a Behavioral-Focused Strategy is Needed

By working with the CAH researchers, county staff were able to see their work through a new lens, and draw on behavioral science principles to improve their communication with residents. CAH researchers noted that much of county staffs' work is intuitively based on these ideas, but highlighting and naming this approach can open up more resources and make communication with residents more accessible, salient, and consistent. Behavioral science emphasizes that humans are not rational, but rather guided by specific motivations and barriers; understanding what those are greatly increases the effectiveness of messaging. Counties don't have the bandwidth to do this research, so seeking out behavioral science and human-centered design resources can amplify county staff capacity. See Appendix 2 of this case study for CAH's COVID Communications Guide shared with participating counties, and Appendix 3 for effective mask flyer designs with the behavioral science principles that underlie them.

Linking research with field application allows for insight into the changing needs and concerns of individuals and communities as the pandemic progresses. The pandemic is constantly changing, with new surges and hotspots, changes in the weather, and the introduction of vaccines. Local government's response will need to change with it to effectively address citizens' concerns and promote current guidance. By connecting research with field application, the CAH partnership was able to close the feedback loop and move research into application more quickly.

## Lessons Learned from the Story

Adjusting individual behaviors is critical to slowing the spread of COVID-19. Once government restrictions are lifted, it falls to individual choices around mask wearing, distancing, and vaccination to slow the spread of the virus. Effective messaging and responsive policy making is key to sustaining individual compliance with these strategies.

It's important for leaders to understand the demographics of their community in order to target messaging to diverse motivations and barriers. Consideration of specific motivations and barriers to adoption of suggested public health measures allows for more effective messaging. To be effective, a campaign needs to appeal to multiple motivations to solve the problem at hand. When it comes to encouraging mask wearing for example, people who forget their mask, versus people who think that masks are ineffective, have very different reasons behind what looks like the same behavior. Messages addressing both cases need to be incorporated to reach the whole community. Similarly, mass gatherings happen for different reasons, within different communities. Understanding each case (or subsets of cases) allows for more effective engagement. This project identified faith communities as one distinct community and developed specific recommendations for faith-based gatherings.

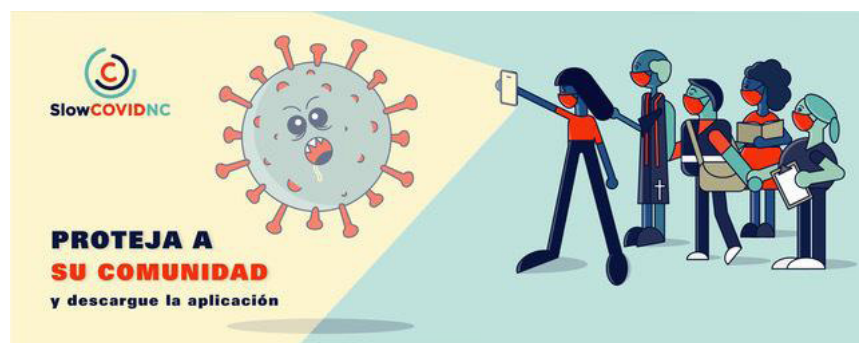
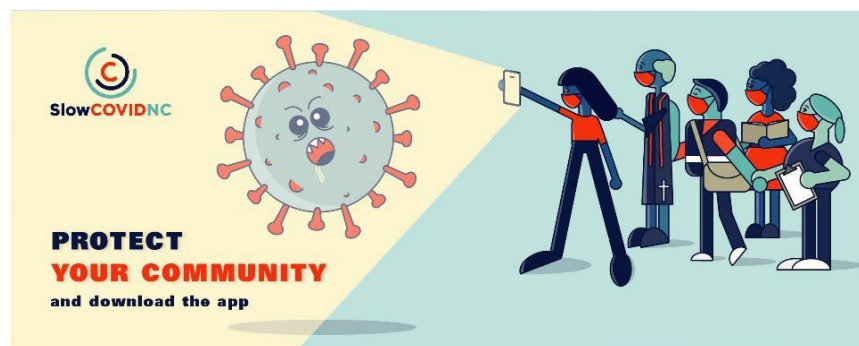
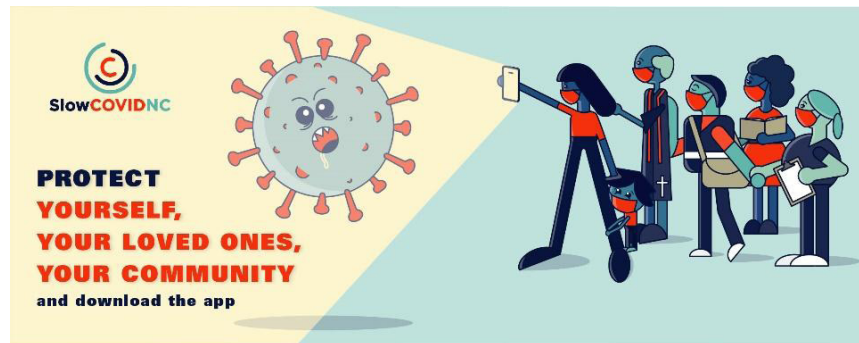
As the pandemic progresses, messaging must shift to maintain public health. Initially CAH's focus was on reopening, but as the pandemic sustained into the summer, they saw that the framing had to shift to saving lives. Similarly, there was a lot of initial focus in the research on how to encourage mask wearing and social distancing, but with the introduction of the vaccine, the project shifted its focus to understanding how to encourage widespread vaccination. Localities must still push the message of social distancing and mask wearing, alongside vaccine campaigns, but may need to rethink these campaigns in order to avoid messaging fatigue.

An outside entity can be helpful to initiate new communication streams, but ultimately, the key is regional and interdepartmental collaboration. This project led to increased communication within county departments, as well as between different counties. CAH played a role in introducing communities initially and facilitating conversation, but any county can reach out and learn from another peer county, or engage neighboring counties to strategize regionally.

## Appendix 1

### SlowCOVIDNC Messaging

Below are the messages that CAH found to be most effective for promoting the SlowCOVIDNC contact tracing app.



## Appendix 2

### CAH's Covid-19 Communications Guide

Using behavioral science, local governments can adopt the following recommendations in their communications to effectively engage with community members, motivate continued social distancing, and mask wearing.

#### Do's vs. Don'ts

##### **Make the Message Simple, Don't Over Rely on Scientific Terms**

While it is important to provide up to date COVID-19 data to community members, avoid too many technical terms. Bounded rationality demonstrates that if readers cannot easily understand the message, they will gloss over the information. Prioritize the key point and use catchy phrases in communications.

##### **Prime the Desired Behavior, Don't Send Messages out of Context**

Sometimes people need a little “nudge” to behave in a prosocial way. Use simple signage to prime a desired behavior and remind people to social distance and wear masks. Consider posting signage on handwashing in bathrooms and included a popular song to mark handwashing duration.

##### **Pair Fear with Actionable Prompts, Don't Provoke Extreme Emotion**

Communications that elicit fear can be effective, but only when paired with actionable prompts to avoid the threat. Be specific in how to reduce the spread of COVID-19 versus only emphasizing the deadly nature of the virus. Avoid provoking any heightened reactions to content. While fear tends to increase perception of risks, anger reduces it.

##### **Frame Restrictions in Terms of Gains, Don't Use Loss-Framed Messaging**

The Prospect Theory demonstrates that people make decisions based on expected gains or losses. For COVID-19 communications, focus on the positive benefits gained from social distancing and mask wearing. Loss-framed messages in this context may elicit anger and frustration instead of fear, and can cause people to rebuke the communication.

##### **Emphasize Desired Behavior Engagement, Don't Publicize Non-Adherence**

Social norms are highly effective in motivating behavior and people are more willing to cooperate with rules if they believe others are also complying. Emphasize engagement in social distancing and mask wearing over non-adherence. Show your appreciation for community member compliance to motivate ongoing cooperation.

##### **Keep it Local, Don't Use National Examples Only**

Localize communications and appeal to people's pride in the community. Consider incorporating popular local expressions or mascots into your messages. Additionally, leverage community partners, like churches, to collaborate on and distribute communications.

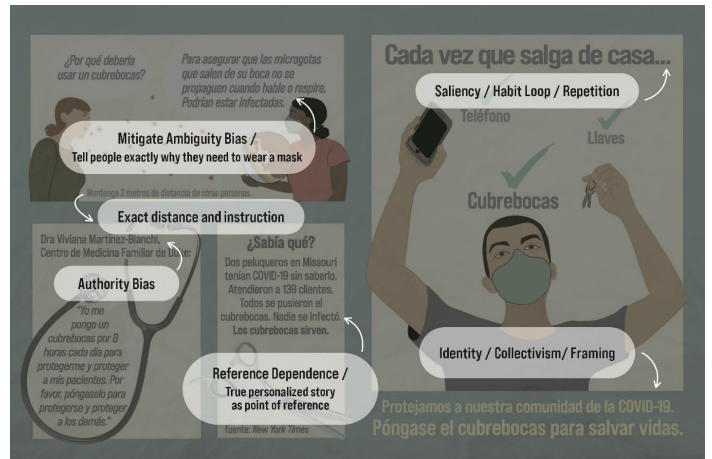
##### **Have Consistent Cadence and Format, Don't Send Constant Notifications**

Many community members may already have “COVID-Fatigue” and will ignore messages if they are sent too frequently. Send communications in a consistent cadence and format, and consider limiting to 1-2 messages per week.

# Appendix 3

## Mask Flyers

The following images demonstrate effective mask messaging, followed by an image naming the behavioral science principles behind each message.





**Who is part of your COVID-19 social bubble?**

Only the people that you live with

Identity / Collectivism / Framing

Protect your social bubble.

Coworkers

Family members who you don't live with

Friends and neighbors

Saliency / Direct Instruction

These people are not part of your social bubble. Always wear a mask when you are close to them.

Bring it with you when you leave.

Cover your nose and mouth.

Keep it on you while you talk.

Mitigates Ambiguity Bias

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO WEAR A MASK?**

**¿Quién forma su círculo social durante COVID-19?**

Solo las personas con quien vive

Proteja a su círculo social.

Compañeros de trabajo

Amigos y vecinos

La familia con quien no vive

Estas personas no forman parte de su círculo social. Siempre pongase un cubrebocas cuando esté cerca de ellos.

Póngaselo cuando salga.

Cubra su nariz y boca.

Manténgalo puesto al hablar.

**¿QUÉ SIGNIFICA PONERSE UN CUBREBOCAS?**

**¿Quién forma su círculo social durante COVID-19?**

Solo las personas con quien vive

Proteja a su círculo social.

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**¿QUÉ SIGNIFICA PONERSE UN CUBREBOCAS?**

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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