



# EXPANDING OUR IMPACT, STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITY

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By Dr. Terri Shelton, Vice Chancellor for Research and Economic Development, UNCG

Times are tough right now in research. In a recent survey, 64% of U.S. scientists reported decreases in grant funding, and almost half of federal science funding recipients say they have laid off or will lay off scientists and researchers due to tightening federal budgets ([CNNMoney](#), [Inside Higher Ed](#)). And, as highlighted in [Matt Evans's recent Business Journal article](#), we are certainly feeling the effects here at home.

The shifting tide in research funding is but one example of a wave of changes on the horizon for all of us in higher education. The challenges of continuing to thrive in our increasingly competitive, knowledge-based global economy, long faced by our business communities, now knock at the gates of academia. In spite of these challenges, our university's commitment to the Triad stands firm.

To assess the state of our community and UNCG's impact on it, we must not only assess direct economic indicators such as job creation and revenue generation but also examine standard of living indicators, such as those related to health, education, and the environment.

It is sometimes hard to quantify these types of impact. We can document that UNCG, through expenditures and interactions with local citizens and businesses, generated a total regional output of \$831 million locally in fiscal 2012 and \$28.7 million in research funding in fiscal 2013. But those numbers are only a piece of the impact generated by UNCG research, creative activity, and community and economic engagement.

Take for example Dr. Nadja Cech, who received the National Institutes of Health's most competitive award, an R01 grant, to study alternative strategies to combat drug-resistant bacterial infections like MRSA, which kills more Americans each year than AIDS. Dr. Cech's research has the potential to save lives, reduce medical costs, and attract industry investment. But that's not where her story ends. Cech's active research lab also provides hands-on training for graduate and undergraduate students, equipping the Triad's workforce with the problem-solving skills needed to compete in the 21st century.

Last year alone more than 365,000 people attended UNCG public service programs and UNCG students contributed nearly 900,000 hours of community service in critical areas such as mental health counseling and educational support services. We thrive at the intersection of research, engagement, teaching, and learning, and, as a result, our impact swells well past the traditional bounds of the ivory tower.

The Joint School of Nanoscience and Nanoengineering recently launched the Nanomanufacturing Innovation Consortium with nine private companies and several area foundations and industry supporters. Our Graduate STEM Fellows in K-12 Education Program has entered its fourth year of placing resident scientists in Guilford County schools, introducing students to authentic research experiences and STEM careers. UNCG partnerships like these help attract new industry, create high tech jobs, and elevate the workforce in our region.

As part of our effort to expand our partnerships and better measure our impact, the UNCG Institute for Community and Economic Engagement recently launched its Collaboratory, a web-based and publicly accessible database of community-university partnerships and projects. Data collected through the growing Collaboratory will inform our strategic planning, programming, and priorities, provide opportunities for self-assessment and improvement, and increase our ability to respond to our community's needs. The Collaboratory includes more than 100 separate projects and partnerships in the areas of business growth and innovation, school learning success, healthy people and healthy communities, and creating vibrant communities through culture, arts, and design. And we're just getting started.

In this difficult funding climate, we are fortunate at UNCG to have faculty, staff, and students willing to put their hearts and souls into finding ways to create new knowledge, to enrich student learning, and to work alongside our community partners to identify the problems we face as a society, explore potential solutions, and bring those solutions to life in the Triad and around the world.



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