



**Local
Government
Commission**

Leaders for Livable Communities



AmeriCorps

**CALIFORNIA
VOLUNTEERS**

Office of the Governor



CivicSpark

JULY 2021

**CIVICSPARK
RACIAL EQUITY
ACTION PLAN
NARRATIVE**

*This action plan was funded by the California Volunteer's
Racial Equity Planning Grant Program*

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1. Executive Summary

CivicSpark is a Local Government Commission (LGC) AmeriCorps program that engages AmeriCorps Fellows (Fellows) to build capacity for local governments to address emerging environmental and social equity resilience challenges in communities across California. CivicSpark was awarded the Racial Equity Planning Grant (REPG) by California Volunteers in August 2020 to better integrate racial equity into the program's culture, practices, and structure. The goal of the planning grant was to provide much needed analytic capacity, expertise, and resources to CivicSpark staff to set clear racial equity goals that would increase diversity in recruitment, enhance racial equity training, and improve support for people of color in the program.

Throughout the timeline of the REPG implementation, several methodologies were used to meet the goals identified above. First, CivicSpark staff conducted a baseline analysis of program practices by reviewing all program documents, data, and resources and identifying progress and gaps in addressing racial equity. CivicSpark then partnered with LPC Consulting Associates, Inc. (LPC) to develop and administer a distinct online survey for each of the program's key stakeholder groups - Fellows, alumni, partners, and CivicSpark staff. 106 responses were collected. The survey results were used to assess where the program was effectively addressing racial equity, and where efforts could be improved. Building on the initial analysis, LGC and LPC designed and facilitated 8 virtual focus groups with over 30 key stakeholders to further explore the root causes of racial inequity in the program, potential solutions to the program's identified gaps, and participants' vision for racial equity within the program. The grant concluded with the onboarding of a racial equity consultant, Adèle James, who provided counsel on the team's approach and

analysis of the project, led racial-equity focused training for the CivicSpark REPG team, and provided guidance on the Racial Equity Action Plan (REAP) development. This document, which contains the synopsis of the project as well as the developed REAP, is the culmination of this work.

CivicSpark's analysis of racial equity in program practices and policies is ongoing, and thus *this is a living document*. Staff will continue to conduct stakeholder surveys and small focus groups throughout each service year to identify opportunities to enhance our efforts in advancing racial equity. Our hope is that this process will expand and evolve as we continue to learn from our stakeholders and adapt our action plan through continued input.

This action plan was designed to enhance racial equity across five key CivicSpark program areas: (1) **Fellow recruitment and hiring**; (2) **Fellow support and supervision**; (3) **Fellow training**; (4) **Partnerships**; and (5) **Staff Culture and Program Support**. The action plan includes twenty-one goals across these five program areas and over sixty identified actions to achieve these goals.

Each action has a specific timeline, a CivicSpark representative accountable for executing the activity, and a qualitative or quantitative performance measure to track progress. Below is a summary of the programmatic goals and actions within each section of the plan:

<p style="text-align: center;">Vision for Fellow Recruitment and Hiring</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Develop a recruitment, selection, and hiring process that counteracts staff and Partner biases, promotes equitable hiring practices, and addresses the root causes of inequity in the Fellow stipend and compensation structure.</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Fellow Recruitment and Hiring Goals</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Increase the diversity of Fellow recruitment networks</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Address the inequities in the Fellow stipend and compensation structure</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Decrease bias in the Fellow interview process</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Develop resources for partners to recruit Fellow candidates who are from or have extensive experience within the communities they serve</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Vision for Fellow Supervision and Support</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Develop a supervision and support plan for Fellows of color focused on preventing discrimination and harassment, facilitating regular discussions on racial equity, and offering more robust professional development support.</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Fellow Supervision and Support Goals</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Prevent workplace inequities when possible and adequately address and correct workplace inequities when necessary</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Provide training and resources to CivicSpark Staff to support Fellows with mental health challenges</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Provide support for peer-to-peer affinity groups for Fellows to pursue anti-racism and navigate through negative racialized experiences</p>

<p>Vision for Fellow Training</p> <p><i>Improve the content of Fellow equity-centered training, increase Fellow engagement with racial equity tools, and partner with diverse thought-leaders who are fairly compensated to support Fellows in addressing racial equity in their service work.</i></p>
<p>Fellow Training Goals</p>
<p>Content: Revise the CivicSpark training curriculum to provide Fellows with knowledge, strategies, and tools to effectively apply a racial equity lens to their service projects</p>
<p>Fellow Engagement: Increase Fellows’ understanding and application of racial equity strategies through mandatory and inclusive equity-focused trainings</p>
<p>Leadership: Identify a diverse group of subject-matter experts to deliver racial equity trainings and ensure experts are fairly compensated for their labor</p>

<p>Vision for Partnerships</p> <p><i>Support CivicSpark partners in increasing their capacity to identify and respond to racial equity in their communities, and develop formal partnerships with alumni to support CivicSpark’s racial equity work.</i></p>
<p>Partnerships Goals</p>
<p>Outline CivicSpark’s commitment to racial equity in the partner recruitment and selection process (flyers, outreach, application, contract)</p>
<p>Embed Racial Equity into onboarding and start-up processes for the placement and project, including partner orientation, supervision, and project goal-setting assessments</p>
<p>Identify ways to extend the program to more partners serving low-income communities, communities of color, and Tribes</p>
<p>Engage and fairly compensate alumni for racial equity program support</p>
<p>Create pathways for alumni and Fellows of color to connect and support each other</p>
<p>Partner with other AmeriCorps programs that value racial equity to explore shared best practices and generate shared learning</p>

<p>Vision for Staff Culture & Program Support</p> <p><i>Staff are equipped with the knowledge to apply a racial equity lens to the respective roles, funding and staff time are dedicated to implementing the REAP, and the REAP is aligned with broader LGC and CivicSpark equity goals.</i></p>
<p>Staff Culture & Program Support Goals</p>
<p>Dedicate CivicSpark staff time to unpacking white supremacy values and assessing the way privilege shows up in workplace culture and practices</p>
<p>Align CS racial equity goals and priorities with 2021 LGC organizational equity analysis</p>
<p>Fund implementation of the Racial Equity Action Plan</p>
<p>Ensure that Racial Equity Action Plan policy and procedure adaptations are incorporated holistically in CivicSpark programming</p>

2. Acknowledgement and Gratitude

CivicSpark's racial equity efforts have historically been driven by Fellows who are deeply committed to this work and holding the program accountable. Fellow and alumni input provided through surveys and conversations with staff prompted many of the goals and actions included in this plan. To our **Fellows and alumni**, we are immensely grateful for the time and energy that you've poured into advancing CivicSpark's racial equity progress, and for your continued engagement in helping us improve.

We would like to thank **our partners** who participated in the REPG surveys and focus groups. Your time, knowledge, and experience have helped us identify where we can continue to grow, and we appreciate your honesty and willingness to be vulnerable. Your financial contribution and mentorship to Fellows are what make this program a possibility.

We're grateful to **LPC Consulting Associates, Inc.**, specifically **Sarah Mosseri and Olivia Arstein-Kerslake**, who provided counsel on the survey and focus group development, and produced a thorough analysis of stakeholder input that guided this action plan. We also extend our thanks to **Adèle James and OnTrack Consulting**, who provided staff training, consultation and support with developing and reviewing this plan.

Funding for this effort was provided by **California Volunteers**, and we would like to express our profound appreciation for seeing the value in this initiative and supporting this work.

Lastly, this work would not be possible with the time, dedication, and energy from **LGC staff both within the CivicSpark team and across the organization**. This plan is the culmination of countless hours of writing and discussion, deep self-reflection, and sometimes difficult conversations about the trajectory and impact of our work. We're grateful that staff continue to be open to this learning journey and prioritize CivicSpark's racial equity work.

3. DEFINING RACIAL EQUITY

CivicSpark's working definition of racial equity is as follows:

“Racial equity is achieved when race is no longer a predictor of access to, treatment of, success in or benefits received by individuals or communities. We envision a racially equitable CivicSpark program where race is not a predictor of access, treatment, and success for CivicSpark participants (Fellows, partners, alumni, and staff), nor is race a predictor of who benefits from the community resilience outcomes of CivicSpark initiatives.”

CivicSpark operates through AmeriCorps, and in partnership with the public sector - institutions that have historically perpetuated injustices against communities of color through policies that uphold institutionalized systemic racism and white supremacy¹. These injustices are exacerbated by the issues our program seeks to address: community resilience in the face of climate change, housing crises, water insecurity, aging infrastructure, lack of access to mobility, the COVID-19 pandemic, among others. Prior to the REPG process CivicSpark lacked a formal, working definition of racial equity and a holistic understanding of how program policies, procedures, and activities may perpetuate and reinforce racial inequity.

Without a central guiding definition, CivicSpark's racial equity efforts to date have been decentralized, and primarily the result of Fellow recommendations and discrete staff initiatives. The program has responded reactively to broader social movements, as chronicled in the previous section. This reactive disposition has been perceived by some stakeholders as ineffective and performative² (see *Section 5 - Evaluating Existing Conditions*). CivicSpark's working definition and growing understanding of racial equity will guide our approach to our program in perpetuity; it will inform participant and community outreach, the members and project partners we select, how we train our Fellows and partners, and how we communicate with our broader CivicSpark community.

¹LPC Stakeholder Feedback Report

²LPC Stakeholder Feedback Report

In pursuit of our community resilience program initiatives, our strengthened commitment to racial equity will be a comprehensive practice and approach to our work. *We focus on racial equity because of the institutionalized racism that exists on all levels. This work does not exclude other marginalized groups but is a step toward realizing equitable outcomes for all*³. In order to achieve racial equity, it is necessary to transform our policies, structures, and practices. In practice, this means identifying and actively striving to dismantle barriers to our program so that race does not predict an individual or community's success throughout the recruitment, approval, and hiring process, training and project implementation, and post-AmeriCorps experience. It means centering communities of color in our project work by building authentic relationships, uplifting marginalized voices, fostering accessibility to our program benefits, advocating for change from within the systems the program operates and creating tangible improvements for those most burdened by environmental or social resilience issues compounded by racial inequity.

Advancing racial equity is a top priority in CivicSpark, and we recognize that the definition may vary depending on people's lived experiences and identities. CivicSpark is also a program of the Local Government Commission, funded by AmeriCorps in partnership with California Volunteers, and these relationships guide how racial equity can be integrated into our unique program. As individual staff members and as a program, we are committed to leveraging our platform to facilitate ongoing conversation, training, and reflection centered on racial equity to continuously mold our work. We are grateful to learn and be challenged by our Fellows, partners, alumni, and staff who have supported racial equity work over the years. We recognize this work is difficult, constantly evolving, ongoing, and requires accountability. This also includes self-accountability, and CivicSpark staff are committed to growing together on this journey towards racial equity. As we continue our conversations, assessing our new

initiatives, and gathering feedback, we will continue to shape our program in order to ensure that race is not a predictor of access, treatment, and success for CivicSpark participants.

Through the planning process, CivicSpark staff conceived of this working definition of racial equity by considering stakeholder feedback, research, and consultant guidance, and input from staff members who will implement the racial equity action plan and track results. CivicSpark's working definition of racial equity is also informed by two pre-existing and relevant definitions:

First, LGC's Statement on Equity was developed by a staff-led equity committee in 2018 and will be revised with the guidance of an external equity consultant in Fall/Winter 2021. Presently, LGC's Statement on Equity is:

“Equity is the fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. Improving equity involves increasing justice and fairness within the procedures and processes of institutions or systems, as well as in their distribution of resources. Tackling equity issues requires an understanding of the root causes of outcome disparities within our society.”

Second, the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) is a trusted and cutting-edge network of governments working to achieve racial equity. GARE defines “racial equity” as:

“Race can no longer be used to predict life outcomes and outcomes for all groups are improved.”

4. Purpose and Overview of CivicSparks Racial Equity Work to Date

Program History

To describe CivicSpark’s purpose for developing this Racial Equity Action Plan, it’s necessary to briefly review the program’s history, including its inception, vision, mission, and theory of change.

CivicSpark was conceived in 2012 when it became apparent to the program’s founders that local government capacity challenges must be addressed in order to effectively mitigate and adapt to climate change. With the support of then Governor Jerry Brown, CivicSpark was launched in 2014 as a Governor’s Initiative Americorps program focused on building climate change resources, programs, and plans to address this crisis. The program has grown several times since 2014 to address additional focus areas, including water management, affordable housing, rural broadband, and mobility. As of the 2020-21 service year, all project focus areas are now situated within the umbrella of “community resiliency” issues.

CivicSpark’s vision is a California of resilient, equitable, and vibrant communities where local governments and leaders are empowered and equipped to proactively serve the needs of all community members.

Through National Service, CivicSpark contributes to this vision for California committing to a mission of:

- Building local public sector capacity to address entrenched and emerging issues;
- Serving as a social purpose career accelerator for future leaders; and
- Fostering lasting, authentic community engagement.

The **theory of change**, or overarching premise for how CivicSpark aims to achieve its vision and mission, relies on the argument that the well-being of California's communities relies on their resiliency – the ability of their institutions, infrastructure, and environments to withstand stresses and shocks, and local government planning and implementation of strategies to achieve the state's ambitious resiliency goals. However, persistent capacity gaps among local governments are a significant factor in the perpetuation - or even exacerbation - of resilience challenges across California communities. Therefore, CivicSpark AmeriCorps Fellows work with local governments to implement targeted research, planning, or implementation projects; support volunteer engagement; and offer a unique way to accelerate local government resilience action efforts.

Purpose

To be truly effective in building capacity for community resilience, we must recognize that **the public sector (both nonprofit and local governments) has created and upheld structures of racial injustice and discrimination** through policies and practices that intentionally or unintentionally create disparities in wealth and health for people of color. From climate change to affordable housing, the complex resiliency threats that CivicSpark seeks to address are both exacerbated and perpetuated by issues of racial inequity.

As a capacity building program, CivicSpark is in a unique position to support local governments in addressing racial equity, develop stronger leadership onramps for people of color, and empower local leaders of all races to take an anti-racist approach to their work. We recognize that we have not yet realized this potential due to our own gaps in recruitment, training and support of Fellows, and partnership practices.

Our hope is that implementing this action plan will allow us to better leverage our position and privilege to:

- Reduce barriers to entry for candidates of color and potential partners representing under-resourced and/or indigenous communities;
- Improve site experience and professional development outcomes for Fellows of color;
- Equitably engage our Alumni network in racial equity training and support to Fellows; and
- Improve our own staff culture to lead by example in racial diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Fellows (total selections=76)



Figure A: Fellow's Desires to Reduce Racial Equity Barriers⁴

Alumni (total selections=54)



Figure B: Alumni's Desires to Reduce Racial Equity Barriers⁵

Racial Equity Work To-Date

This Racial Equity Action Plan will help CivicSpark accelerate racial equity as a top priority in the program and build upon a seven-year long history of racial equity-centered training, Fellow support systems, and staff activities. Figure C highlights the timeline of progress to-date made toward increasing racial equity knowledge and building support structures for Fellows of color in CivicSpark:

⁴LPC Stakeholder Feedback Report

⁵LPC Stakeholder Feedback Report



Figure C Overview of CivicSpark's Equity Work To-Date

5. Evaluating Existing Conditions

AmeriCorps Structure

AmeriCorps (formerly known as the Corporation for National Service, or CNCS) has a long history of funding national service programs to address pressing societal and environmental issues. While AmeriCorps allows organizations to effectuate meaningful change in their communities and fosters a unique professional development experience, **there are structural factors that make it challenging for AmeriCorps programs to reduce barriers to entry for partners and members, alike.**

One limitation is the **maximum possible stipend amount** that AmeriCorps members may receive. The AmeriCorps funding structure requires a grantee, in this case CivicSpark, to obtain a match cost from project partners, donors, and/or sponsors to cover all operating costs, including member living stipends, healthcare, staff time, training, travel, consultant fees, equipment, and uniforms. In order to raise the living stipend for Fellows, CivicSpark must either pass the costs onto project partners, bring in donors or sponsors to fill the gap, or reduce the program operating budget. While many CivicSpark partners are amenable to paying more for Fellows, raising the match cost perpetuates inequities by increasing the barrier to entry for low-income partners. For reference, the maximum stipend for any AmeriCorps member serving an 11-month term for the 2020-21 service year was \$27,464 before taxes and CivicSpark Fellows received \$22,000 before taxes. Comparatively, the estimated living wage for a single adult without children in California is \$18.66 per hour, which equates to just under \$39,000 annually before taxes.⁶

Another constraint is the **AmeriCorps service term structure**, which requires

members to serve for at least 1700 hours over an 11-month term. These service term requirements limit opportunities for members to obtain additional jobs to supplement the AmeriCorps stipend. The service restrictions also limit an AmeriCorps members' ability to take extended leave for major life events that may occur during the service term. Grantees may design their programs to accommodate members on a shortened timeline, such as three-quarters time (roughly 7.5 months) or half-time (about 5 months), however the maximum living stipend amount is reduced proportionally to the service term length.

Additional Fellow barriers to entry include **unemployment ineligibility** and **tax implications on core benefits**. AmeriCorps members are ineligible for unemployment benefits after the service term, which can be a significant drawback for alumni who are struggling to find employment after a year of national service. Additionally, the federal Segal Education Award and the Student Loan Interest Repayment program available to all AmeriCorps members who complete a term of service are taxed as income, which reduces the total impact of each benefit to members. Lastly, AmeriCorps requires **U.S. Citizenship or lawful permanent residence** for participation. This means AmeriCorps participation is currently inaccessible to undocumented individuals and individuals living in the United States on student VISAs.

Legislation and lobbying occurring nationwide aims to address some of these restrictions. Most prominently, the proposed federal CORPS Act seeks to increase the maximum AmeriCorps member stipend and create tax exemptions for the Segal Education Award. Some states have also passed similar legislation to eliminate state taxes on the education award, among other member economic benefits. Some states have also passed similar legislation to eliminate state taxes on the education award, with Wisconsin being the most recent state to extend this benefit to its AmeriCorps

members. LGC has endorsed both pieces of legislation.⁷

Baseline Assessment

CivicSpark engaged LPC Consulting Associates, Inc. (LPC) to assess the program's racial equity efforts and to identify recommendations for better promoting racial equity across five program areas: (1) Recruitment, (2) Fellow Support and Supervision, (3) Training, (4) Partnerships, and (5) Staff Culture and Support. LGC and LPC conducted surveying and focus groups with current Fellows, alumni, project partners, and CivicSpark staff to assess these program areas, and **below is a summary of LPC's analysis report, "CivicSpark Racial Equity Planning Grant Stakeholder Feedback Summary Report."**⁸

Fellow Recruitment and Hiring

Fellow recruitment and hiring was identified by stakeholders as an area where CivicSpark could greatly improve its racial equity efforts. **Over the course of CivicSpark's seven years, recruitment efforts have not reflected the diversity of California.** Among candidates who shared demographic data during the application process, CivicSpark Fellows were 56% White, 13% Hispanic, 2% Black, and 14% Asian (as compared to 40% / 38% / 6% / 13% in California as a whole). The program has seen trends toward more equal representation, with a 123% increase in Hispanic Fellows and a 13% decrease in white Fellows. However, the demographic picture is hindered by varied data collection over the years. For example, 40% of 2017-18 Fellows elected to not respond to demographic questions.

In surveys and focus groups, **stakeholders noted areas for improvement within diversifying recruiting outreach strategies and tactics, creating greater equity in the interview processes, and adapting the Fellow selection criteria to consider other lived experiences.** When rating their agreement that CivicSpark recruitment efforts reached a diverse pool of candidates, all

surveyed stakeholder groups indicated a below average score (the average is represented by a score of 3 - see Figure D).

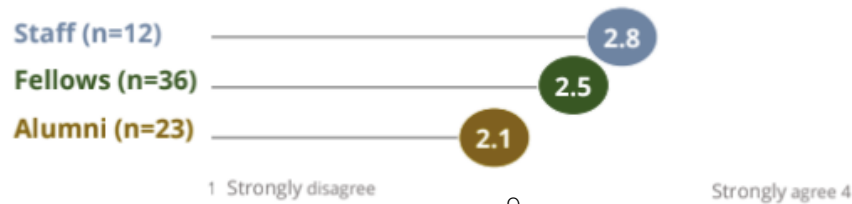


Figure D: Diverse Recruitment Efforts⁹

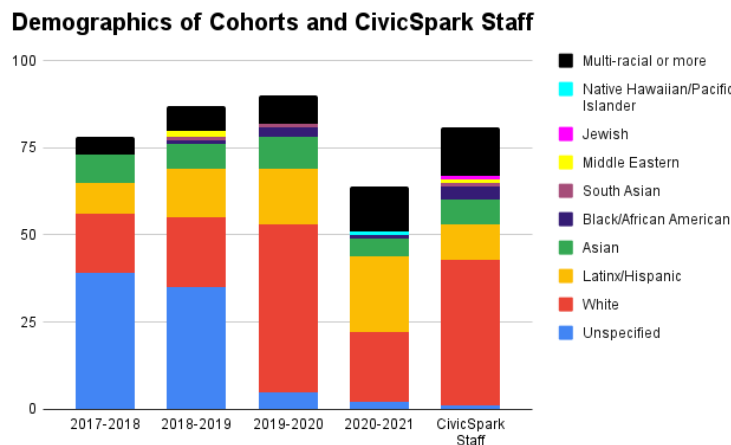


Figure E: Demographics over the Years¹⁰

In focus groups, Fellows expressed concern that current **recruitment strategies prioritized more privileged groups** and backgrounds, including those from prestigious universities, with higher degrees, or those that can afford unpaid internships. Staff members and Fellows also highlighted **concerns about bias influencing the interview process**, noting a lack of diversity in CivicSpark interview panels. Staff members felt informed about how bias could influence their assessments of candidates, but they felt less equipped to promote racial equity in other parts of the interview process, including communicating CivicSpark’s commitment to racial equity, assessing candidates in terms of equity, and asking equity focused questions. All stakeholders also highlighted how the **low Fellow stipend** impeded efforts to improve racial diversity within the program, stressing that it could be a barrier or deterrent to applying to CivicSpark.

Fellow Support and Supervision

Fellow Support and Supervision was identified by stakeholders as one of the more successful areas in implementing racial equity efforts. **Regional Coordinators are generally perceived as being supportive spaces** for those who need to talk about and/or process race-related issues. Similarly, peer-based interactions and affinity groups, such as the POC and Whiteness and Anti-Racism Caucuses, were identified by Fellows and alumni as valuable spaces for discussing racial equity issues, processing racialized social interactions, and for building solidarity in white-coded spaces.

Despite these strengths, there were some concerns raised about racism in the workplace. Some Fellows and alumni indicated that they **weren't sure how to report negative racialized encounters at their host sites**, and it was unclear where they could find support for navigating racially tense climates. **Power dynamics between Fellows and project partner staff** have caused Fellows to hesitate to point out racial equity concerns and suggest solutions, especially in host sites where leadership's commitment to racial equity was unclear. Stakeholders also highlighted **a need for better mental health training** for Site Supervisors and Regional Coordinators who co-supervise Fellows.

To further explore mental health concerns, CivicSpark staff administered an anonymous Fellow Support Survey in June 2021 to gauge how staff can improve Fellow support structures. More than half of the cohort (~60%, or 49 out of 82 Fellows) participated. Fellows requested better access to therapy and mental health resources, more mental health training for Fellows and staff, improved insurance benefits, more flexibility in work structure, and more frequent check-in's with CivicSpark staff. Fellows also mentioned a desire for formal accommodations for people with specialized needs and bringing on a staff person solely responsible for mental health support. Results of the survey will continue to be reviewed by CivicSpark

staff and inform actions laid out in the Fellow Support and Supervision section of the Racial Equity Action Plan.

Fellow Training

CivicSpark's internal stakeholders generally saw the program as promoting racial equity through the Fellow training curriculum. **Racial equity was perceived as a central component in the Fellow training curriculum**, and current Fellows were generally satisfied with the racial equity focus within the training program. Fellows were substantially more satisfied than alumni with major training events and statewide calls, which could partially reflect programmatic changes across the years. alumni, along with some current Fellows and staff, noted that a number of racial equity focused **trainings had been developed and facilitated by Fellows to fill perceived training gaps**.

Fellow and alumni-driven content was especially well received, leading some stakeholders to recommend that their contributions be more formally recognized within the program, including through compensation. Fellows requested **more immediately applicable content** that could help them to implement racial equity in their day-to-day work. To continue to support a racial equity focus in future trainings, **staff also requested additional resources and trainings**. In surveys, staff felt most confident in their understandings of white privilege, implicit bias, and structural racism and least confident with concepts such as intersectionality and allyship.

85% of Fellows agreed that
"racial equity is a central component
of the CivicSpark training program"

Partnerships

Internal stakeholders identified partner relationships as an area where CivicSpark could improve its racial equity efforts. There was significant variation across partners in their views and actions toward promoting racial equity. While many surveyed partners described progressive racial climates at their organizations and rated their knowledge of racial equity concepts relatively high, they also acknowledged challenges in implementing racial equity in Fellows' service work. In both surveys and focus groups, partners expressed a high degree of interest in CivicSpark-led racial equity capacity building and greater accountability in their racial equity work.



The high degree of partner interest underscores CivicSpark's potential to serve as a pathway for local governments to advance racial equity throughout California.

In focus groups, many partners articulated an **awareness of the historical context of racial inequity in both local government work and in environmental work**, and they highlighted how that history contributed to enduring racism today. Despite this awareness and their relative knowledge regarding racial equity concepts, partners said **they struggled with how to implement racial equity initiatives in practice**. Specifically, they described a lack of knowledge regarding how to communicate racial equity needs to partners and stakeholders and **how to manage a racially diverse**

workforce. In addition to the implementation knowledge gaps identified by partners themselves, staff observed, from their perspective, how some partners struggled with initiating racial equity efforts when their organizations were seen as not directly serving communities of color.

Staff Culture and Program Support

In addition to the four program areas analyzed in the LPC report, staff also assessed gaps and progress in advancing racial equity through the staff culture and program support. **All stakeholders perceived CivicSpark as being committed to racial equity**, and they acknowledged a strengthening of the program's commitment in recent years. When discussing the culture and racial climate of CivicSpark, internal stakeholders reiterated that the program seemed committed to racial equity but also that its commitments could feel "surface level" or "performative" at times. **The program's expressed commitments to racial equity were not always strongly reflected in policy and practice** or the experiences of Fellows, alumni, and staff. This inconsistency caused frustration, particularly for some alumni, who felt that the program had not fully implemented recommendations they offered during previous service years. The lack of follow-through left some alumni feeling like their efforts had been in vain and called attention to the costs of their emotional labor. This mismatch between stated values and everyday practice was also elevated in survey results, with all four stakeholder groups rating CivicSpark's commitment to racial equity higher than its advancement.

While the majority of surveyed partners viewed CivicSpark as a partner in promoting racial equity (as noted above), internal stakeholders (Fellows, alumni, and staff) **indicated a lack of confidence about their ability to articulate CivicSpark's racial equity commitments to partners.** Internal stakeholders' lack of confidence in articulating CivicSpark's commitments to

racial equity may be driven by internal confusion about what those commitments are, a sentiment that emerged in focus group discussions. Internal stakeholders stressed the **importance of a shared definition of equity that does not overlook or obscure but instead directly tackles existing inequalities**. Stakeholders stressed the importance of developing greater consistency across CivicSpark program policies, improving clarity and alignment with LGC's broader racial equity efforts, and assessing the way privilege shows up in CivicSpark's workplace culture.

Fellow: So, you have a diverse workforce that is being managed by a lot of White people. And we're getting all these emails being like, 'we're sorry. It really sucks to be Black right now. Like, we care about racial equity,' and in my experience, it's largely White women sending out these emails. I'm glad I work at a place where I get emails that are like 'hey we know this is happening, and we know that it is impacting you,' but it still feels like it is coming out of an institution that is very much grounded in White supremacy in terms of its leadership structure.

Staff: I think Staff, in general, care deeply about improving the climate/culture that we have. So, I would describe it as like folks are engaged, but I don't think the Staff, in general, has the capacity or skills that are necessary to make the long-lasting changes that are necessary.

6. RACIAL EQUITY ACTION PLAN

The CivicSpark Racial Equity Action Plan (REAP) includes twenty one goals and over sixty actions to advance racial equity across five program areas: Fellow Recruitment and Hiring, Fellow Supervision and Support, Fellow Training, Partnerships, and Staff Culture and Program Support. This plan is a product of the collective feedback from focus groups, surveys, internal evaluation, and team discussions. The REAP includes: **a racial equity vision** for each program area; **progress to date** in addressing racial equity within each area; individual **goals** summarizing the outcomes that CivicSpark intends to realize for each area, **actions** that identify the concrete step CivicSpark staff will take to accomplish the goals; a **timeline** for accomplishing each action; **staff members who are accountable** for implementing each action; and qualitative or quantitative **performance measures** to evaluate progress.

The draft REAP was shared with all stakeholders on July 6, 2021 and accompanied by a feedback survey to

collect input on the goals and priorities in the plan. CivicSpark staff also hosted a 90-minute stakeholder input session on July 8, 2021 to gather additional live feedback on strengths and gaps within the plan. During the feedback session a group of Fellows shared, “Action Items for Indigenous Communities in CivicSpark,”¹¹ a document summarizing eleven suggested actions to include in the REAP that would advance Indigenous equity. The “Action Items for Indigenous Communities in CivicSpark” document received thirty-eight signatures from current Fellows and alumni in support of the proposed actions. Feedback on the draft REAP was also gathered from Adèle James, OnTrack Consulting, and CivicSpark staff. The “REAP Stakeholder Feedback Summary”¹² summarizes all stakeholder input. The feedback provided through the live session and feedback survey helped to refine the goals, identify gaps in the plan, and prioritize actions.

The REAP will serve as a living document which will be continuously updated through input received from stakeholder surveys, small focus group discussions, and large group Fellow input sessions. See Section 7 - Evaluation and Accountability for additional information on how the plan will be evaluated and updated.

The goals and actions included in the REAP address both individual and institutional-level racism. As CivicSpark staff developed the plan, the team identified how each action would address these intersecting dimensions of racism, and below is a high-level summary of this analysis.

DIMENSIONS OF RACISM ADDRESSED IN THE REAP

INSTITUTIONAL

Institutional racism exists within the scope of discriminatory laws, policies, power, and decision making and results in systematic prejudice which denies opportunities and resources to historically marginalized communities. Specific actions and goals in this action plan are directed at addressing institutional racism within CivicSpark, including assessing and revising policies and procedures, striving for diversity in program leadership and decision-making, addressing inequities in the Fellow compensation, providing additional training to local governments, and increasing access to the program.¹³

STRUCTURAL

Structural racism can be defined as the history, root causes, cultural representations and other norms which reinforce racial inequities. Structural racism defines the privileges that exist due to the cumulative impacts of stereotype, biases, and prejudice. Specific actions and goals within the action plan aim to address structural racism within our program by evaluating how implicit bias influences decision-making, assessing the way privilege shows up in workplace culture and practices, and promoting values of equity, inclusion, access, and dignity for all.¹⁴

¹³Race Forward

¹⁴Race Forward

INTERPERSONAL

Interpersonal racism is characterized by individualized biases and personal beliefs which impact personal interactions between individuals and groups.

Interpersonal racism includes microaggressions, racial violence, and profiling. Specific actions and goals within the action plan aim to address the impact of interpersonal racism in the program, such as diversity and cultural competency training, the promotion of cross and inter-identity group dialogues, and hosting diverse community events.¹⁵

INTERNALIZED

Internalized racism is the personal conscious or subconscious acceptance of the dominant society's racist views, biases and stereotypes. Specific actions and goals within the action plan aim to address the impact of internalized racism for participants of our program such as providing our People of Color and White Anti-Racism caucuses, the Peer Support Network, and training for site supervisor and staff on culturally competent supervision.¹⁶

¹⁵Race Forward

¹⁶Race Forward

7. Evaluation and Accountability

In order to ensure accountability, the CivicSpark team will review and evaluate progress for each REAP program area. Staff will evaluate progress on the Fellow Recruitment and Hiring goals during the winter prior to launching Fellow the recruitment process for the following year's cohort. The team will use the annual recruitment cycle to assess how changes to recruitment and outreach strategy have influenced outcomes, and provide staff an opportunity to incorporate feedback from the previous year's Fellows in the upcoming hiring process. The Fellow curriculum and REAP training goals will be assessed at the end of each service year to incorporate Fellow and partner feedback into training updates and address identified gaps in the Fellow training content. Fellow supervision and support goals will also be evaluated at the conclusion of the service year prior to onboarding the next cohort of Fellows. REAP goals and actions related to partnerships will be evaluated before the start of partner recruitment to identify and address any needed changes to partner onboarding and materials. Staff culture and program support goals will be incorporated into bi-annual staff evaluations and reassessed as part of LGC's Equity Committee evaluation efforts in the coming year. CivicSpark staff also will conduct a full REAP evaluation and review alongside the annual program strategic planning efforts that occur at the end of each year. This action plan will serve as a guiding resource for the team's self-evaluation and goal-setting for the coming year.

CivicSpark will leverage a number of existing evaluation tools and methods to continue gathering Fellow, alumni, and partner feedback on racial equity efforts. Through surveying, in-person feedback sessions, and 1:1 check-in's with Regional Coordinators, staff will assess the effectiveness of the REAP implementation, identify where we may be progressing or falling short, and gather additional input on how the goals and actions can be more

effectively implemented. CivicSpark will build on the baseline data collected through the REAP surveys and focus groups to measure progress and assess where additional work is needed.

The CivicSpark team will also take advantage of large group gatherings within the service year, including Fellow orientation, mid-year retreat, and graduation, to host smaller focus groups and gather additional input on opportunities for improvement.

The action plan also includes actions and goals that support advocating for greater flexibility and racial equity in the AmeriCorps structure and program requirements. REAP evaluation will monitor for legislative changes that occur at the federal, state, and local level that may impact actions with this plan and adjust advocacy and collaboration efforts as needed to accommodate for these changes.

“Equity means you are providing support to people who need it the most... Hold yourself accountable and be true to that word”¹⁷

8. Limitations and Lessons Learned

CivicSpark staff identified a number of limitations and lessons learned through the REAP development, including restrictions on time and staff capacity and limitations on the stakeholders engaged through this process. Our hope is that these reflections can inform others as they pursue racial equity assessment and planning efforts.

Time and Budget Constraints

While the Racial Equity Planning Grant (REPG) was awarded in August 2020, the CivicSpark team had limited capacity to begin implementation until Winter 2020 due to changes in staff leadership, staff shortages, and the launch of another AmeriCorps program, the Climate Action Corps. As a result, surveying and focus groups launched in March 2021 and concluded in May 2021, which limited the depth of outreach and support for difficult-to-reach stakeholders groups. All grant deliverables had to be finalized by July 2021, which limited the team from conducting multiple rounds of stakeholder input and analyzing stakeholder feedback in greater depth. The REPG grant requirements also guided how funding could be used for participant stipends, consultant fees, and staff time. Staff were particularly challenged by the limited budget for equity consultant support, and conducted multiple rounds of outreach and interviews to find an equity consultant that could accomplish the goals of the grant within CivicSpark's budget. The team also wanted to ensure sufficient funding for POC alumni participation stipends, which restricted the available budget for an equity consultant. The budget limitations may have resulted in a loss of individualized narratives, specific perspectives, a lengthier study, greater expertise in assessing racial equity, and a broader scope of work.

Survey Methods and Analysis

Due to the time and budget constraints, CivicSpark was unable to use lengthier and more costly qualitative data collection approaches for the REAP development, including one-on-one interviews and multiple rounds of focus groups, which could have added to the depth and quality of feedback. This also resulted in being unable to provide a “narrative perspective”, which could have been employed to develop trends regarding specific barriers and identities that individuals held.

Stakeholder Input Limitations

Participation in the REPG surveys and focus groups was strongest from partners and current Fellows, which resulted in more input from these perspectives. Partners submitted nearly double the amount of survey responses (39 responses) as alumni (22 responses), and more than the alumni and staff responses (11 responses) combined. Fellows (34 responses) represented the second largest group of survey respondents. In surveys, partners also expressed more interest in participating in focus groups than any other stakeholder group. In total, eight focus groups were conducted: three partner groups, two Fellow and two staff groups, and one alumni group. Focus group discussions ranged from three to six individuals, with an average of four individuals per group. Focus groups were conducted during a limited four-week period to allow sufficient time for analysis within the grant timeline requirements. The focus group size, time commitment for involvement, and limited window for participation likely created restrictions for some participants who lacked time and/or capacity to provide input during the data collection period.

As seen in Figure F¹⁸, survey respondent demographics also varied across stakeholder groups. The racial composition of survey and focus group participants likely resulted in over-representation and under-representation of some groups in the feedback and suggestions reflected in the action plan

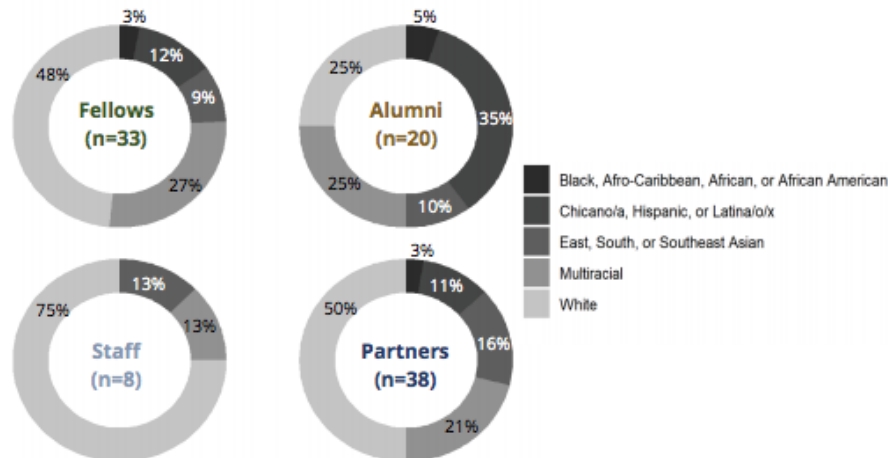


Figure F: Racial Composition by Stakeholder Group

Budget and time constraints also limited opportunities for greater partner, alumni, and Fellow participation in REAP review and feedback. While staff were able to conduct a REAP feedback survey and live REAP feedback session, more time could have allowed for additional rounds of stakeholder input on the plan goals, actions, and priorities.

Lessons Learned

Throughout this project, CivicSpark has received invaluable feedback and testimonials from Fellows, partners, alumni and current and former staff. The stories and perspectives shared by these groups and the trends realized through this study highlight the importance of equity within the workplace.

The long-standing impacts of systemic racism and marginalization in institutions and society have not left CivicSpark untouched. CivicSpark has contributed to the deep inequities that have persisted, and this work has elevated our responsibility to take steps to bridge the gaps between inequities and address systemic oppression both internally and in program implementation.

One of the most important takeaways from this work is **the need for more time to effectively listen, take stock of what we heard, and demonstrate**

how feedback was incorporated into the plan. Effective REAP implementation will require **staff time, budget, and support from the CivicSpark and LGC leadership teams** to ensure sufficient resources are dedicated to accomplishing the actions and goals in the plan. Staff also noted that **more time is needed for transparency and feedback**. Valuable feedback will require more depth and allocated time

As progress is made in this racial equity work, CivicSpark staff must continue this racial equity action plan past the existence of the REPG grant. **This work must be embedded into the practices of the organization** and this report will serve as the beginning of a continuous project. Moving forward, it is vital to take steps to **continue uplifting communities of color through every avenue possible, including through staff, Fellows, and the communities they serve.**

9. APPENDIX

LPC Report

Stakeholder Feedback Outcomes Summary

07.08.21 Action Items for Indigenous Communities in CivicSpark

REPG Terms and Definitions

LGC letter of support for the Corps Act

Endorsements for The Segal AmeriCorps Education Award Tax Relief Act

June 2021

CivicSpark

Racial Equity Planning Grant Stakeholder Feedback Summary Report



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Executive Summary

Publicized accounts of police brutality against Black individuals, the disparate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic among communities of color, and widespread social protests against racism have increased awareness of the critical and ongoing need for racial reform in the United States. California Volunteers' Racial Justice Planning Grant responds to this need by providing funds to support the development and refinement of AmeriCorps program models that specifically serve the goal of racial equity. In the fall of 2020, the Local Government Commission (LGC) was awarded **Racial Justice Planning Grant** funding to strengthen racial equity within the CivicSpark Program.

In the spring of 2021, LGC partnered with LPC Consulting Associates, Inc. (LPC) to solicit feedback from CivicSpark program stakeholders to inform the development of a racial equity plan. LGC identified four key stakeholders that are essential to delivering its mission of building local public sector capacity, serving as a career accelerator for future leaders, and fostering lasting and authentic community engagement. Those stakeholders include current **CivicSpark Fellows** and **Alumni**, who serve (or have served) at state, local, and community-based organizations to support community resilience, particularly in light of environmental and social equity issues; **CivicSpark Staff**, who support and mentor Fellows, serve as a liaison with Partners, and coordinate program logistics; and **CivicSpark Partners**, who host Fellows and provide guidance and supervision over service projects.

To assess racial equity efforts and to identify recommendations for better promoting racial equity across key areas of the CivicSpark program, LGC and LPC administered surveys to and facilitated a series of focus groups with these four stakeholder groups. This report summarizes key findings drawn from that data collection.

What are CivicSpark's Strengths in Promoting Racial Equity?

- The program has demonstrated a **growing commitment** to racial equity in recent years.
- Racial equity efforts have been **most successful** in the areas of Fellow training and Fellow support and supervision.
- Racial equity was viewed as **a central component** of the Fellow training program, and current Fellows were generally **satisfied with trainings**. They sought additional trainings and resources, especially concrete strategies and ideas for addressing racial equity challenges in their day-to-day work.
- **Peer-based interactions and affinity groups**, such as the POC Caucus, have provided **valuable spaces** for discussing racial equity issues and for BI&POC Fellows, in particular, to process racialized social interactions and to build a sense of solidarity in White-coded spaces.
- **Regional Coordinators** are perceived as providing supportive spaces for talking about race-related issues.
- Most CivicSpark **Partners said their organizations value racial equity** and that racial equity should be a priority.
- Surveyed Partners said they view **CivicSpark as a partner in promoting racial equity** and have found racial equity conversations with and resources provided by Fellows and Staff to be helpful.

What Gaps and Challenges Exist as Barriers to Racial Equity?

- CivicSpark's commitments to racial equity felt **decoupled from the everyday realities** experienced by Fellows, Alumni, and Staff. This decoupling raised **questions about the sincerity and depth** of the program's commitments.
- Racial equity efforts have been **least successful** in the areas of Fellow recruitment and selection and Partnerships.
- **Inadequate Fellow compensation** and previously **narrow recruiting strategies and selection criteria** have undermined Fellow diversity.
- **Insufficient BI&POC representation** across the program, including among Fellows, CivicSpark Staff, and Partner Staff, contributed to a culture that sometimes **felt uninviting or alienating** to people of color and that required them to perform **uncompensated, emotional and relational labor**.
- Some Fellows and Alumni **experienced overt racism and microaggressions** at Partner host sites, raising concerns about the safety of their working environments.
- Some Fellows and Alumni **did not know how to report negative racialized encounters** nor where they could find support for navigating racially tense climates in the future. Relatedly, Staff reported a lack of clarity regarding how to respond to negative racialized encounters experienced by Fellows.
- Power dynamics between Fellows and Partner Staff **made it difficult** for Fellows to **raise racial equity concerns and advocate for racial equity commitments**, particularly in sites where leadership buy-in was in question.

How Can CivicSpark Better Promote Racial Equity?

Increase Fellow compensation to recruit a more diverse cohort, to reduce Fellow vulnerabilities, and to increase Fellow's sense of empowerment to promote racial equity at their host sites.

To support improved compensation, LGC might consider additional sources of funding. In lieu of increased compensation, LGC might consider cutting Fellows' weekly hour requirements and/or ending the program two months earlier (in May).

Improve BI&POC representation at all levels, including among CivicSpark Staff and LGC leadership and Partner staff, to better align cultural values with the structure and reality of the program.

Suggestions for improving Fellow diversity, specifically, include increased compensation (mentioned above), addressing bias in selection criteria (e.g., dropping degree requirements, widening understandings of relevant experience, implementing name and/or school-blind hiring), expanding recruiting outreach, and giving candidates more information prior to interviews.

Establish internal alignment regarding CivicSpark's commitments to racial equity to facilitate shared ownership and to empower Fellows, Alumni, and Staff to communicate those commitments more effectively with Partners.

Internal stakeholders stressed the importance of a shared definition of equity that does not overlook or obscure but instead directly tackles existing inequalities.

Communicate the importance of racial equity to Partners and make racial equity a requirement within the program.

All Stakeholders felt there was a need to require more from Partners in regard to racial equity. Most Partners said that racial equity requirements would not be a barrier to participation in the program, and many expressed an interest and a willingness to invest time in racial equity capacity building.

Make racial equity trainings mandatory and compensate Fellows and Alumni for the racial equity work they do internally for the program.

Doing so will demonstrate the value attached to racial equity work and help to address imbalances in the provision of that work.

Invest more heavily in the professional development of BI&POC Fellows to progress toward the goal of creating a more representative next generation of leaders in local government.

Developing an Alumni of Color Mentorship program may represent one resource for supporting BI&POC Fellows and Alumni in achieving their professional goals.

Create formal mechanisms for sharing feedback around racial equity within the program **and for reporting** race-based discrimination, harassment, and/or microaggressions.

Stakeholders suggested the hiring of a Race and Equity Officer, as well as platforms for sharing anonymous feedback.

Provide CivicSpark Staff with more racial equity training and with **additional racial equity resources** for supporting Fellows and Partners and for developing and modifying racial equity focused training content.

This training should include guidance on how to address and support Fellows' mental health challenges, which are intrinsically linked to racism and discrimination in the workplace.

Find ways to **extend the program** to more Partners that **serve low-income communities and communities of color**.

Consider a sliding-scale cost option or sponsorship for low-income communities to receive Fellows.

Section 1 Background and Methods

In Fall 2020, California Volunteers awarded funds to the Local Government Commission (LGC) to develop programming that targets issues disproportionately affecting communities of color. This funding is intended to support equitable practices in AmeriCorps programs and develop new AmeriCorps program models focused on fostering just and equitable communities. Specifically, this funding was awarded to develop a plan for enhancing racial equity in four key areas of LGC's CivicSpark program: (1) Fellow recruitment and hiring; (2) Fellow support and supervision; (3) Fellow training; and (4) Partnerships.

To help inform the development of a Racial Equity Plan, LGC reached out to four key stakeholders in the CivicSpark program: **Fellows** in the current 2020-2021 cohort; **Alumni** from the past three cohorts (2017-2020); CivicSpark **Staff**, including Regional Coordinators and select other former and current staff; and the Site Supervisors at local government **Partner** organizations. These stakeholders were invited to participate in two forms of data collection, each outlined below.



A distinct **online survey** was developed for each stakeholder group. Each survey included approximately 25-30 questions in both closed and opened-ended formats. Questions inquired about aspects of racial equity across the four program areas of interest, asking for stakeholder assessments and recommendations. They were sent by email and remained live for approximately three weeks. In total, 34 Fellows, 22 Alumni, 11 Staff members, and 39 Partners fully completed the survey, with a few additional individuals partially completing the surveys (see details about survey response and survey sample demographics in the [Appendix](#)).



A series of **focus groups** were then conducted with stakeholder groups. Survey respondents were asked to indicate their interest in participating in focus groups through a question near the end of each survey. All respondents that indicated an interest were invited to join a focus group. Focus group prompts asked stakeholders to describe the program's racial climate, identify drivers of racial inequity within the program, share their thoughts and recommendations regarding targeted program areas (e.g., recruitment, partnerships), and outline their vision for racial equity within the program. In total, LGC facilitated two Fellow focus groups, one Alumni focus group (and a one-person facilitated conversation), two Staff groups, and three Partner groups. Most groups included between three and five participants, and the conversations were conducted virtually through Zoom.

LPC analyzed data from the four stakeholder surveys, and from the two Fellow groups, the one Alumni group, one of the two Staff groups, and two of the three Partner groups. This report summarizes findings from the data collected, and it is organized by six thematic sections: (1) Stakeholder Assessments of CivicSpark's Racial Equity Efforts; (2) Fellow Training; (3) Fellow Support and Supervision; (4) Fellow Recruitment and Hiring; (5) Partnerships; and (6) Stakeholders' Vision for Racial Equity at CivicSpark. Within each section, findings from across stakeholders and across data collection methods are summarized.

Section 2 Stakeholder Assessments of CivicSpark's Racial Equity Efforts

Stakeholders perceived CivicSpark as being **committed to racial equity**, and they acknowledged a strengthening of the program's commitment in recent years. However, they commented on how CivicSpark's commitment to racial equity **did not always translate into policy and practice**, leading the program to fall short in advancing racial equity. Stakeholders also highlighted **variation in the success of racial equity efforts across program areas** with efforts being the strongest in Fellow training and support/supervision.

Increasing Commitment to Racial Equity



During focus group conversations, Fellows, Alumni, Staff, and Partners commented on a noticeable elevation of racial equity concerns within the program in recent years, explaining that much of the change had been Fellow-driven.

Staff: I think racial equity wasn't a priority at all at the outset, it was just a complete and total blind spot from the program's inception, and it has definitely become more of a priority and therefore the racial climate or culture has improved over the years. But, it has definitely been a Fellow-driven improvement as far as I can see. It's the Fellows pushing for it, and then Staff responding to it.

Alumni echoed this sentiment, but also expressed frustration that the program had not yet fully implemented recommendations they offered during their service years. The lack of follow-through left them feeling like their efforts had been in vain and called attention to the costs of their emotional labor.

Alumni: This [racial equity] planning has been going on for years, since [CivicSpark] started. **It's crazy that CivicSpark hasn't taken tangible actions** or integrated systems of racial equity and cultural knowledge into their program.

Alumni: I feel that a lot of us have done that [racial equity] work, **so there's probably going to be a lot of emotional labor [in these conversations]...** we've already done that work, probably all the RCs [Regional Coordinators] already have our recommendations. **I think I spent more than 100 hours doing that work already...** [Leadership], the RC's, all those folks already have my recommendations. I'm just noticing my emotional labor right now.

"I feel that a lot of us have done that [racial equity] work...I'm just noticing **my emotional labor** right now."

Racial Equity in Name, Missing in Practice



In focus groups, Fellows and Alumni expressed feeling that although CivicSpark was committed to racial equity, there was something missing in practice.

Fellow: I do think CivicSpark has an awareness of their lack of racial diversity perhaps, which I think it important... I think there is a very aware Staff, and I'm glad that these conversations are happening – and so, in that respect, I think, overall, I think it's positive. I like to see and hear that. In the mission of CivicSpark, there's no obvious problems with addressing race.

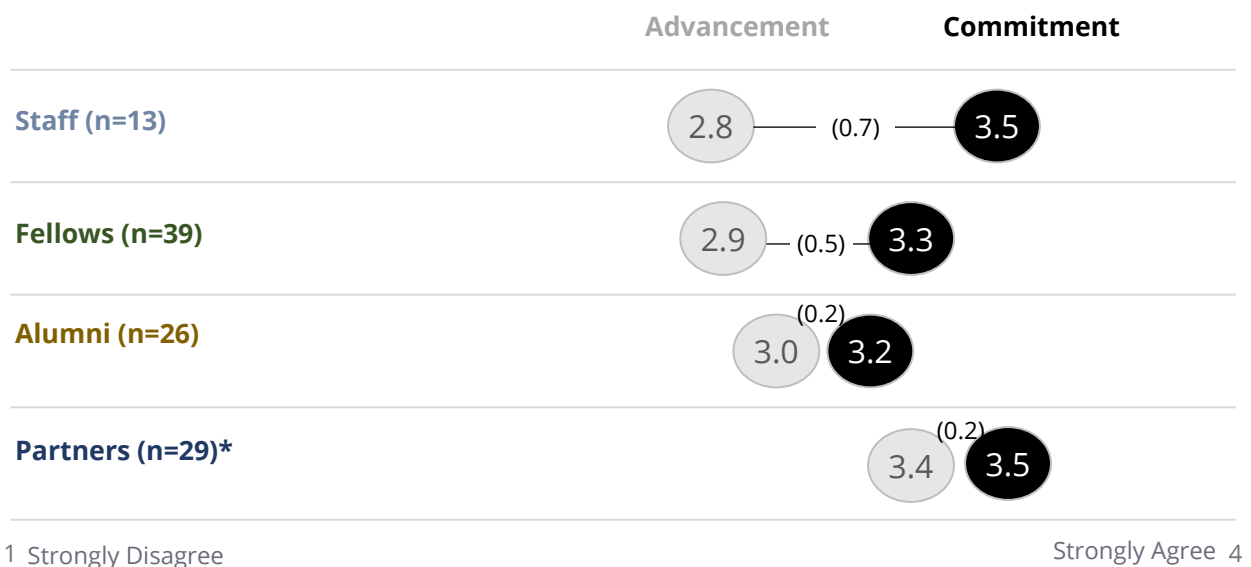
In theory, it's great but, in practice, it needs to be improved.

Alumni: CivicSpark does such a good job of selling itself as a progressive program that, when you're applying to it, you just imagine it's going to be a progressive group of folks and that you'll find likeminded young people who want to make this change and who understand what equity is and what structural racism is. And then you show up at orientation, and it's very different from how it's marketed. I think that's the mismatch. Like, **we all know that government is White, that the climate space is White, but I expected CivicSpark to be different** and LGC Staff to be different.



This mismatch between stated values and everyday practice was also reflected in the survey results represented in Figure 1, with all four stakeholder groups rating CivicSpark's commitment to racial equity higher than its advancement. Based on these results, the difference between advancement and commitment was clearer to internal stakeholders than to Partners.

Figure 1. Average Agreement Regarding CivicSpark Commitment to and Advancement of Racial Equity



*Ten Partners responded "don't know" to this question.

Variation Across Program Areas



Internal stakeholders (Fellows, Alumni, and Staff) also noted variation in the success of CivicSpark's racial equity efforts across its program areas. In surveys, Fellow training and Fellow support and supervision were consistently rated as being areas where racial equity efforts had been more successful, while there was room for improvement in the areas of Fellow recruitment and Partner relationships.



This variation across program areas also surfaced in focus group conversations.

Fellow: I think that CivicSpark has a lot of language and trainings that deal with racial equity and encouraging racial justice, but materially speaking, CivicSpark could do more to actually support POCs joining the CivicSpark program, as evidenced by the racial makeup of some of the cohorts; and I think that that's... it's the language is there, the ideology is there, but there is clearly something materially lacking.

Alumni: I had a great experience at my site. I had a wonderful team and a great supervisor, manager. People really invested in my professional growth... But I do know Fellows that didn't have that experience, and I don't think it should be just luck of the draw. ...Not every local government in California is going to be progressive, and not every local government is going to have racial equity training for their staff, and I don't know if it's something CivicSpark can require. Just because they don't have the history or don't have the resources to be able to do that, [I'm not sure] that they don't deserve a Fellow. But, **I do think it's improper to drop a BI&POC Fellow into a situation like that without the proper support or warning.**

The following sections look at each program area in greater detail, beginning with those rated by stakeholders as being more successful in racial equity efforts (Fellow training and Fellow support and supervision), followed by those rated as being less successful (Fellow recruitment and hiring and Partner relationships).

Section 3 Fellow Training

As previously noted, internal stakeholders viewed Fellow training as an area where CivicSpark’s racial equity efforts had been more successful. Current Fellows, in particular, were generally satisfied with the racial equity focus within the training program. Fellow and Alumni-driven content was especially well received, leading some stakeholders to recommend that their contributions be more formally recognized within the program, including through compensation. In addition, Fellows requested more immediately applicable content that could help them to implement racial equity in their day-to-day work. To continue to support a racial equity focus in future trainings, Staff requested additional resources and trainings.

Training Satisfaction

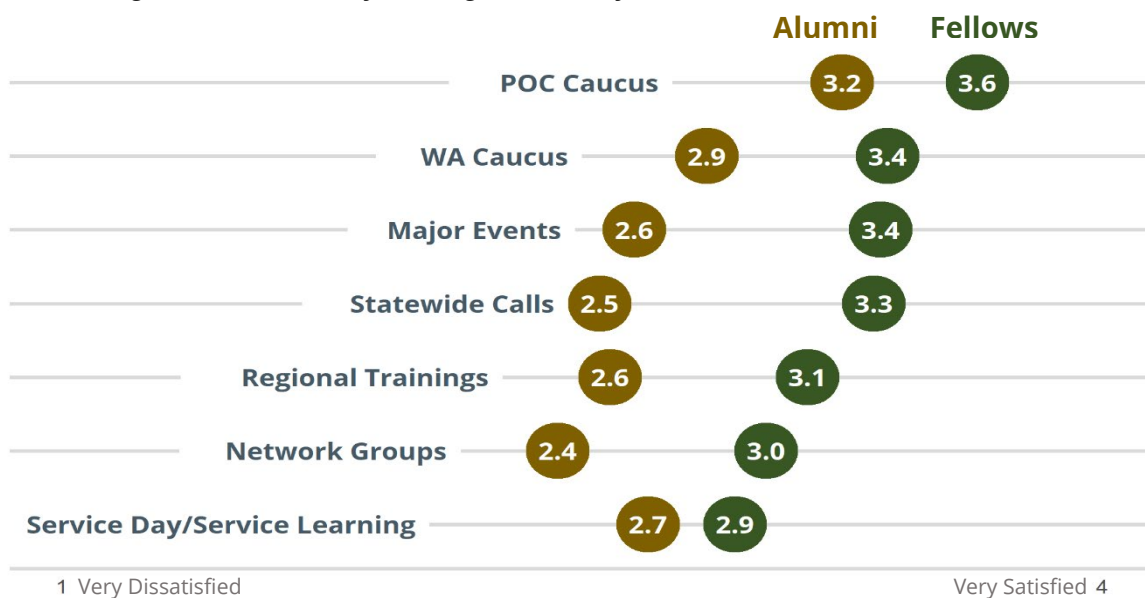


Current Fellows were relatively satisfied with the focus on racial equity within trainings. In surveys, 85 percent of Fellows somewhat or strongly agreed that racial equity was centered in the training program. Fellows also indicated a general sense of satisfaction when individually assessing racial equity focused trainings (see Figure 2). In contrast, Alumni expressed less satisfaction with racial equity focused trainings (also Figure 2), and only 36 percent somewhat agreed that racial equity was centered within trainings more broadly (none strongly agreed).

85%
of Fellows agreed that
“racial equity is a central
component of the
CivicSpark training
program”

- The POC and White Ally and/or Whiteness and Anti-racism Caucuses were among the highest rated trainings for both Fellows and Alumni.
- Fellows were substantially more satisfied than Alumni with major events and statewide calls, which could partially reflect programmatic changes across the years.

Figure 2. Average Satisfaction of Key Trainings as Rated by Fellows and Alumni





Fellows' satisfaction with the racial equity components of CivicSpark trainings also came through in focus groups, where they discussed the applicability of the material to their project work.

Fellow: I've been pleasantly surprised with trainings. I think some of the initial trainings in the beginning of the year, I actually was able to use some of the materials and things like that because one of my projects is specifically focused on equity.

In alignment with survey responses, Alumni were less positive when recollecting their training experiences in focus groups. Alumni, along with some current Fellows and Staff, noted that a number of racial equity focused trainings had been developed and facilitated by Fellows to fill perceived training gaps. They recommended that Fellows (and Alumni) be compensated for their efforts in this area.

Alumni: In my cohort year Mid-year Gathering, we put on a training on racial equity for Fellows to understand the importance of environmental justice and racial justice in local government policies and programs. We took the ownership on us to do that because CivicSpark wasn't going to plan to do a racial equity training at Mid-year Gathering, so **we had to fill in the gap that CivicSpark dropped the ball on.** That presentation was well received by Staff and Fellows. Self-reflecting, CivicSpark pays GARE (Government Alliance on Race and Equity) and other consultants to lead those trainings, and **we saved CivicSpark money on holding that training, once again taking advantage of our emotional labor.** Fellow-led groups tend to be more effective than the consultants who lack cultural competency or don't understand the culture of CivicSpark. **I recommend providing an extra stipend for Fellows who want to take on training opportunities.** That might be more effective than paying a consultant who doesn't understand the cultural climate they are entering, or how they might be triggering or traumatizing Fellows.

Alumni (and some Fellows) also expressed a need for greater accountability to ensure that all Fellows were involved in racial equity efforts and that the burden did not fall disproportionately on BI&POC Fellows and Alumni.

Alumni: My favorite spaces when I was a Fellow were the spaces we created for ourselves... all the ones LGC structured (trainings, groups), I hated those. In my year, we had a particularly bad trainer in the equity workshop, and then we all had to decompress about it, talk about how awful it was... I'm also thinking about the balance about encouraging the ecosystem of Fellow-led spaces, and also there **needs to be accountability of all Fellows to do this work, not just BI&POC Fellows** to self-organize... So making it more structured... there has to be accountability and engagement.






Training Recommendations



In surveys, Fellows and Alumni selected their top recommendations (from a given list) for improving equity focused trainings at CivicSpark (see Figure 3). Top recommendations included increased participation requirements and a better

centering of racial equity across all training content. In open-ended responses, Fellows and Alumni also requested more specific and concrete racial equity training content that could be implemented in their day-to-day work.

Figure 3. Top 5 Recommendations for Improving Equity Focused Training Based on Percent of Total Responses from Fellows and Alumni

	Percent of Fellow Selections (n=52)	Percent of Alumni Selections (n=44)
 Increased participation requirements (for Fellows)	19%	18%
 Better centering of racial equity in all content	17%	30%
 More/better racial equity resources	15%	18%
 Increased quality of RE training, curriculum, speakers	13%	11%
 More equity focused training activities and discussions	13%	18%

**Survey respondents were asked to select only two, although some selected more than two*

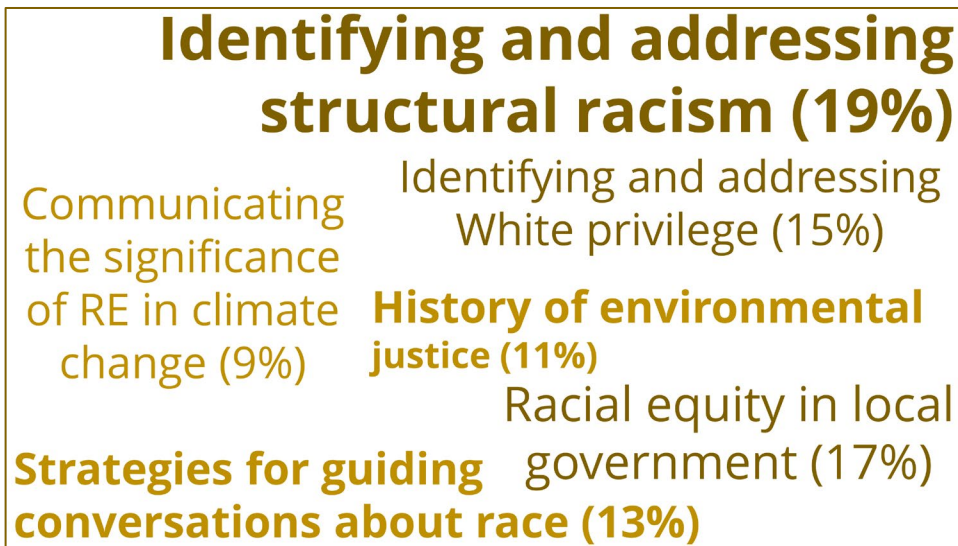
Surveyed Fellows and Alumni also indicated specific content areas they would like to see added to the CivicSpark training curriculum, again selecting from a given list. As shown in Figure 4 (on the following page), there was strong interest in content focused on **identifying and addressing structural racism**.

Figure 4. Top Requested Content Areas for Racial Equity Trainings Based on Percent of Total Responses from Fellows and Alumni

Fellows (total selections=76)



Alumni (total selections=54)



In focus groups, Fellows also emphasized the need for training focused on handling **microaggressions** and on the **histories of racism** at their Partner sites, including why these local governments may have strained relationships with the communities they serve.

Fellow: I would have loved to have a crash course or something that would better prepare me to handle different microaggressions and things like that because just jumping straight in- It was something that, starting the Fellowship, **if I did come across something like that, I would just push it off to the side because I knew I had so many other things to worry about.**

Fellow: One of the biggest things I had to do in my role at the city is...understand the harm that local government has done to people and understand how people relate to it...and I would honestly like to see the program address that more because I think that it is an important conversation to have. As you go out and you do the most good possible for the people that we work with and serve in these communities, **we also [need to] have a really honest and ongoing discussion with ourselves about how government has hurt people and be aware of the structures that we are currently functioning within.** I think that would be really helpful especially at the start of the service year when we're trying to make sense of everything and trying to figure out our approaches as we go into our communities... I know one of the roadblocks I ran into at my site was just not being able to do events or even talk to certain groups because we didn't have the best relationship. And I don't think I was prepared for that when I came to this, I was like, 'oh everyone is going to want to talk to us because we are doing the best thing that we can,' and it was just kind of an awakening. I was, like, **people here experience all of this differently than we are experiencing it right now.**

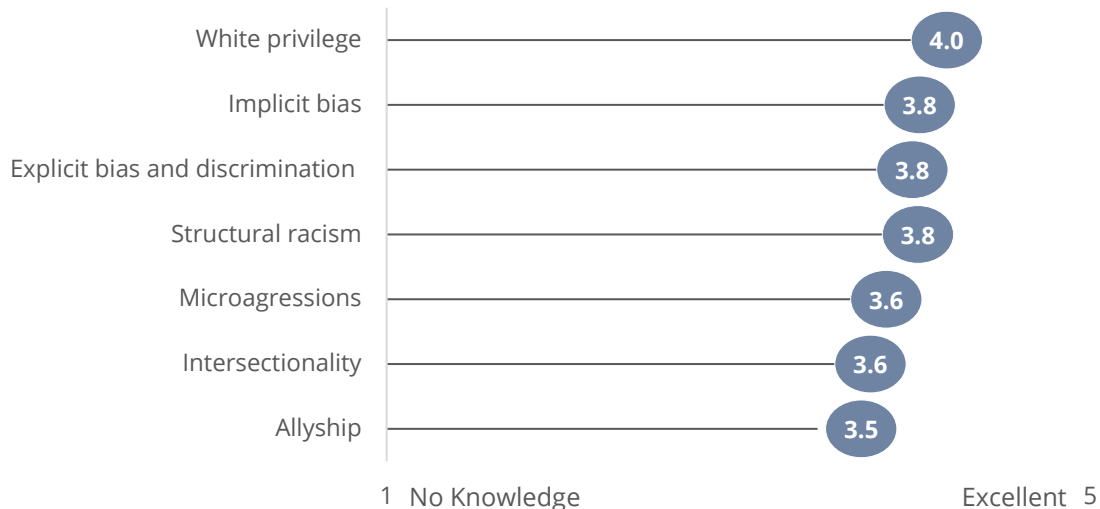
Staff Knowledge and Support Needs



Increased and/or improved racial equity trainings require Staff that feel equipped to plan or facilitate those trainings. In surveys, Staff rated their knowledge of key racial equity concepts on a scale ranging from 1 to 5 (1=No knowledge, 5=Excellent). As shown in Figure 5, average scores on all concepts fell between fair (3) and good (4), indicating sufficient knowledge but also room for growth.

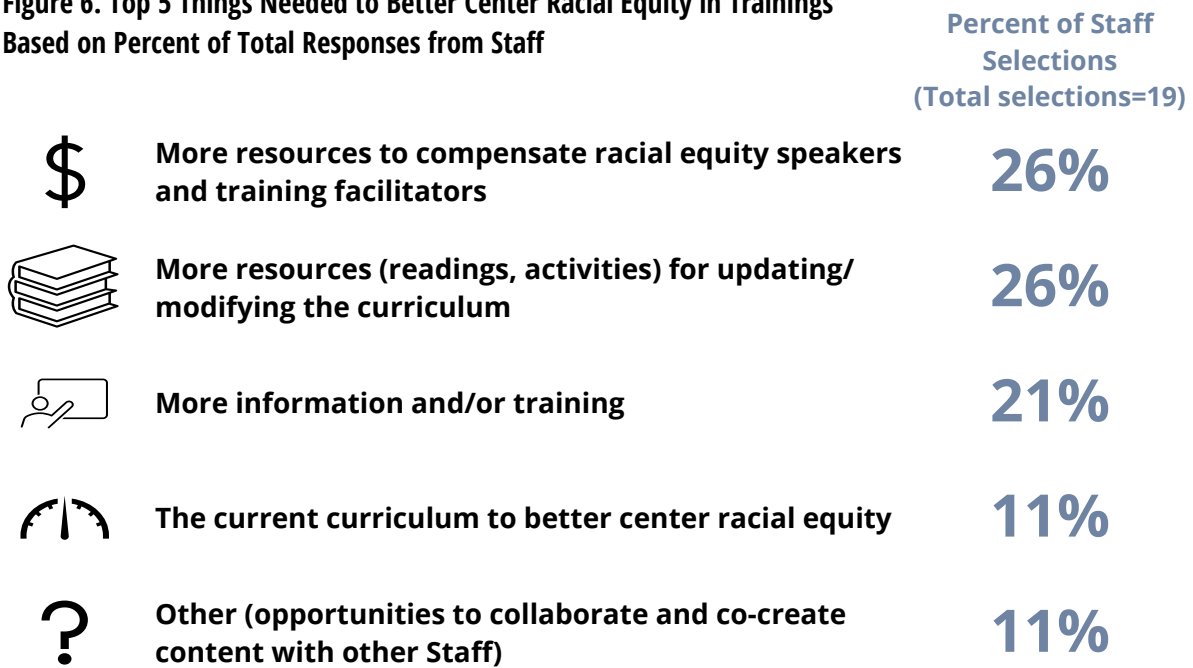
Staff felt most confident in their understandings of **White privilege, implicit bias, and structural racism** and least confident with concepts such as **intersectionality and allyship.**

Figure 5. Staff Self-Assessments of Knowledge on Key Racial Equity Concepts



Slightly over one-third of the Staff (36%) disagreed that racial equity was a central component of the Fellow training program. In open-ended survey responses, Staff discussed centering racial equity by “talking about their own experiences,” “bring[ing] in speakers that centered racial equity” and “talk[ing] with speakers that were White about the importance of acknowledging privilege.” Surveyed Staff also selected the top things that would help them to better center racial equity in trainings. As shown in Figure 6, they most frequently indicated a need for stipend funds to compensate racial equity speakers and training facilitators and resources for updating the training curriculum.

Figure 6. Top 5 Things Needed to Better Center Racial Equity in Trainings Based on Percent of Total Responses from Staff



**Survey respondents were asked to select only two, although some selected more than two*

Section 4 Fellow Support and Supervision

As noted in Section 2, CivicSpark's internal stakeholders generally saw the program as promoting racial equity through its support and supervision of Fellows. Yet, they also described limitations and ongoing challenges to the advancement of racial equity in this area, and they made several recommendations for better empowering Fellows in their racial equity work.

CivicSpark Culture and Racial Climate



When discussing the culture and racial climate of CivicSpark, internal stakeholders reiterated that the program seemed committed to racial equity but also that its commitments could feel “surface level” or “performative” at times.

Staff: I think Staff, in general, **care deeply** about improving the climate/culture that we have. So, I would describe it as like folks are engaged, but I don't think the Staff, in general, has **the capacity or skills that are necessary to make the long-lasting changes** that are necessary.!

Fellow: The impression I get is that potentially **a commitment to justice and equity feels recent**, which feels similar to a lot of other institutions to me. A lot of institutions were like ‘racism, this is a thing we need to address now in 2020’. My experience with CivicSpark started in 2020, so without knowing what CivicSpark was like before my service year, it feels like as **an institution that wasn't built on justice or eradicating racism**. And I feel like what I am experiencing at CivicSpark and at my service site is what I've experienced at other workplaces where the **diversity in the workforce is very much contained to lower levels**. So, you have a diverse workforce that is being managed by a lot of White people. And we're getting all these emails being like, ‘we're sorry. It really sucks to be Black right now. Like, we care about racial equity,’ and in my experience, it's largely White women sending out these emails. **I'm glad I work at a place where I get emails that are like ‘hey we know this is happening, and we know that it is impacting you,’ but it still feels like it is coming out of an institution that is very much grounded in White supremacy in terms of its leadership structure.**

Fellows and Alumni also described less than ideal situations at their host sites. As outlined later in this report, some focus group participants described experiencing hostile racial interactions and cultures at their host sites. Importantly for CivicSpark, Fellows and Alumni said they were confused about whom to talk with when racial equity issues arose, and they sought additional, and potentially more formal, channels for reporting these issues.

Fellow: It's kind of a long story, but it ends up with the beneficiary [the Partner] admitting that their organization actively avoids working with indigenous organizations and said some things to me that were definitely racist against indigenous people. And I pushed back and basically said, ‘I disagree with you. I think that this partnership is good and will benefit us, and furthermore, you are legally required in this situation to have formal consultation with tribes.’ And, **it would have been nice to have more information about the channels that I could**

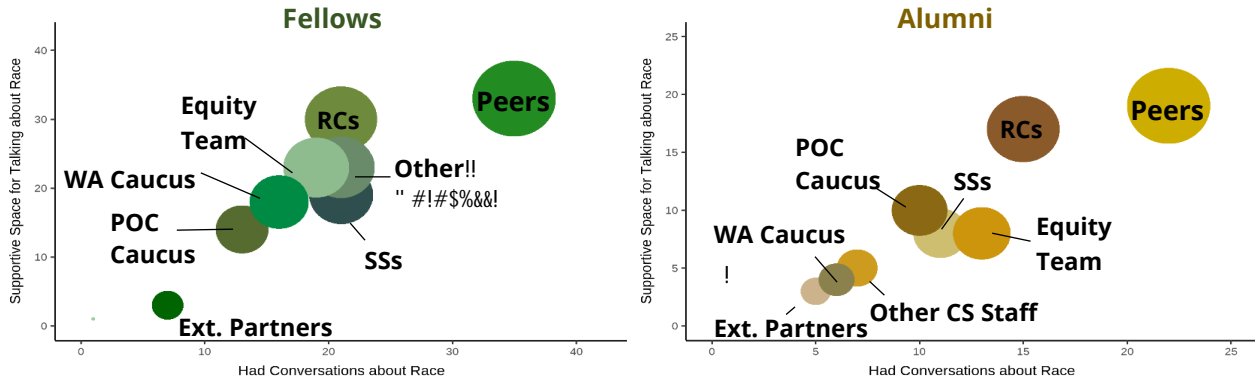
go through in terms of CivicSpark to get information and advice on how to deal with a situation like that. I ended up talking to someone at LGC, but only by coincidence because they happened to be at meeting where I mentioned this – a meeting of a Fellow group, in which mostly Fellows attend - at one of the affinity groups.

Alumni: There should be a systemic way in which Fellows can be supported. All the Fellows chatted, and **we had folks going through terrible experiences, and none of us knew the proper channel to talk about it./**



In surveys, Fellows and Alumni listed the social spaces where they felt most supported in talking about race and those where they were most likely to talk about race. Figure 7 maps these social spaces, which generally overlapped. Peers and regional coordinators (RCs) were most likely to provide supportive spaces and to have conversations about race.

Figure 7. Social Spaces for Talking about Race Cited by Fellows and Alumni



While RCs provided an important resource for Fellows to talk about race, both Fellows and Staff raised concerns that BI&POC RCs may be carrying a heavier labor load compared to White RCs. One Staff member also seemed to suggest that more formal structures and processes focused on addressing racial inequities may help to relieve some of this pressure for BI&POC RCs.

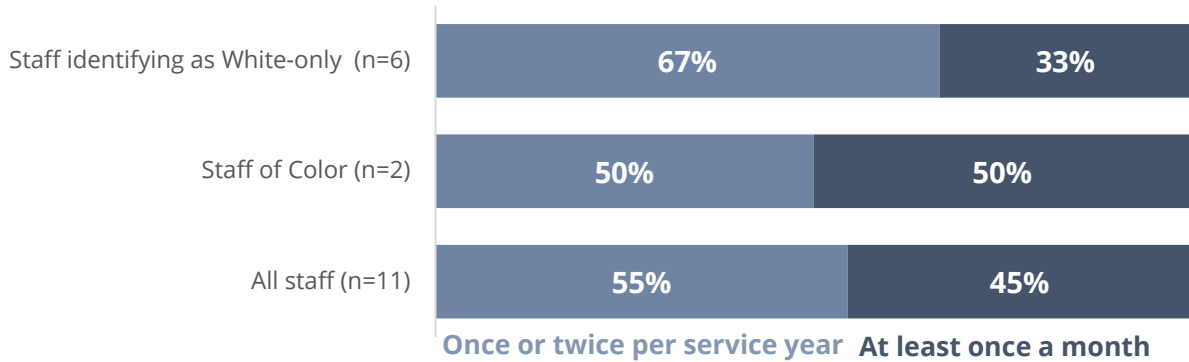
Fellow: One thing I think about is how much I rely on my Regional Coordinator, and she is a woman of color. If I didn't have her, I might not know who to turn to at CivicSpark, someone I could rely on. And, **I just wonder, should luck of the draw factor into how much a Fellow of color has resources and folks they can talk to?...** I worry sometimes, I'm like she has a million things to be doing. She has a full-time job. I don't want to just call her every time racism happens because I'd be on the phone all day.

Staff: So, I think that Fellows will often times be asking for resources/languages/tools. And, as someone who is also a POC, Fellows come to me personally...to talk through issues that are going on that might be affecting them and impacting their professional life as well. In that sense, I think there's sort of that element of, like, 'if you need support, we're here', but there's not necessarily something that's done before that.



Survey data also suggest inequities across Staff members in terms of the frequency with which they had race-focused conversations with Fellows. As shown in Figure 8, BI&POC Staff reported such conversations more frequently than White Staff. As 45 percent of surveyed Staff disagreed that they felt “equipped to talk about race issues with Fellows,” additional Staff training in this area may help to empower all Staff members to engage in race-related conversations more frequently.

Figure 8. Staff Reported Frequency of Talking about Race with Fellows



In addition to informal conversations with peers and RCs, peer-facilitated affinity spaces, such as the Equity Team, the POC Caucus, and the White Ally and/or Whiteness and Anti-racism Caucus (WA Caucus), provided Fellows with valuable spaces for discussing racial equity and processing racialized interactions. These affinity spaces were specifically mentioned in focus group conversations (see excerpt below), but were less noted in surveys due, in part, to distinct participation patterns across race. For example, only 27 percent of BI&POC respondents reported participation in the WA Caucus, and no respondents identifying as White-only reported participation in the POC Caucus.

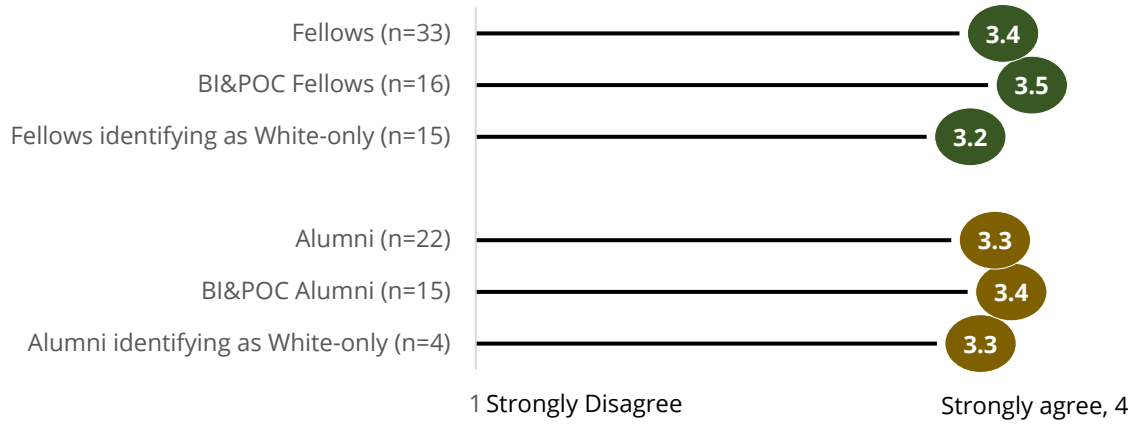


Fellow: [When the POC caucus met, we] talked about these different microaggressions or experiences that have happened to us. It was more just, like, **sharing our different experiences and knowing that there are other Fellows also out there who experience some uncomfortable situations.** Because it is not necessarily something I would get into at, for example, our regional trainings... that’s not something I’m going to share in the five minutes we have. So that space has been very helpful for me.



Indeed, 89 percent of Fellows and 83 percent of Alumni participated in at least one of the three affinity groups, and most agreed that their participation was beneficial. Figure 9 (on the following page) outlines the average agreement scores by stakeholder group and racial identity. Higher scores among BI&POC Fellows suggest that these spaces may be particularly important for them given the relative “Whiteness” of CivicSpark described by focus group participants.

Figure 9. Average Agreement that Participation in Affinity Groups was Beneficial Among Fellows and Alumni, by Racial Identity



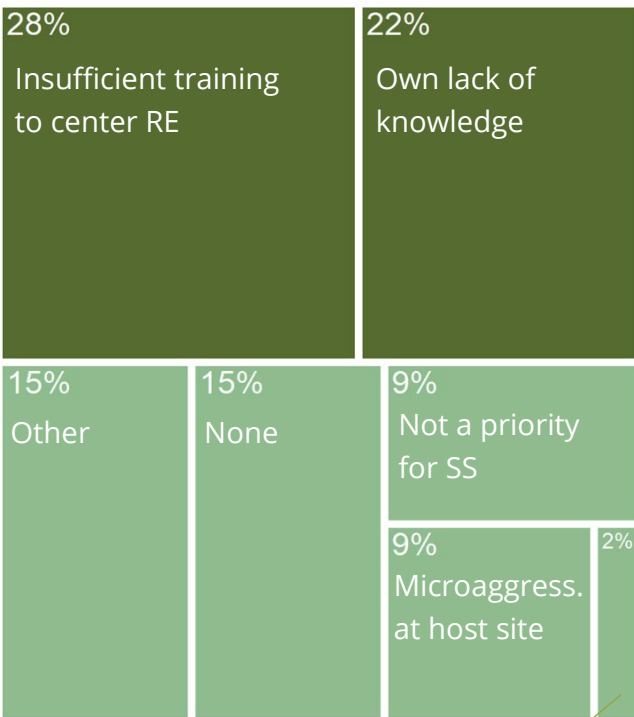
Fellow Challenges



Fellows and Alumni indicated that **insufficient training and knowledge** made it difficult to promote racial equity in their service work, while Alumni highlighted insufficient training and **microaggressions at host sites** as key challenges (see Figure 10).

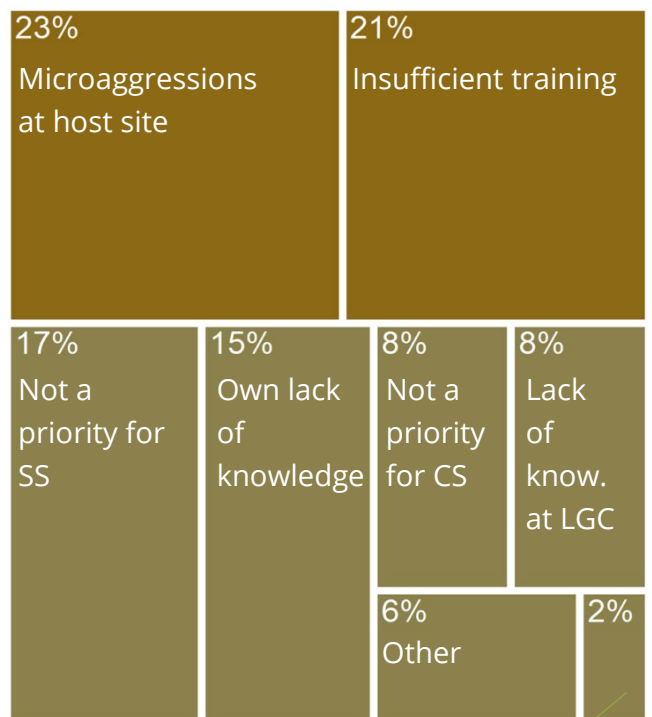
Figure 10. Fellow and Alumni Challenges to Advancing Racial Equity in their Work

Fellows (n=54)



Microaggressions at CS (2%)

Alumni (n=48)



Microaggressions at CS



In focus groups, Fellows elaborated on the additional challenges that they faced in promoting racial equity in their service work. In some cases, they reiterated a desire for more knowledge and training, especially in navigating strained relationships between government workers and community members.

Fellow: People don't want to talk to us because we work for the county ...given **cultural and racial barriers presented at project sites**, there may be a methodology or procedure we could be equipped with so we know how to have these conversations and have the right tools, especially with tribal engagement. There could be an opportunity for something like that. It could be like, **'if you come across these situations, here are your options, how to be eloquent and be racially sensitive'** and help your project Partners be racially sensitive.

In other cases, Fellows described specific dynamics at their host sites as limiting their ability to promote racial equity. As illustrated in the excerpt below, a few explained that the narrowly defined scope of their role and project left them feeling like they had little opportunity to enact meaningful change.

Fellow: I feel like a lot of times, I have a very specific task, and they want me to implement it. And they know exactly how they want it to be implemented...I have all these peers in the cohort that are **talking about what we want the future to look like and how we can make change happen**, and then **my day-to-day work is to enter numbers into a spreadsheet**.

Other participants were keenly aware of the power imbalance between Fellows and Site Supervisors, and they cited this imbalance as making it difficult to bring up racial equity issues.

Fellow: There was one situation where I came into a meeting and folks were kind of joking about how to do littering, and they were like 'oh we could taser people when they litter' and that was like really, really, kind of terrifying to me that they were like, 'oh we're just going to institute a police state so people don't litter in the parks'. So just little things, not little things, huge things like that, **where I also feel there is a power dynamic, where I, as an 11-month Fellow who just came in, like, I don't know how I address things like that**.

Fellow Empowerment



As shown in Figure 11, the last two CivicSpark cohorts (2019-2020 & 2020-21) generally agreed that they felt empowered to advance racial equity in their service work. The average agreement scores in these cohorts fell between somewhat (3) and strongly agree (4), whereas earlier cohorts fell between somewhat disagree (2) and somewhat agree (3).

83%






of current Fellows agreed that they felt empowered to advance racial equity

Figure 11. Empowerment to Advance Racial Equity in Service Work, Average Agreement by Cohort



Fellows and Alumni indicated what would help them to feel more empowered to advance racial equity in their work. The top five selections from the survey are shown below in Figure 12. The top selection was **more information and training**. As outlined in Section 3, current Fellows were relatively satisfied with CivicSpark’s trainings. At the same time, both Fellows and Alumni highlighted gaps in training and knowledge as some of the biggest challenges they faced in promoting racial equity in their work. In part, this reflects an interest in **training materials that are more specifically applicable to the challenges they face in their day-to-day work**, such as navigating racially charged situations at their host sites, initiating racial equity conversations in sites where it is not a priority, and developing trust between local government agencies and the communities they serve. The second most cited selection was increased confidence in leadership buy-in at host sites.

Figure 12. Top 5 Selections to Empower Fellows to Advance Racial Equity Based on Percent of Total Responses from Fellows and Alumni

	Percent of Fellow Selections (total selections=70)	Percent of Alumni Selections (total selections=56)
 More information and training	25%	21%
 Confidence in leadership buy-in at host site	20%	20%
 More time	16%	14%
 Equity requirements for project updates	16%	18%
 Site Supervisor Support	13%	16%

**Survey respondents were asked to select only two, although some selected more than two*

Fellows, and especially Alumni, also provided recommendations for empowering Fellows in open-ended survey responses.

Fellow: Focus racial equity discussions and tools on how they can be applied directly to Fellow’s projects.

Alumni: Bi-weekly check-ins should have this question or similar questions to this. As a Fellow, sometimes that is something I wished I was asked.

Alumni: Reiterate to Site Supervisors that racial equity elements need to be a priority in service projects. It was exhausting needing to convince people why racial equity work is important.

Alumni: Address issues, including the reality that Fellows of color feel alone, are treated differently (directly or implicitly) by other Staff and at project sites, may have lived experiences that other Fellows/CS/LGC Staff seek to address, etc.

Alumni: CS/LGC leadership needs to improve messaging around racial equity to encourage those conversations across all levels of Staff and Fellows, and all Staff need to hear from the top the persisting issues of racism in the government workforce and the sustainability/ climate field.



In Fellow focus group conversations, the idea of an **Alumni of Color mentorship program** was discussed as another way to support Fellows. Alumni felt this would be supportive to Fellows but emphasized the need to **compensate Alumni for their time**.

Fellow: It just feels like access to opportunities could be fostered more specifically with Fellows of color, maybe a group of mentors who would be willing to provide support to fellows or even **an alumni network that was specifically for Fellows of color**.

Alumni: I tried supporting in an Alumni role. For me, I feel like I've always had a passion for equity work, and it was noticeable from all CivicSpark Staff. And because of the passion of that work, it made it more exploitative because [they think], 'he's really good at it – if we can get it for free, why pay for it?' Just because you have passion, doesn't mean you should do it for free. You're exploiting them. **Pay for the labor from Alumni folks. They have a lot of knowledge and resources to share, but you don't get free consultant work.** You shouldn't get support from Alumni when they also have things to do. I was so excited to support the next generation and wanted to pass the baton of the EJ [Environmental Justice] work, but it was exhausting, and I was burning myself out because of my own passion. So, there's going to be a lot of folks who are passionate, but don't burden folks or add to burn out. One way to help that is to come in with extra money and pay for that. **Don't exploit their labor.**

Several Fellows also requested a method and space to **anonymously share questions and comments** around racial equity in meetings and during trainings.

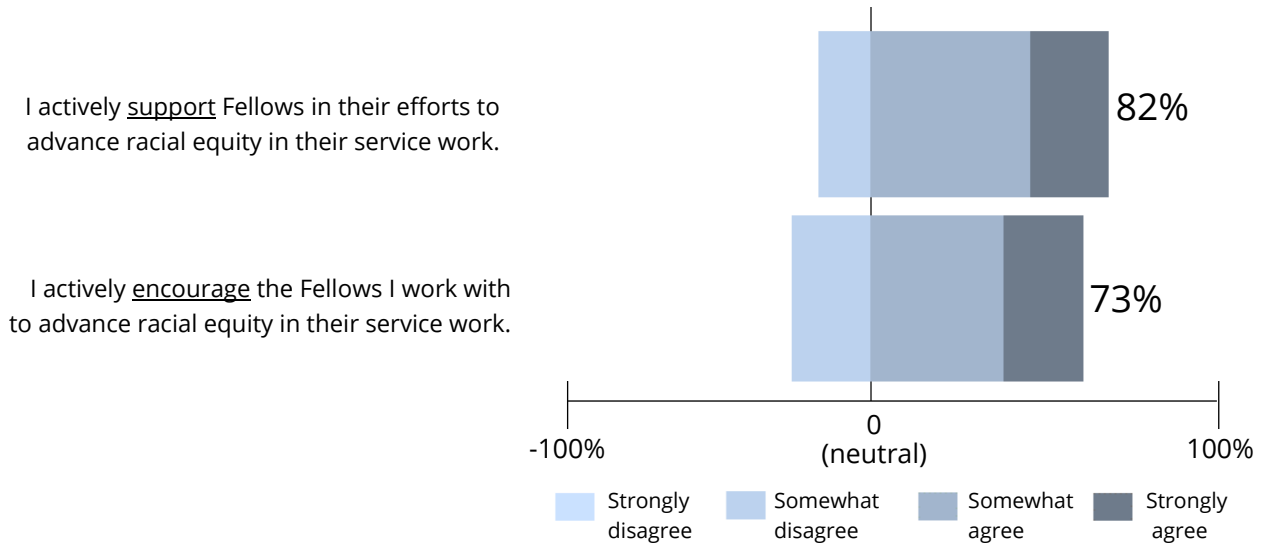
Fellow: But something that has been really helpful for the mayor's office is we had our own sexual harassment training, and it was live on WebX with an external leader. So, there was a portion where people could send in questions they had, and it was fully anonymous and everyone could hear it. So, one staff member sent in something like, 'I don't like it when people address the group like, 'hey ladies.' So, **it was a way for someone to express how they were feeling without being identified, and we could have a conversation about it with a mediator.**

Staff Perceptions of Fellow Support



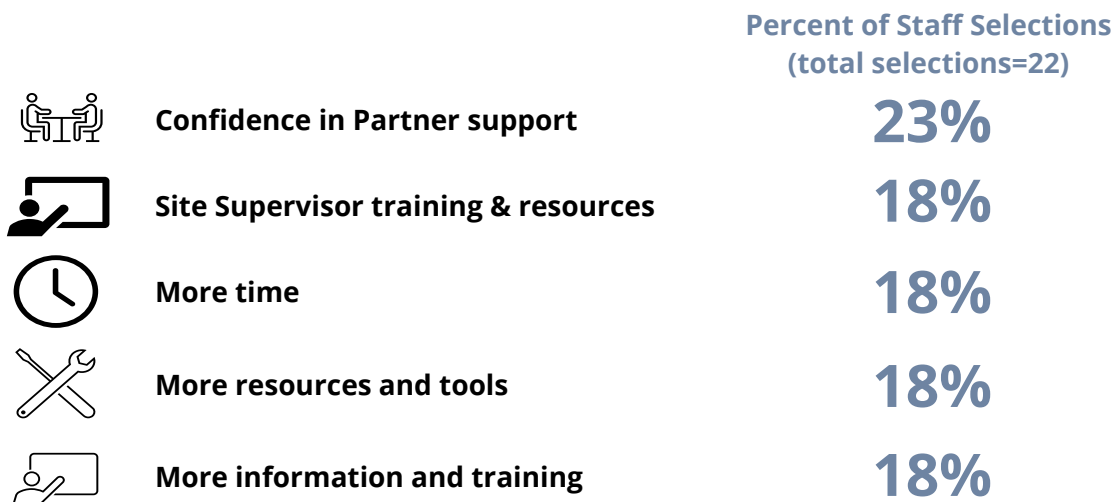
In surveys, Staff were asked about the extent to which they supported and encouraged Fellows to advance racial equity within their service work, and their responses are shown in Figure 13 on the following page. Overall, these assessments were relatively high, although reports of **support** (82 percent somewhat or strongly agreed) were greater than those of **encouragement** (73 percent somewhat or strongly agreed), potentially suggesting a more passive approach.

Figure 13. Average Staff Agreement Regarding their Support and Encouragement of Fellow Efforts to Advance Racial Equity



Surveyed Staff indicated what would help them to feel better equipped to support racial equity in Fellow's service work, and their top five recommendations are outlined in Figure 14. Similar to Fellows and Alumni (see Figure 12), Staff viewed greater **confidence in Partners' buy-in** as important in supporting their efforts to promote racial equity in project work.

Figure 14. Top 5 Selections to Equip Staff to Support Fellows to Advance Racial Equity



**Survey respondents were asked to select only two, although some selected more than two*

In opened-ended survey questions, Staff elaborated on what was needed to help them support Fellows in promoting racial equity. Responses focused on internal supports at CivicSpark and supports for Partner relationships.

At CivicSpark

- more discussions and data about racial equity and justice
- greater support from the Board
- mandatory racial justice workshops for Fellows

In Partner Relationships

- recruiting equity focused Partners
- dedicated spaces for discussing racial equity with Partners
- communication of the importance of racial equity to Partners

Staff: I think there could be more discussion of how to have confidence in these [conversations]

Staff: Secure outside funding to reduce barriers to participation by equity focused Partners, and/or allow the program to be more directed in what they ask from Partners

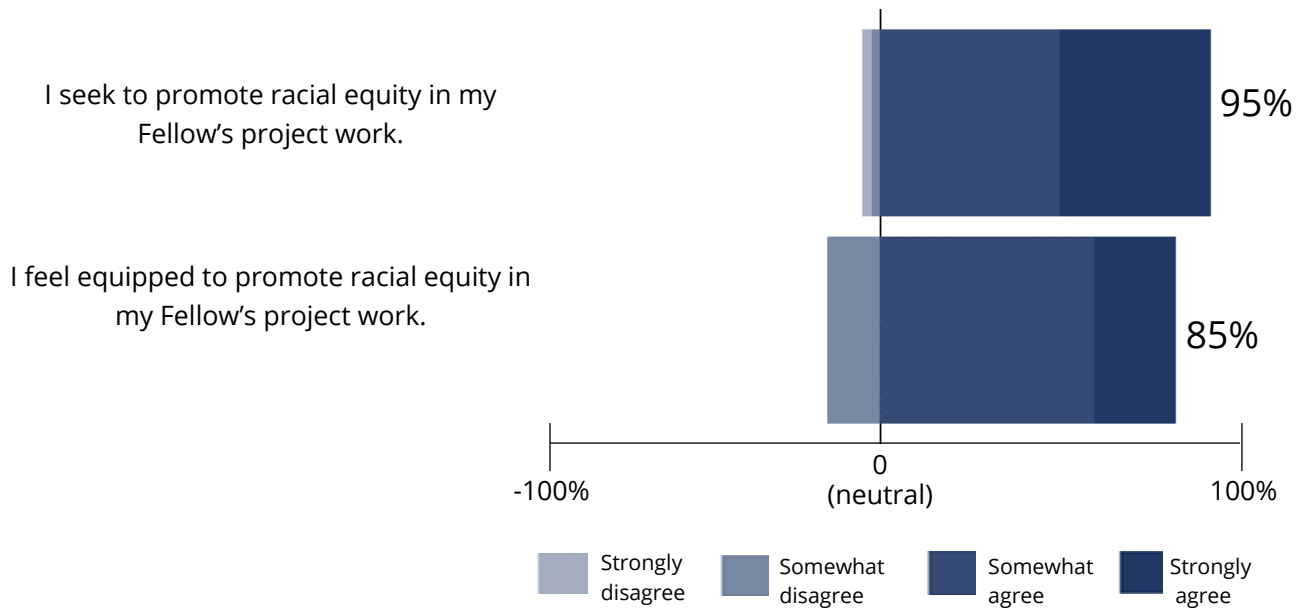
Staff: Be more active in language used with Partners to provide more resources to them as well as providing Staff language to have those conversations

Partner Perceptions of Fellow Support



Partner self-assessments (Figure 15) regarding the extent to which they sought to promote – and felt equipped to promote—racial equity in Fellow’s work were generally on par with those of Staff (Figure 13 above). Among Partners, 95 percent somewhat or strongly agreed that they promoted racial equity in Fellows’ project work, while 85 percent somewhat or strongly agreed that they felt equipped to do so. Indeed, **Partners rated themselves slightly higher than did Staff**, reflecting either differing self-perceptions or actual differences. The **gap between seeking and feeling equipped to promote racial equity** suggest room for capacity building.

Figure 15. Average Partner Agreement Regarding the Promotion of Racial Equity in Fellow's Project Work



Section 5 Fellow Recruitment and Hiring

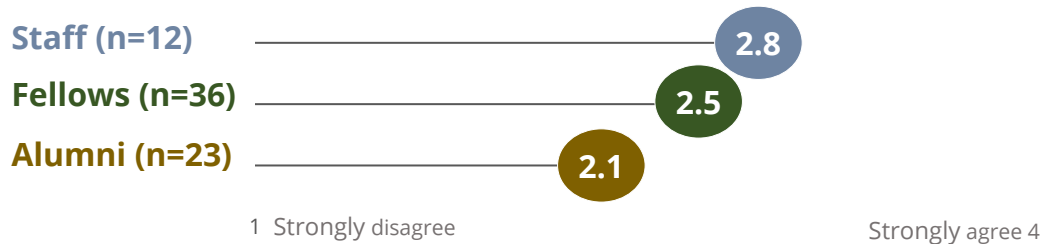
Internal stakeholders identified Fellow recruitment and hiring as one area where CivicSpark could improve its racial equity efforts. They recognized gaps in racial representation within Fellow cohorts and noted areas for improvement within recruiting outreach strategies and tactics, interview processes, and selection criteria. All stakeholders also highlighted how the low Fellow stipend impeded efforts to improve racial diversity within the program.

Diversity in Recruitment



When rating their agreement that CivicSpark recruiting efforts reached a diverse pool of candidates, all internal stakeholder groups indicated an average score below the somewhat agree level (represented by a score of 3). As shown in Figure 16, Staff ratings were higher than those of Fellows and Alumni.

Figure 16. Average Agreement that CivicSpark Reaches a Diverse Pool of Candidates, by Internal Stakeholder Group



In focus groups, Fellows **questioned whether CivicSpark effectively reached a diverse pool of candidates**. They expressed concern that current recruitment strategies prioritized more privileged groups and overlooked important skills and experience, with Staff noting some recent changes in thinking around selection criteria.

Fellow: I just graduated from one of the Claremont colleges [private, 4-year colleges], and there are tons of CivicSpark Fellows who are always from the Claremont colleges... **I'm just worried that the cycle is just continuing, and we're just drawing from the same institutions, and there just needs to be more outreach.** As much as I love knowing five Fellows on this year's cohort, we all come from – well, obviously intersectional identities – but our educational background and our socio-economic statuses, they are similar.

Staff: [We've] thought a lot about what qualifications or experience we look for in Fellows... Before, we looked for folks that had environmental science degrees and internships ... My thought is, okay, they could get an entry-level job probably in a local government agency, and should we reserve CivicSpark for folks that could really use the steppingstone aspect of the program, and get experience, and **make that entry into this career sector more equitable by taking in folks with less experience?** That way, they can get caught up to their peers that

are able to do unpaid internships, whereas **maybe they had to work and get paid and get money to support their families and weren't able to have free time to do an internship program like that.**

All stakeholder groups identified the **Fellow stipend as a source of inequity**, stressing that it could be a barrier or deterrent to applying to CivicSpark.

Staff: People of color are more than proportionally lower income and therefore might have student loans to pay or need to be making greater income, and therefore **can't survive on CivicSpark stipend for a year.** They can't give up that one year of earnable income professional years.

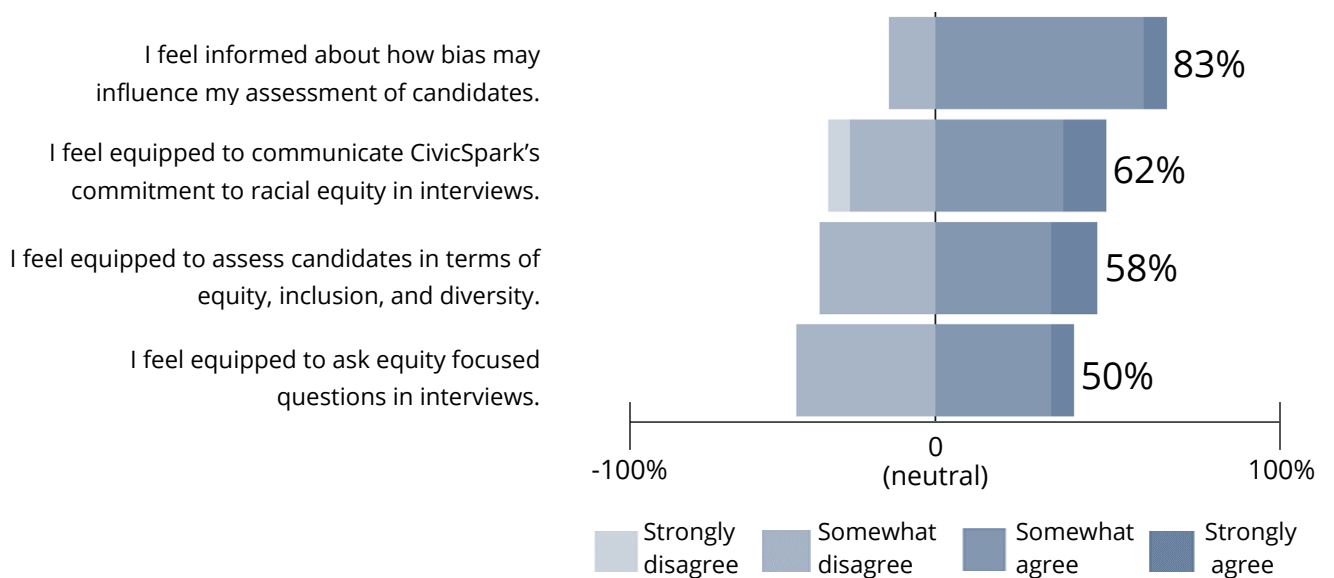
Fellow: I actually work with an intern team right now at my project site, and there are a couple of interns applying to CivicSpark this year. The only one who has hesitated...and who feels like she can't handle it is a person of color from a low-income background. **[She] has told me she has to support her family as well [and] she can't survive off of this.**

Interview Bias



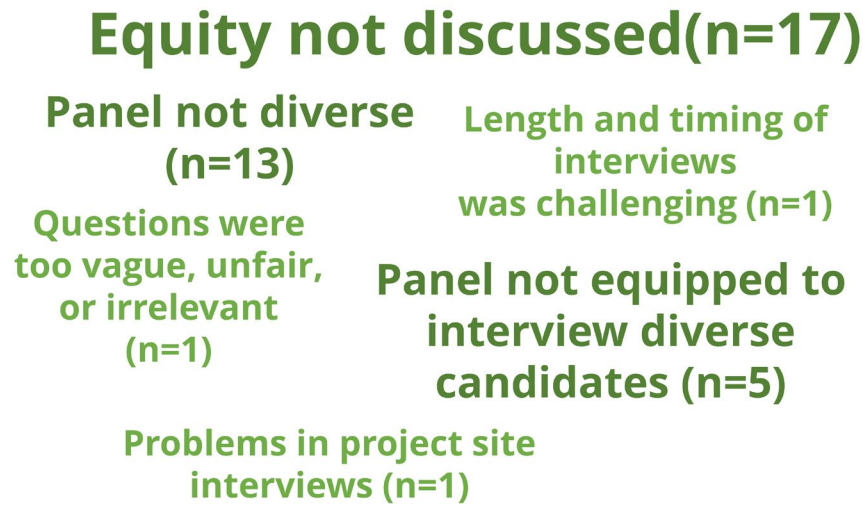
As shown in Figure 17, the majority of Staff members felt informed about how bias could influence their assessments of candidates. They felt **less equipped to promote racial equity** in other parts of the interview and selection process, including **communicating CivicSpark's commitment** to racial equity, **assessing candidates** in terms of equity, inclusion, and diversity, and **asking equity focused questions**.

Figure 17. Staff Confidence in Promoting Racial Equity in Fellow Interview and Selection Processes (n=12)



Fellows and Alumni highlighted biases they observed from their side of the CivicSpark interview process, including equity not being discussed and the panel lacking racial diversity (see Figure 18 on the following page). They also commented on what would have helped them perform better in interviews (see excerpts on the following page).

Figure 18. Word Cloud of Noted Areas of Interview Bias as Indicated by Fellows and Alumni



I would have done better in my interview if...

Fellow: I saw myself represented in the interview panel.

Fellow: We were given more tools and background on how the interviews were going to be conducted and what to expect.

Alumni: I was aware of and had access at the time to discuss CivicSpark with a previous Fellow prior to the interview.

Alumni: The interviewer had stated in the opening that CivicSpark has a commitment to equity and is seeking a cohort that reflects the composition of the population we serve (California).

Recruitment and Hiring Recommendations



Drawing from a given list within surveys, internal stakeholders indicated their top recommendations for increasing the representation of BI&POC Fellows (see Figure 19). The top recommendation among Fellows and Alumni was to increase Fellow compensation, and Fellows commented further on the need for better compensation in opened-ended survey responses (excerpts below).

The top recommendation for improving racial diversity among Fellows and Alumni was to **increase compensation**




Fellow: Please just stop paying us below minimum wage.

Fellow: Pay Fellows a living wage. BIPOC are statistically more likely to live in a lower-income household.

Fellow: Compensation - would not say "adjust," would say "dramatically increase."

Fellow: The pay and education requirement are the greatest barriers for BIPOC communities...come on.

Figure 19. Top Three Recommendations for Improving Racial Diversity Based on Percent of Total Responses by Internal Stakeholder Group

	Percent of Fellow and Alumni Selections (Total selections=151)	Percent of Staff Selections (Total selections=24)
 Adjust compensation scale	28%	25%
 Increase diversity of outreach networks	19%	33%
 More actively encourage members of BI&POC communities to apply	10%	17%

**Survey respondents were asked to select only two, although some selected more than*



Focus group participants further emphasized the need for better Fellow compensation, noting that they were hesitant to refer others, particularly Fellows of color, to the program without such improvements.

Fellow: I personally don't think I would feel comfortable promoting a new initiative to try and bring in... more Fellows of color or Fellows that came from backgrounds that didn't have as much wealth, recruiting them into a program that wasn't going to pay. I just don't feel good about that... I think it really does come down to pay, and that is kind of a dealbreaker in my mind. **If there isn't a way to make pay equitable...I think that is going to be a foundational flaw in the program if we want to make the program look different** going forward.

If the Fellow stipend cannot be increased, focus group participants suggested the following:

<p>Provide scholarships or make funds available for Fellows needing extra support</p>			<p>Cut overall hours or increase hour flexibility so Fellows can balance other jobs, needed to support themselves</p>
<p>End the Fellowship two months earlier (in May) to allow Fellows to apply for other summer opportunities</p>			<p>Seek out other funding for the program that can facilitate higher stipends</p>

Other recommendations for improving racial equity within CivicSpark's recruitment and hiring processes that emerged from focus group conversations included:

- **Conducting name and school blind hiring** to prevent bias against ethnic sounding names or bias for/against specific institutions
- **Removing staff ranking numbers and notes** before sending candidate information to partners
- **Giving candidates interview questions prior to the interview** to support those that may have limited interview experience
- **Changing the language of job postings** to broaden the range of relevant skills and experience required
- **Dropping degree requirements** to expand the candidate pool to include folks with high school degrees
- **Increasing social media presence** to expand outreach for recruiting
- **Reaching out to specific campus affinity groups**, such as Chicano or Black student groups
- **Providing greater support to Partners** during the interview process

Alumni: [The university] shouldn't matter, it should be the **commitment to service** and **commitment to serving underserved communities**...I think that is truly what helps Fellows excel in the program

Section 6 Partnerships

Internal stakeholders identified Partner relationships as an area where CivicSpark could improve its racial equity efforts. The data revealed significant variation across Partners in their views and actions toward promoting racial equity. While many surveyed Partners described progressive racial climates at their organizations and rated their knowledge of racial equity concepts relatively high, they also acknowledged challenges in implementing racial equity in Fellows’ service work. Additionally, as noted in Section 4, Fellows, Alumni, and Staff described the culture at some host sites as being less attentive, and in some cases, counterproductive to advancing racial equity. Nevertheless, most surveyed Partners saw CivicSpark as a partner in promoting racial equity, and in both surveys and focus groups, they expressed interest in CivicSpark-led capacity building and greater accountability in this area.

Racial Climate at Partner Organizations

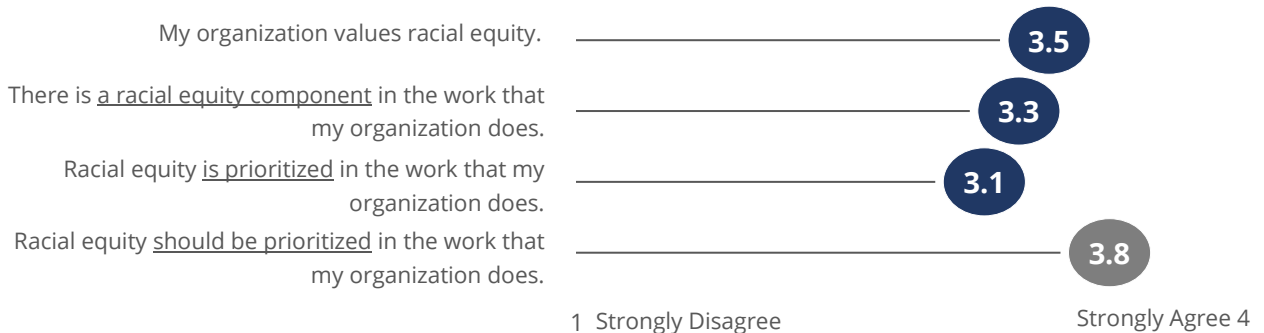


Surveyed Partners rated their level of agreement with statements about the racial culture and climate at their organizations. On average, Partners **agreed that their organizations valued racial equity** (see Figure 20), and the vast majority said that racial equity should be a priority at their organizations.

88%

of Partners strongly agreed: “Racial equity should be prioritized in the work that my organization does”

Figure 20. Partner Self-Assessment Scores on Racial Climate Indicators (n=40)



In focus groups, Partners approached the discussion of racial equity within their organizations in **distinct and diverse ways**. Some Partners focused on the **racial composition** of their offices as a primary indicator of equity, while others discussed the implementation of **comprehensive racial equity plans** and others still described **leadership-led initiatives to center racial equity in every aspect of decision making**.

Partner: We now have board adopted **JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion) guidelines in five categories of work**, and we have a work plan based on that. And that’s what the JEDI committees and subcommittees focus on... So I would say that the **diversity and inclusion work has been important to our agency**.

Partner: We had a change in leadership two years ago, and the new **Executive Director came in and said ‘equity is what we lead with and needs to be embedded in literally everything we do, internally and externally.’** Obviously, delivering on the vision takes a fair amount of time to get there, so I think **it’s been really beneficial to have someone at the top pushing that initiative**

Several Partners also shared that a commitment to racial equity had been a much stronger focus recently, fueled in part by the Black Lives Matter movement.

Partner: We passed a racial equity resolution last July, partially as a result of the murder of George Floyd. Using that resolution as a focus point, we are evaluating our work internally. We just held a series of equity focus groups, working to **try to define equity for the agency and how that translates into our work.**

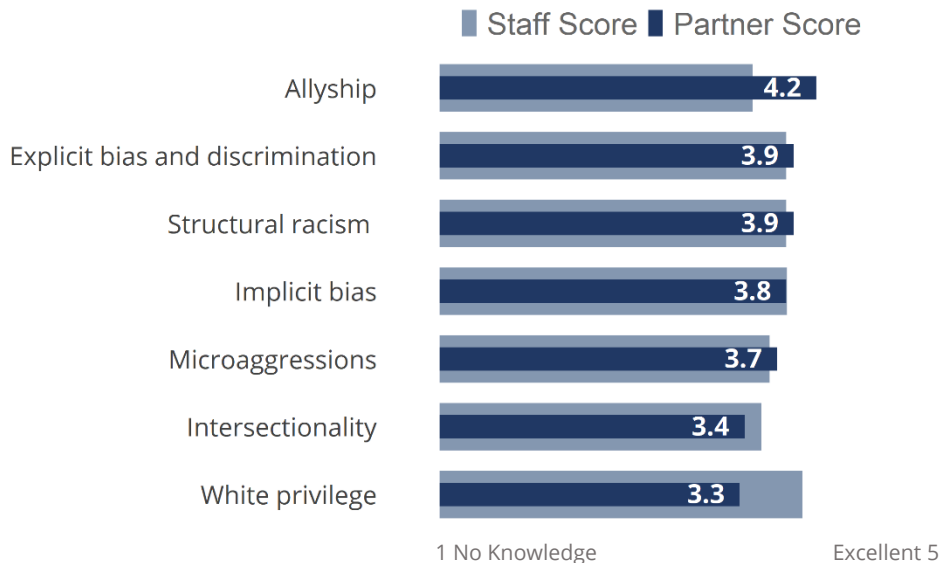
Partner: We had big Black Lives Matter protests for several weeks that culminated in the occupation of a highway, and substantial tear gas, and police brutality incidents that shook a lot of people up; and it really reinvigorated a lot of dormant voices. **I think it made a lot of leadership reflect on the systems we’ve created in this guise and how they were not only perpetuating but perhaps exacerbating racial inequity.!**

Partner Knowledge



As with Staff (see Figure 5 in Section 3), surveyed Partners assessed their knowledge of key racial equity concepts on a scale ranging from 1 to 5 (1=No knowledge and 5=Excellent). Their average ratings are shown in comparison to Staff ratings in Figure 21 below. Similar to Staff, Partners **rated their knowledge of most racial equity concepts between fair (3) and good (4).** However, there were **different areas of strength and weakness across the two stakeholders.** While Partners were confident in their knowledge of allyship, this was not an area of strong knowledge cited by Staff. In contrast, Staff indicated confidence in their knowledge of White privilege, whereas Partners were least confident around this concept. These differences suggest potential areas of knowledge-sharing.

Figure 21. Partner Versus Staff Self-assessments of Knowledge on Key Racial Equity Concepts





In focus groups, many Partners articulated an **awareness of the historical context of racial inequity** in both local government work and in environmental work, and they highlighted how that history contributed to enduring racism today.

Partner: Even personally, I have a Master's in City and Regional Planning, and really reflecting on that. Not only are there some components of that discipline's history that have been complicit in racism, but perhaps the majority history of city planning is around racist outcomes and continues to be today in many communities. **So really thinking about how we take the power we've been able to obtain in these positions in government and make space to address those harms.**

Despite this awareness and their relative knowledgeability regarding racial equity concepts, Partners said they **struggled with how to implement racial equity initiatives in practice**. Specifically, they described a **lack of knowledge regarding how to communicate racial equity needs to their partners and stakeholders** and how to manage a racially diverse workforce.

Partner: The big picture problem is a lot of people think, when we're talking about racial equity, what we're saying is like, 'you finally come to terms that there are racist people doing mean stuff, and we should find them and change what they're up to.' What's tragic and impossible about our country is you learn that federal tax policy has racist outcomes, incarceration rates, redlining, zoning – almost everything we can do has been used by local governments over the past 250 years to further White supremacy or certain anti-Black initiatives. So, when we review certain parks and rec[reation] elements, and we comment, 'where is the equity component?', and **they say, 'oh no, this is a parks plan. This isn't your thing. This is the parks piece.'** So, helping people to have that imagination to understand how...they have power to resolve these things that cause our community members to hurt and cause us collectively to be a less vibrant and thriving place than we could be. **It's a big challenge because we don't always have the expertise in other professions to help them get there.**

Partners: Here is a little example of this. He [the Fellow] gave a presentation to our Board. He did a great job...he got a lot of positive feedback from staff who sent emails around, and I even struggled with that. Like okay, are we telling a young Black man, 'oh that was so articulate'? We did not use that word. I'm just being completely honest with my feelings as a manager and how to navigate this. **...I don't want anything I do or say to be viewed as a microaggression.** I want it to be taken at face value with good intent. But it's just...hard. I think it has been great. Check-ins have been good. **I'm just hopeful that I'm not totally messing up.**

In addition to the implementation knowledge gaps identified by Partners themselves, Staff observed, from their perspective, how some Partners **struggled with initiating racial equity initiatives when their organizations were seen as not directly serving communities of color.**

Staff: I think **Partners struggle implementing racial equity** in Fellow service work if the populations that they serve are not racially diverse, and I know that there is always a place for racial equity to be part of everybody's work because it's structural... Especially working in some of the more rural areas of California -- in some of the whitest areas of California -- that has definitely been key because people, for all their well-meaning, people think, 'Well I don't see racism in front of me, so it doesn't necessarily impact the work I do. So, it doesn't need to be part of my toolbox.' And whatever we can do, whatever our Fellows can do, whatever we can help our Fellows do to break that down, I think that would be highly valuable.



To address knowledge gaps internally, many Partner organizations conducted racial equity trainings. Indeed, 45 percent of surveyed Partners said their organization had offered racial equity trainings within the last 12 months. The topics of these trainings are reflected in the word cloud in Figure 22, with more common trainings shown in larger text. Partners explained that these trainings could be facilitated in various formats, including one-session workshops, multiple-session series, facilitated conversations, book clubs and the "21-Day Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge." They also spoke about the value of resources from the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) and the Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN).

45%
of Partners said that their organization had offered racial-equity trainings within the last 12 months

Figure 22. Topics Covered in Partner Trainings



Partner Challenges

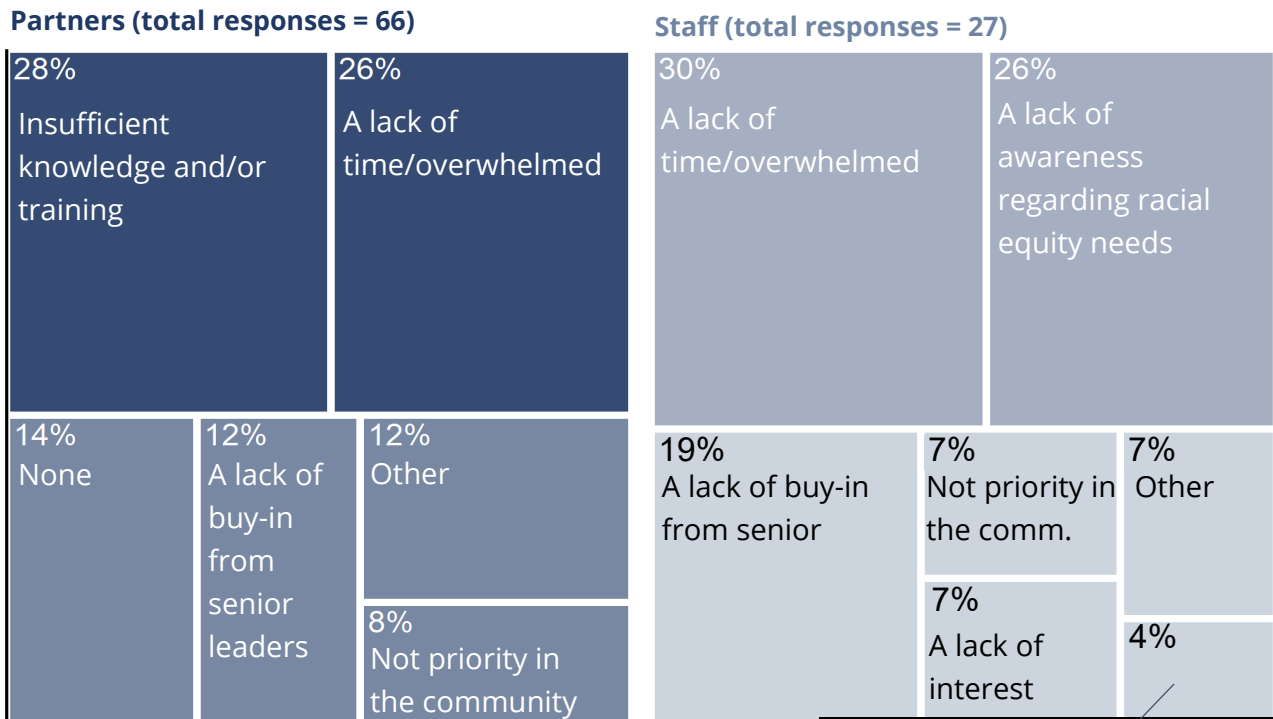


In surveys, both Partners and CivicSpark Staff were asked about the greatest challenges Partners faced in promoting racial equity in their work. Both sets of responses are outlined in Figure 23 on the following page. Partners most frequently cited a **lack of knowledge and**

training, of time, and of senior buy-in as challenges to promoting racial equity. Staff perceptions of Partners' challenges overlapped with those listed by Partners, although Staff also noted a **lack of awareness of racial equity needs** as a challenge. Responses from those who marked "other" highlighted challenges involving insufficient funding, stakeholder resistance, a lack of meaningful community connections, and difficulties in identifying specific ways of promoting racial equity.

Additionally, Partners and Staff identified the **most challenging stages of the CivicSpark partnership for advancing racial equity**. Both groups identified the **application and scope development stage** and the **project implementation stage** as the most challenging.

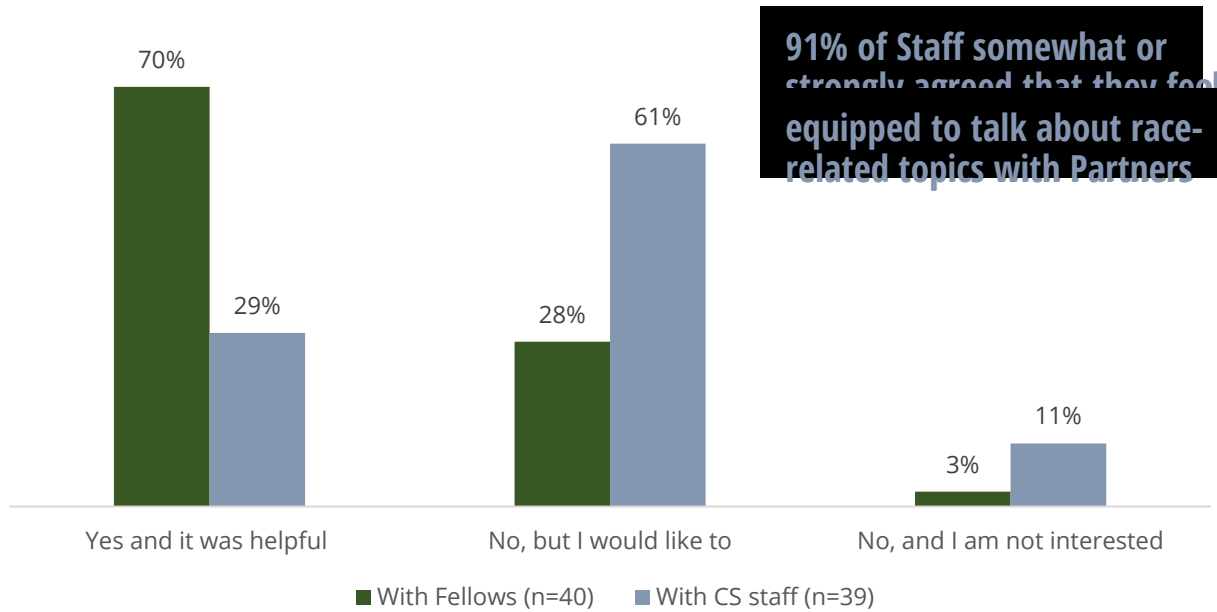
Figure 23. Partner Challenges as Cited by Partners and by CS Staff



These challenges were echoed in focus group conversations, where Partners also expressed concerns about how to **integrate, and perhaps balance, racial equity initiatives with their project work.**

Partner: [Staff] all bring their interests with them to this [racial equity] effort and have different ideas. Lots of things they want to see changed. I'm in management. It's, like, let's pick a few things and do them really well instead of trying to do everything. Plus, we do have some responsibility to run the agencies and get grants out. We can't spend all our time on it. **We're trying to improve coastal access, restoration, and climate adaptation and having a racial equity lens across that is important. But, we can't spend all our time doing implicit bias training and working on racial equity action plans -- it's a part of it.** Some of the staff will be aghast to hear me say that sort of thing. And others would have the same perspective.

Figure 25. Percentage of Partners Reporting Conversations about Racial Equity with CivicSpark Fellows and Staff



**Survey respondents were given the option of “Yes, but it was not helpful,” and no respondents selected this option.*

When asked whether they viewed CivicSpark as a partner in promoting racial equity, 95 percent of surveyed Partners agreed. Another 85 percent of Partners said they were interested in receiving racial equity resources from CivicSpark, and 74 percent said they would be interested in CivicSpark-led racial equity trainings.

95%

of Partners said they view CivicSpark as a partner in promoting racial equity

85%

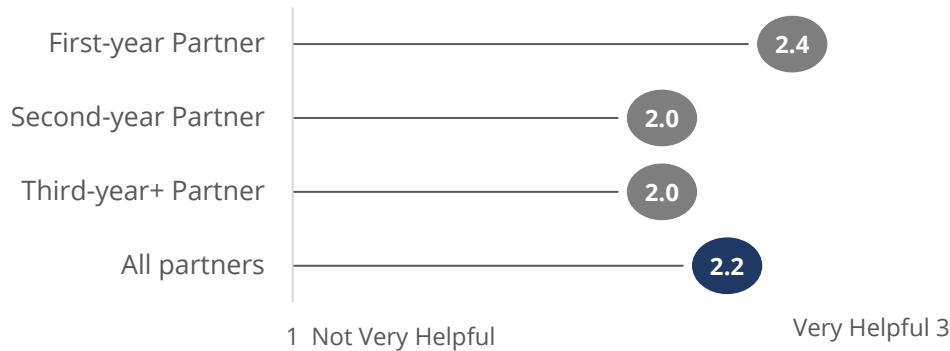
of Partners expressed interest in receiving racial equity resources from CivicSpark

74%

of Partners expressed interest in receiving racial equity training from CivicSpark

About a quarter (25%) of Partners surveyed reported that they had previously received racial equity resources from CivicSpark. They rated the helpfulness of those resources on a scale from 1 to 3 (1 = Not very helpful and 3 = Very helpful). The average helpfulness score of 2.2, among all Partners, suggests that CivicSpark-provided resources were valued (see Figure 26). The elevated score among first-year Partners (2.4) suggests that such resources may be particularly helpful in the early stages of partnership.

Figure 26. Partner Assessments of Racial Equity Resources Provided by CivicSpark



Recommendations for Improving Racial Equity in Partnerships



Stakeholders were asked in both surveys and focus groups to provide recommendations for improving racial equity in CivicSpark’s relationships with Partners. Recommendations provided through opened-ended survey questions are listed in Figure 27 below. Of note, recommendations from different stakeholder groups overlapped in regard to **increasing racial equity resources/ training for Partners** and **adding an equity component into Partner applications and contracts**. Partners further requested that they be assigned **Fellows who had an interest, knowledge, and relevant capacity for promoting racial equity** and that racial equity be integrated into the scope development process.

Figure 27. Potential Areas of Future Supports for Partners in Promoting Racial Equity As listed by Partners, Staff, and Fellows/Alumni

Desired Supports Among Partners

- Increased RE **knowledge and capacity** among Fellows
- Equity component in **project scope** development process
- Equity component **in application**
- Equity component **in contract**
- Racial equity **resources and training**
- Fellows** who are **interested in racial equity**

Needed Partner Supports Perceived by Staff

- Equity component **pre-service capacity assessment**
- Racial equity **resources and training**
- Equity component **in contract**
- Equity requirement **in Fellow transition reports**

Needed partner Supports Perceived by Fellows/Alumni

- Clear and explicit **racial equity expectations**
- Equity component in **application**
- Racial equity **resources** and **(mandatory) training** for Partners
- Racial equity **resources** and **training** for Fellows
- More space for **RE discussions between CivicSpark and Partners**



In focus group conversations, Partners requested more **training about how to manage with racial equity in mind**, and they also requested that CivicSpark share **feedback from Fellows** regarding their experiences with racial equity throughout their project year.

Partner: I know CivicSpark hosts quarterly trainings, and one of them earlier on was on how to be a good manager to your Fellow and having really frank conversations like others have brought up, like how do you manage and think about race?...It's an area I want to grow, and I suspect a lot of people are looking for those opportunities. I know within the management training and subject-matter professional development I do, **no one has gone too deep into race, and so if there is an opportunity for the quarterly trainings to incorporate that – if I saw that, I'd work hard to make space on my calendar to attend.**

Partner: I think CivicSpark could be a liaison... If you have a group of Fellows, and you're asking them if there have been instances when race and equity ... was positive or negative... and you have a conversation and document the thoughts coming out. Then, in a quarterly training, you ask us our own questions but also **lifting up what was shared [by Fellows]**... That could be rich and a benefit for Fellows/supervisors, like a feedback loop around this issue.

Across stakeholder focus groups, a persistent theme was feeling that **CivicSpark should require more from Partners**, through mandatory trainings or the addition of an equity component to projects.

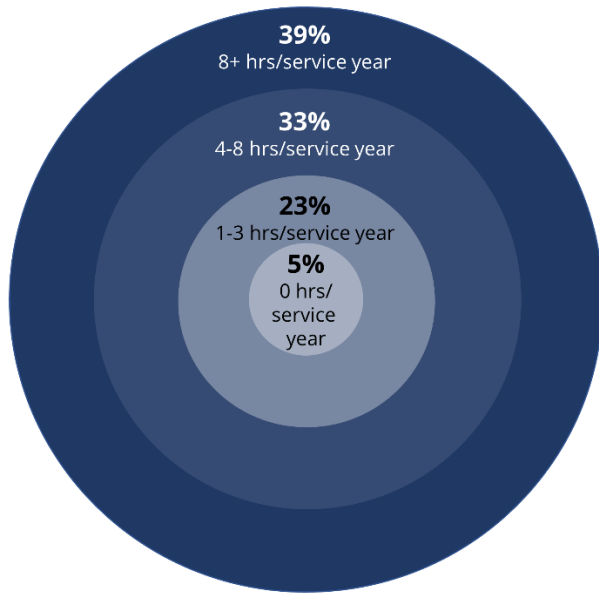
Partner: I think there is an opportunity for CivicSpark to ask more of recipients. My own perspective is the value we get from the Fellows is so great, and I think there are ways LGC and CivicSpark could require more of those agencies that get that opportunity. **If CivicSpark and LGC want to actively advance racial equity, I think there is an opportunity there to require a little more of the agencies that are doing it.** I guess I don't know if LGC feels same way – if they feel like they need a low barrier to entry? I do think there is an opportunity to require more.

Alumni: CivicSpark needs to assert themselves-- that it's **mandatory to have an equity component** and have these requirements. That's a way to protect Fellows from the get-go and support them on that front and continuously support them on that journey. **You can't solve the problem of racism at government agencies, but you can support Fellows as they go through these processes and systems that are constantly going against them.**

Staff: I would love to see LGC provide training on microaggressions and equity training to Partners... I feel like **we do so much training for the Fellows, but we don't do training for the Partners.**



Partners expressed **an openness to increased capacity building and requirements** regarding promoting racial equity. As noted in Figure 28, **39 percent of surveyed Partners said they were willing to devote 8+ hours each service year to building capacity related to promoting racial equity.** Only 5 percent said they were unwilling to devote any hours to capacity building in this area. In addition, only 8 percent (3 Partners) said that the addition of racial equity commitments within CivicSpark contracts would be a barrier to participation, with a majority (64%) saying they would not be a barrier and others (28%) indicating that they did not know.

Figure 28. Time Partners are Willing to Invest in Racial Equity Capacity Building

Only 8% of surveyed Partners said that the addition of racial equity commitments in CivicSpark contracts would be a barrier to participation



Alongside greater Partner requirements, internal stakeholders also proposed **increased vetting of Partners**. Specifically, they recommended considering the potential of not renewing contracts with Partners that failed to follow through on racial equity commitments or that created hostile work environments for Fellows.

Staff: I think the CivicSpark program and LGC as an organization need to decide what's important to us. And **it should be that we are creating a safe, equitable space for a diverse Fellow population, and, more broadly in LGC's work, for the communities we serve.** And yes, to a certain degree, we have 100 Fellow slots that we need to fill with Partners, and yes, sometimes it can be hard to fill those slots. But, is it more important to fill those 100 slots or is it more important to ensure a safe, equitable, enriching experience for the Fellow? And I think that comes first. And if we don't fill all 100 slots, so be it...And, **we absolutely should be requiring every Partner to take some kind of implicit bias, microaggressions, racial and cultural sensitivity training.** We require them to do training already. If this is going to be a priority for the program, we should require them to do this kind of training as well. And when we have Partners that we know have issues, **we should take a stronger hand in remediating those issues when they arise and not allowing them to be Partners in the future if they've already demonstrated that they're not a viable site for the Fellows.**

Section 7 Stakeholders' Vision for Racial Equity at CivicSpark



At the end of focus groups discussions, participants were asked to share their vision of racial equity for CivicSpark. The following is a summary of key themes and quotes from this discussion.

Equity: Shared, Embedded, and Mandatory

Shared Understanding of Equity

Fellows and Alumni discussed the need for a shared understanding of equity, through common language, a deep understanding of systemic inequality, and thoughtful policy.

Alumni: I want to make sure there is an understanding about what the term equity means... **Equity means you are providing support to people who need it the most.** If you're using that word in the program, stick true to the definition of it: provide support to Fellows who need it the most. **I say that because if you're not doing it, don't call it that. You're doing 'fakeequity.' You're doing a lip service...** like a façade of being inclusive. Hold yourself accountable and be true to that word and the definition of that word.

"Equity means you are **providing support to people who need it the most...** Hold yourself accountable and be true to that word."

Alumni: If you create policies assuming it's an equal playing field, [that] will harm certain populations more than others. [My] racial equity vision is **acknowledging that [all] Fellows are not on an equal playing field and providing services and support systems...** I think identifying what are the CivicSpark policies that are not intentionally harmful, but, through the assumption that it's an equal playing field, end up being neglectful of the needs of certain Fellows.

Fellow: Make sure that **every Site Supervisor has a very good grip on what racial equity at their site looks like**, even more so than what they have right now... If that could be more standard across the board people would have the ability to focus on their work without coming into work and worrying about what they would hear, or what someone would do or say to them.

Equity Embedded in all Aspects of Programming

Fellows and Staff noted the importance of embedding equity into all aspects of the program and highlighted that the responsibility to hold equity as a priority should fall on all parties, as opposed to being solely concentrated on Fellows.

Fellow: [Currently], the responsibility of linking equity to the rest of the work falls on Fellows... I see the importance of giving Fellows the leadership opportunity and to make regional trainings their own, **but sometimes it feels like it falls a lot more on the Fellows than on the program or the Regional Coordinators...** in an ideal world, it would be more a part of the program, like 80% program, 20% Fellows.

Staff: I would love to see us get in the direction of **never planning anything...without thinking about racial equity...** And I say that recognizing that this is a tall order and recognizing that the Staff and Fellows have really pushed to make significant progress already, and I think we can continue to do so. But, I wonder if we approach it from a framework of **mainstreaming racial equity into our processes...** We just constantly have to think about it, like, it's a sticky note behind everyone's monitor: this task that you're doing today, how will you be anti-racist as you do that task? How will you incorporate racial equity considerations as you do that task?

Equity is Mandatory in CivicSpark Projects

As previously noted, many focus group participants discussed the importance of increasing racial equity accountability within CivicSpark partnerships and across its projects.

Fellow: Being more specific that **racial equity is a mandatory part of a CivicSpark project**, whether that's woven into a gap assessment goal or woven more into the framework, both as a part of CivicSpark training, including activities that are led by CivicSpark, as well as unavoidable for project Partners.

Partner: A lot of [Fellow] work is so in the weeds... We're incorporating race and equity into the work that we are doing, but at the same time, I feel like a lot of the work... is not necessarily actively creating new ideas. It's like research and analysis... **The questions we ask and things we are researching include equity and race, but it's not the full focus of what the Fellow's working on.** When you sent out the survey about how CivicSpark should include race and equity...I think I was reflecting, like, 'oh shoot, maybe there were missed opportunities,' and I think there could be more work to be done... **I'm really curious about how CivicSpark will evolve and if there are ways that [racial equity] is more front and center.** So just acknowledging I don't think we've done a great job... it's there, but it's not front and center.

Adequate Pay

Throughout focus group conversations, all stakeholders discussed how the limited stipend affects racial equity within the program, including who might apply for the program as well as how Fellows experience the program. One Fellow reiterated this point when discussing their vision for CivicSpark's future.

When you are using a job to get these connections, you are in a much more vulnerable position in relation to speaking out or challenging ideas that your Site Supervisor or beneficiary bring up.

Fellow: In concert with ensuring Fellows are paid more, whether that be shortening hours or raising the stipend, because part of what is contributing to the Fellow vulnerability in relationship with project Partners and beneficiaries is the fact that most of what we are supposed to get out of this is networking, connections, etc. **That's why it's sold to us as something that is acceptable to underpay us, because we get these connections.** And when you are using a job to get these connections, you are in a much more vulnerable position in relation to speaking out, or challenging ideas that your Site Supervisor or beneficiary bring up. So having a bigger stipend will put Fellows in a better position to advocate for themselves and negotiate with Partners.

Increased BI&POC Representation Across the Program

Fellows stressed that increased BI&POC representation among Fellows, Staff, and Partners was integral to creating an equitable future for CivicSpark.

Fellow: I think a metric that could help determine project success would be **the same amount or more of people of color applying for CivicSpark.** I don't know what it looks like on the backend, but I can only assume and hope that the reason there are more White people in CivicSpark is because more White people applied and not because of any explicitly discriminatory process. So, I think this would be good metric to demonstrate change and encourage equity.

Fellow: I would like to see more Site Supervisors of color... I think someone said that **[having a Site Supervisor of color] can really change your whole experience with leadership and management...** More supervisors of color would be really cool. I mean, of course, a more racially diverse group of Fellows would look more equitable, feel more equitable.

In calling for greater racial diversity, Fellows and Alumni explained how White-dominated spaces created disadvantage and a sense of alienation for Fellows of color.

Fellow: Sometimes I'll just end up emailing someone I see as the organizer of a meeting, and I'm like 'hi person I've never met, I don't know if this is where I should be sending this feedback, but this happened in our meeting today, and I feel really, really weird about it.' And like amping myself up to send that email is kind of tiring, it's just like a lot of effort to do that, and also do my site work... this isn't to say I have the hardest time, but it is extra time. I feel like a lot of value and merit is placed on how much work you can get done at your site within a limited amount of time... and if [I am] spending a whole morning grappling with this meeting that I felt really uncomfortable in, I'm like **there are other Fellows who are 'getting ahead' in their professional journey because they didn't spend their morning doing that,** so I think about that a lot.

Alumni: The day I arrived at orientation, it was such a culture shock... the culture shock was being in an immensely White space and knowing you're lucky to be here. And this space isn't meant for you. And, seeing that these are the type of people that can advance and succeed, who can have these opportunities, and it's constantly being reflected at leadership and higher levels. And that was day one for us. And, that triggered so many Fellows of color... because of how hurt, how sad, how low-key disgusted we all were. Just imagine being in a space and knowing you are not represented in the work you are trying to build your career off of.

Increased Support and Fostering Access to Opportunities for Fellows of Color

Several Fellows and Alumni discussed CivicSpark's role as a professional development program, and the importance of specifically supporting the professional development of Fellows of color.

Fellow: I think that the professional opportunity aspect is something that could improve... I just think that CivicSpark does feel like a really big opportunity, and it's figuring out how to make that a reality for everybody... **I picture coming in and being welcomed in the program, not having to deal with trauma every day**, and being able to move on from the program and feel like you are making changes and you are **not running into a ton of barriers at work because of your race**. And also, you have a path forward out of the program and into work that is meaningful.

Fellow: Even more essential than bringing in diverse Fellows is really, again, the support. **So, once they are even in the Fellowship, making sure there are resources and support to help them thrive and to navigate these different situations...** I really like the [Alumni of Color Mentorship] idea, so that we can see ourselves post-Fellowship. I know, for a lot of us, this is really stressful right now, but having that additional support with people who understand...our experiences in the Fellowship and so they could answer those questions about if you wanted to stay in local government...what it's like in the workplace, which **I think would be really helpful and something I would definitely take into consideration when looking for my next job after the Fellowship.**

"I picture coming in and being **welcomed in the program**, not having to deal with trauma every day, and being able to move on from the program and **feel like you are making changes** and you are **not running into a ton of barriers at work because of your race.**"

Alumni: I think regardless of race that every Fellow achieves their desired professional development goals throughout their tenure as a Fellow, and they feel valued for their service—it's not work, it's service, and we all know that-- **regardless of who you are and where you come from, you are able to achieve your desired goals.**

One Partner commented on the importance of professional development initiatives that could help Fellows of color navigate racially fraught spaces while also honoring the potentially unique knowledge and perspectives that those Fellows might bring.

Partner: If we [CivicSpark and Partners] are successful in bringing more people in, I want to talk about that experience and creating a space where we are not just bringing non-White folks into the program to indoctrinate in the “White” way of doing... They do need the skills to become successful in the way local government currently exists *and* **how do we support them in being able to articulate other ways of knowing that they may have/may be bringing in and not shove them down or train them out of them.** How do we give them the skills to be able to see and recognize things and not be able to take them as given and sit with it and be able to voice things when appropriate, like know how to navigate that space? So, some sort of training for them on that, and then training for us on how to host that.

Helping Communities

One Staff member framed their vision for racial equity at CivicSpark around ensuring that CivicSpark programming is directed towards the communities in California that need the most support.

Staff: I want to see CivicSpark support communities that have been doing the ‘cool climate things’ before they were cool, like biking to work-- poor people have been biking to work forever because they don’t have cars. Where are the nice new bike lanes for those people? I want to be supporting folks who have been reducing their waste and reusing because they can’t just go buy a new one. I want us, as an AmeriCorps group, to be able to serve those people and provide those services... **I want to be improving these things for folks who have been relying on them for a long time, not just people who think they’re cool now.**

Similarly, Staff and Partners expressed concern about CivicSpark’s ability to reach local governments with fewer funds available to support a Fellow, and they suggested investigating grant opportunities for organizations with fewer resources.

Staff: Just, like, how Fellows can’t live on the stipend, Partners can’t really afford to pay the stipend for a Fellow. So, we see wealthier cities returning again and again to the program, but there’s some parts of California we’ve never reached in the eight years of the program. So, that’s definitely a way we can improve equity is helping more communities, reaching those communities that need the most help.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Data gathered from CivicSpark stakeholders reveal a strong commitment to racial equity within the program but less success in fully actualizing that commitment in its everyday practices, policies, partnerships, and structure. Stakeholder feedback emphasizes the need for a multi-pronged approach that simultaneously addresses racial inequity across different areas of the program to produce system-level change. The following is a summary of recommendations drawn from the stakeholder feedback.

Fellow Training

- **Value the knowledge and passion that Fellows and Alumni have** regarding racial equity, **providing them with paid opportunities** to lead racial equity discussions and trainings.
- **Make racial equity workshops and trainings a mandatory** part of the Fellowship experience to facilitate ongoing thinking about how to address inequities within the program and in service work and to ensure a more balanced division of labor across Fellows/Alumni.
- **Deliver Fellow trainings that focus on the breadth of the problem**, including topics such as the history of racism in local government and environmentalism and structural racism, and **trainings that focus on promoting racial equity in tangible ways**, including topics such as strategies for guiding conversations about race, building healthy, trustworthy relationships between government agencies and the communities they serve, and implementing racial equity initiatives in day-to-day work.
- **Provide Staff with trainings and additional resources**, including funds for compensating speakers and spaces for collaboration, **to better equip them to center racial equity within trainings** and more broadly.
 - ! In doing so, consider trainings and resources on topics such as microaggressions, intersectionality, and allyship, which reflect areas where Staff feel less confident in their knowledge.

Fellow Support and Supervision

- **Continue internal dialogue about racial inequity within the program and invite Fellows and Alumni into both conversations and decision-making.**
 - ! In doing so, make sure that all voices are heard and that Fellow-driven (and Alumni-driven) efforts to address racial inequity are acknowledged and appropriately valued.
- **Establish visible and accessible mechanisms and spaces for discussing issues of racial inequity and reporting inappropriate interactions**, including personal experiences of racial discrimination, harassment, and/or microaggressions.
 - ! Stakeholders suggested having a Staff person with designated responsibility and time for addressing racial inequity issues and facilitating the anonymous submission of comments for group discussion.

- **Increase BI&POC representation among Fellows, Staff, and LGC Leadership** to better align CivicSpark's values regarding racial equity with its structure and with the lived experiences of individuals.
 - ! Increased BI&POC representation may also reduce the pressures for extra emotional and relational labor among BI&POC Fellows, Alumni, and Staff by creating a more diverse and welcoming working environment for all.
- **Communicate the importance of promoting racial equity to Partners in program materials (e.g., applications, contracts) and in higher-level conversations between staff/leadership at LGC/CivicSpark and at Partner organizations.**
 - ! Continually articulating racial equity as a priority within the program can help support Fellow-driven conversations with Partners.
- **Provide training and resources to help Site Supervisors** better support and manage Fellows in ways that center racial equity.
- **Make racial equity a regular part of Fellows' check-in meetings** with both Regional Coordinators and Site Supervisors to provide an ongoing space for thinking and talking about how to confront injustices and inequities.
- **Continue existing affinity spaces**, such as the Equity Team and Caucuses, to provide Fellows with a supportive environment for talking about race and building peer solidarity around issues of racial inequity.
- **Invest in the professional development of BI&POC Fellows and Alumni.**
 - ! This might include securing service placements that are aligned with their professional goals and are safe and healthy working environments, establishing an Alumni of Color Mentorship program, and providing support in navigating and challenging workplace power dynamics that overlap with racialized organizational structures (i.e., institutions based on White supremacy or that remain White-dominated in their racial composition).
- **Think critically about what Fellow compensation** might communicate to Fellows and Partners and how that compensation might undermine efforts to promote racial equity in service work.

Fellow Recruitment and Hiring

- **Increase the Fellow stipend** to encourage and support the participation of less privileged individuals, which due to historical and systemic racism, disproportionately include those from BI&POC communities.
 - ! Increasing the Fellow stipend would allow Fellows and Alumni to feel more comfortable making internal referrals to low-income and BI&POC individuals.
 - ! Stakeholders acknowledged challenges to increasing the Fellow stipend within the current funding structure of the program and recommended diversifying, augmenting, and/or replacing current funding sources to achieve stipend increases or reducing Fellow workload by decreasing weekly work hours or by ending the program in May versus July.
- **Broaden recruitment strategies to reach a more diverse candidate pool** by ensuring that outreach and application materials include inclusive language, connecting directly with race-based student groups at colleges and universities, extending outreach beyond college campuses, and increasing social media efforts.

- **Create a more supportive and inclusive interview space** by increasing BI&POC representation on interview panels, equipping and encouraging Staff to discuss equity within interviews, and giving candidates access to program representatives and interview questions beforehand.
- **Continue expanding selection criteria** by acknowledging less traditional forms of relevant experience and **address areas of potential selection bias** by implementing name and/or school-blind processes.

Partnerships

- **Equip and empower internal stakeholders** to articulate CivicSpark's racial equity commitments to Partners.
- **Formalize racial equity across the different stages of the partnership process** by adding a racial equity component to applications, contracts, and project scopes and by adding racial equity requirements to project outcomes.
 - ! Very few Partners felt that the formalization of racial equity commitments within the partnership would be a barrier to program participation.
- **Provide additional support and assistance to help Partners integrate racial equity elements** into projects during the application and scope development stage and during project implementation.
- **Support Partners' racial equity capacity building** by providing relevant resources and trainings, particularly on topics such as historical and systemic racism in local government and environmental work, justice-oriented community engagement, implementing racial equity in practice, and managing with a racial equity lens.
 - ! Most Partners expressed an interest and ability to invest in racial equity capacity building.
- **Share Fellow feedback** regarding racial equity experiences at host sites with Partners.
- **Create and foster dedicated spaces and times** for Fellows and Regional Coordinators to **discuss racial equity** with Partners.
- **Prioritize Fellow safety and professional development** by directly addressing racial climate concerns with Partners and reevaluating partnerships with organizations that do not value racial equity and/or do not provide welcoming environments for Fellows, especially BI&POC Fellows.
- **Consider collecting demographic staff data at Partner agencies** to better understand the racial composition of each agency and to support Partner efforts to increase the racial diversity within their organizations.
- **Find ways to extend the program** to more Partners serving low-income communities and communities of color.
- **Consider matching Partners with Fellows** who are from or have extensive experience **within the communities they serve**.

Appendix

Table 1 | Survey Response by Stakeholder Group

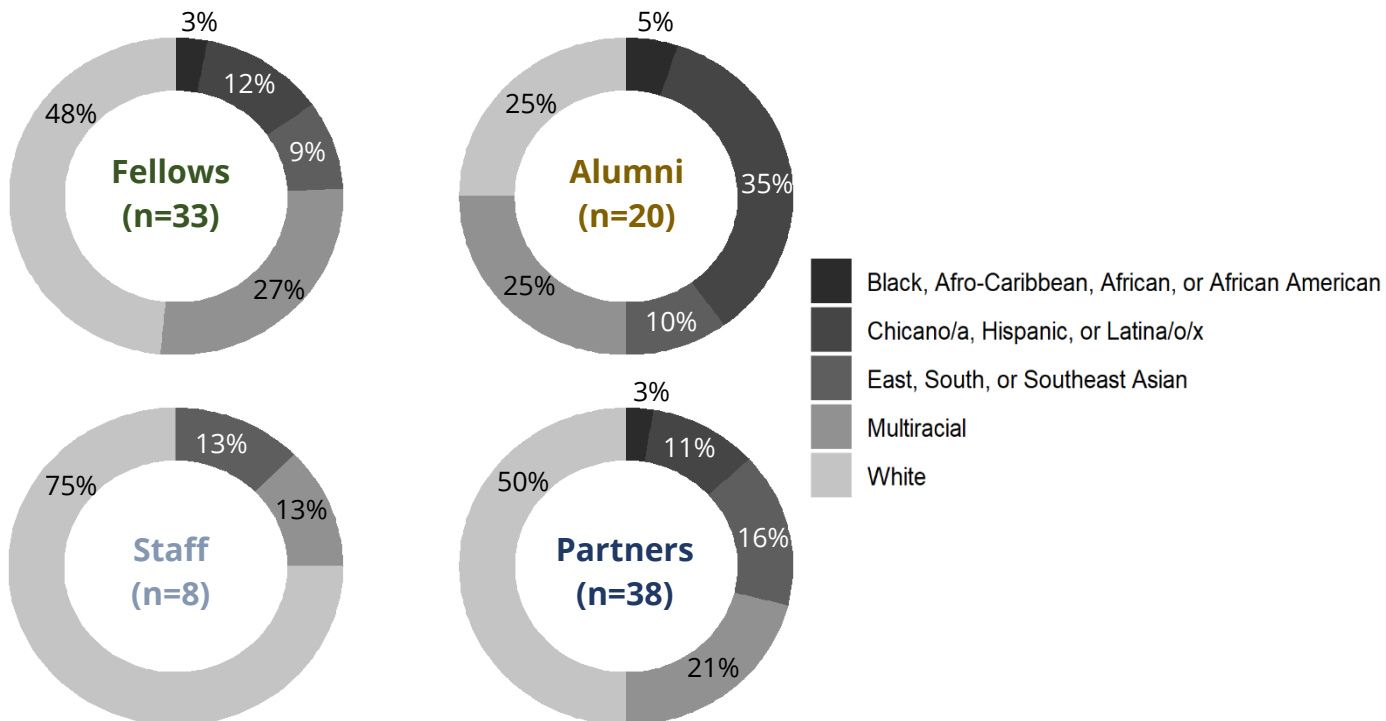
Stakeholder Group	Total Surveys Started	Total Surveys Completed	Notes
Current Fellows	41	34	5 of 7 incompletes finished less than 20%
Fellow Alumni	26	22	3 of 4 incompletes finished less than 20%
CivicSpark Regional Coordinators and Other LGC Staff	16	11	All 5 incompletes finished less than 20%
CivicSpark Partners (Site Supervisors)	41	39	Both incompletes finished less than 20%

Some incompletes, particularly on the Staff survey, may have been due to administrators/LPC staff testing the survey.

Participant Demographics

The racial composition of survey participants for each stakeholder group is shown in Figure 29.

Figure 29. Racial Composition by Stakeholder Group



**Note: White is capitalized to bring attention to the fact that this often “unmarked” category is racialized. As noted by the MacArthur Foundation, not capitalizing White while capitalizing other racial and ethnic identifiers implicitly affirms Whiteness as the standard and norm.*

Notes regarding racial composition by stakeholder group

FELLOWS

Most Fellows self-identified as White (48%), and a little over a quarter (27%) identified as multiracial.

Individuals identifying as Multiracial selected combinations among the racial categories shown in Figure 29 as well as the following racial categories: American Indian or Alaska Native, Hawaiian or Pacific Islander and Jewish.

In total, 52 percent of the Fellow sample identified as BI&POC.

Nonresponse = 8

ALUMNI

Most Alumni self-identified as Chicano/a, Hispanic or Latina/o/x (35%), followed by Multiracial (25%) and White (25%).

Individuals identifying as Multiracial selected combinations among the racial categories shown in Figure 29 as well as the following racial categories: North African or Middle Eastern and Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.

In total, 75 percent of the Alumni sample identified as BI&POC.

Nonresponse = 6

STAFF

Most Staff members self-identified as White (75%), with 13% identifying as Multiracial and another 13% identifying as East Asian, Southeast Asian, or South Asian.

Individuals who identified as Multiracial selected combinations among the racial categories shown in Figure 29.

In total, 25 percent of the Staff sample identified as BI&POC.

Nonresponse = 8

PARTNERS

Most Partner survey participants self-identified was White (50%), and slightly less than a quarter (21%) identified as Multiracial.

Individuals who identified as Multiracial selected combinations among the racial categories shown in Figure 29 as well as the following racial categories: American Indian or Alaska Native, Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and Ecuadorian, Italian and Portuguese descent.

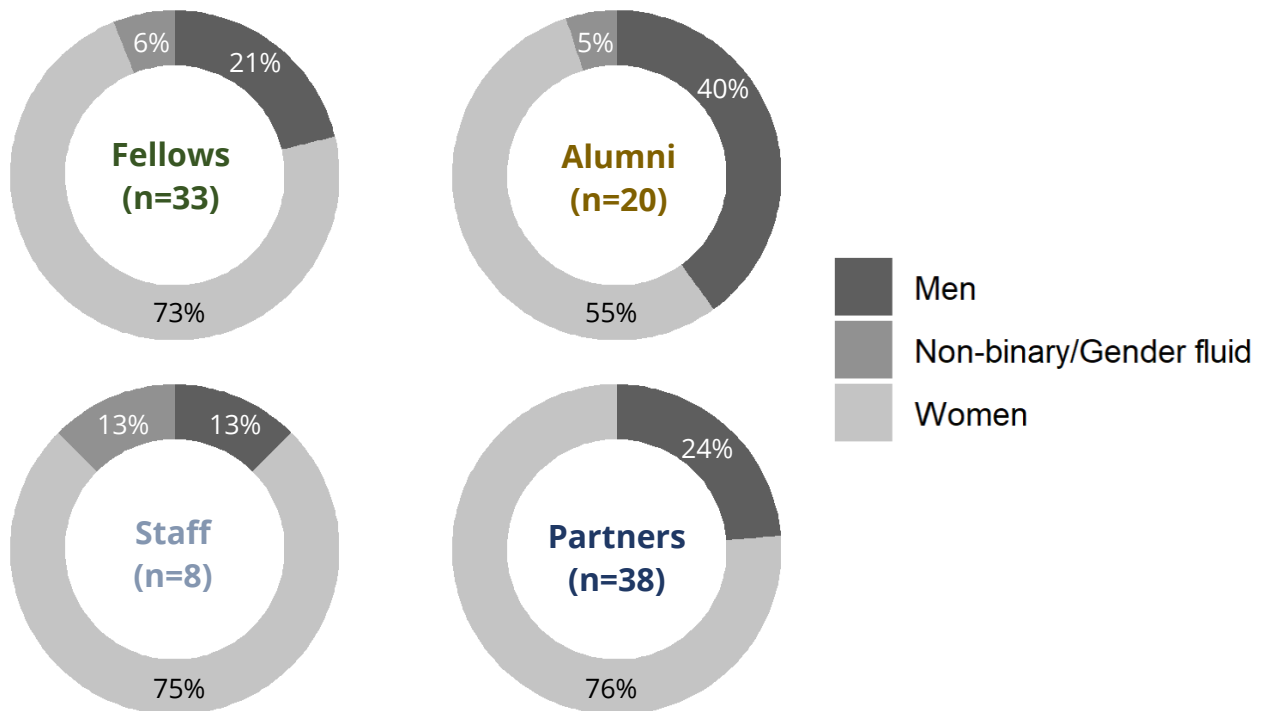
In total, 50 percent of the Partner sample identified as BI&POC.

Nonresponse = 3

Gender Composition

The gender composition of survey participants for each stakeholder group is shown in Figure 30.

Figure 30. Gender Composition by Stakeholder Group



Notes regarding gender composition

- Across all groups, the majority of participants identified as women.
- The most gender diverse sample was the Alumni sample, with 40 percent of participants identifying as men, 55 percent identifying as women and 5 percent identifying as gender fluid.

Additional Sample Details

Alumni. The breakdown of the Alumni sample by year is shown in Table 2. The percentage of Alumni identifying as BI&POC and as White-only by cohort year is shown in Table 3.

- The majority of Alumni respondents were part of the most recent cohort (2019-2020).

Table 2 | Alumni by Cohort Year (n=22)

Alumni year	
2017-2018 Fellow	27%
2018-2019 Fellow	18%
2019-2020 Fellow	55%

Table 3 | Racial Identity by Alumni Cohort Year

Alumni year/race	BI&POC	White
2017-2018 Fellow (n=5)	60%	40%
2018-2019 Fellow (n=4)	100%	0%
2019-2020 Fellow (n=11)	73%	27%

Staff. The breakdown of the Staff sample by role is shown below in Table 4. The percentage of Staff identifying as BI&POC and as White-only by role is shown in Table 5.

- Notably, all non-Regional Coordinator, LGC staff members identified as White
- Regional Coordinator category includes 5 current RCs and 1 former RC

Table 4 | Staff by Role (n=9)

Staff type	
Current CivicSpark Regional Coordinator	56%
Other LGC Staff Member (former or current)	44%

Table 5 | Racial Identity by Staff Role

Staff type	BI&POC	White
Current CivicSpark Regional Coordinator (n=4)	50%	50%
Other LGC Staff Member (n=4)	0%	100%

Partners. The Partner sample is disaggregated by tenure in the CivicSpark program in Table 6. Table 7 outlines the relationship between a Partner's tenure and the program year(s) in which they participated. Table 8 presents the percentage of Partners identifying as BI&POC and as White by program year.

- Slightly less than half (44%) of Partner respondents were in the first year of participating in the program.
- Most Partner respondents participated in the program during the last two years and over half (53%) participated in both.

Table 6 | Partner by Tenure (n=39)

Partner tenure	
One year	44%
Two years	28%
Three+ years	28%

Table 7 | Program Year by Partner Tenure

Partner tenure	2019-2020	2020-2021	Both 2019-2020 & 2020-2021	Older cohorts
One year (n=17)	6%	76%	12%	6%
Two years (n=11)	9%	0%	91%	0%
Three+ years (n=11)	13%	33%	49%	5%

Table 8 | Racial Identity by Program Year

Program Year	BI&POC	White
2019-2020 (n=5)	40%	60%
2020-2021 (n=12)	50%	50%
Both 2019-2020 & 2020-2021 (n=19)	53%	47%
Older cohorts (n=2)	50%	50%

Summary of the Breakout Group Discussion & Survey Results

- Have less abstract trainings, and increase information on how to pursue equity amidst real-world limitations
- Personal power/privilege bias trainings, exercises led by BIPOC-trainers, educating staff Fellows and hosts
 - Speaker idea: Connie reitman-solace, CA native, cultural sensitivity trainings
- Beyond land acknowledgment
 - Make it a mandatory training at Orientation and allocate budget for indigenous leaders to develop and deliver this training
 - Also allocate funds for indigenous leaders to provide land acknowledgment at major events and/or lead trainings throughout the year
- Trainings to be delivered by diverse groups
- Compensation provided for POC caucus/leadership roles led by Fellows by logging additional hours or stipend (OR caps on leadership positions to reduce labor done by Fellows if uncompensated)
 - Transparency around how much time a leadership positions would require and understanding the capacity of these positions
- Trainings also focus on history, racial equity, and the dynamics of each placement site being served, understanding the larger connection to the region and its demographics-goes along with the understanding of power dynamics between Fellows and their respective placement sites
 - Subject matter experts should be consulted early in the service year to establish and approach to racial equity with proper research on the experts (avoid tokenism)
- Important to note that an honorarium exists for Fellows to bring in diverse speakers (with proper compensation)
- Trainings that include how to apply a racial equity lens to various service projects
- These trainings should especially take place at the beginning of the service year (and maybe include reflections, revisited during MYG)

Feedback from Racial Equity Consultant

- Adele can help provide resources for potential speakers from diverse backgrounds (race and gender identity)
- Make sure implicit bias training focuses on strategies to overcome implicit bias rather than describing what it is. Performance Measure could be that staff demonstrate 3 ways of overcoming implicit bias by...in teams, teams, in meetings, in communications, in office environments, etc.

Actions to Include in the REAP

- Mandatory statewide “Beyond Land Acknowledgement” training for Fellows at the beginning of the service year.
 - Budget funding for the development of an Indigenous informed “Beyond Land Acknowledgement Training” with funding reserved for Indigenous speakers.
- Budget funding for Indigenous leaders to lead or inform the creation of a proper Land Acknowledgement for statewide events.
- Provide stipends for Fellows leading BIPOC affinity groups and Equity trainings.
- Budget funding for more Environmental Justice curriculum that is not confined to BIPOC affinity groups.
- Allocate time for trainings to be delivered by diverse speakers representative of Fellows and different groups which have been unrepresented

IV. Partnerships ([breakout session notes](#))

Summary of the Breakout Group Discussion & Survey Results

- Explore partnerships or shared learning opportunities with other AmeriCorps programs such as Public Allies that actively value and implement JED(A)I practices
 - How do we create coordination across organizations also considering racial equity (between CivicSpark and partner orgs) in order for equitable engagement to happen?
- Conduct outreach to project and promotional partners to support initiatives like the CORPS act
- Expand the number of projects that address tribal issues and increase engagement with tribal community needs, instead of just understanding them.
 - Partner with Indigenous groups and Tribes
- Identify barriers to advancing racial equity in local government such as Prop 209. Provide training and education to Fellows and partners about how to advocate for racial equity within these constraints. Lack of understanding could be a reason why some local governments haven’t been engaging in as much racial equity as they could/should.
- Encourage discussion of racial equity needs and challenges between Fellows and partners
 - Ensure partners are held accountable to racial equity practices
- Partner training and feedback is important. These trainings should be virtual to minimize time burden on partners.

- Incorporate racial equity training into online orientation for site supervisors and project partners
- How do we educate partners about racial equity and JEDAI considerations that makes both the Fellows' experiences the best possible *and* maximizes capacity to do great work? How do we fund this?
- Integrate storytelling into how we talk about and educate around racial equity. Discuss racial equity in context of a person's experience. Encourage activities that help Fellows / partners / staff understand / see personal privileges, e.g "run to this side of the room if..."
- Consider intersectionality of identity alongside race. Accessibility should be centered and prioritized. Create a welcoming culture to individuals of all identities. Honing in on the ways these intersectional issues impact BIPOC communities is key to addressing these root causes of inequity.

Feedback from Racial Equity Consultant

- Services and programming being developed can be drawn from racial equity measurements within the project evaluation instruments (Gap Assessment, Capacity Assessment, Transition Report).
- Change "sensitivity" to "awareness or responsiveness" when it comes to training/communication between all stakeholders, as the latter has a more action-based connotation to it.
- Something just as important as having diversity in national service team hiring is having a culture that is welcoming where recruits would want to spend their fellowship time.

Actions to Include in the REAP

- Explore partnerships or shared learning opportunities with other AmeriCorps programs and agencies that actively value and implement JED(A)I practices
- Conduct outreach to project and promotional partners to support initiatives like the CORPS Act
- Expand the number of projects that build Indigenous / Tribal capacity and resilience by conducting greater outreach to Indigenous CBOs, Tribal entities, and agencies that support them.
- Identify barriers to racial equity in LG (such as Prop 209) and provide education and training to implement racial equity solutions
- Require potential partners to take a "Boosting Equity in Local Government" training as part of the application process and explain how their projects will include an equity component for BIPOC, Tribal, and working class communities in their application.
- Provide training as part of the Partner Orientation process on racial equity expectations

of partners, specifically focusing on awareness or responsiveness. Integrate storytelling into training to humanize discussion.

- Incorporate racial equity measurements within project and Fellow evaluation instruments (Gap Assessment, Capacity Assessment, Transition Report). Require partners to develop a plan on how they intend to support Fellows with their racial equity needs and what gaps they would like CivicSpark to assist them with in their pre-capacity assessment.
- Identify funding for host organizations that are already doing the work and can bring the diversity to the table both in host site and in the CivicSpark program.
- Support partners in developing a welcoming culture that considers accessibility and intersectionality with race, support Fellows and partners in discussing racial equity challenges and providing feedback to best meet needs.

V. Staff Culture & Program Support (no breakout session notes)

Summary of the Breakout Group Discussion & Survey Results

- There is an important need to diversify staff so Fellows feel represented
- Partnerships should include organizations that also hold diverse voices
- Have personal power/privilege bias trainings, exercises led by BIPOC-trainers, educate staff, Fellows, and hosts
- Accountability- ensure that updates are provided on the implementation of REAP
- How can we center racial equity as part of the CS mission, vision, and activities? What does it look like to center this in what we do?

Feedback from Racial Equity Consultant

- Include different culturally significant events (Juneteenth, Pride, Chinese New Year, Cesar Chavez day, etc)

Actions to Include in the REAP

- Include community organizing as an “allowable activity” for Fellows during the service year
- Diversify staff with BIPOC representation
- Budget funding for BIPOC affinity groups

Additional input was provided by a group of Fellows in the, [“07.08.21 Action Items for Indigenous Communities in CivicSpark”](#)

Dear CivicSpark Staff & Stakeholders,

We would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the *2021 CivicSpark Draft Racial Equity Action Plan (RE-AP)*. We are grateful that the CivicSpark administration is motivated to assess what racial equity gaps exist in the program and develop a planning document to outline pathways to improvement.

As fellows, the CivicSpark staffs' efforts to foster a space for conversations about racial equity empowered us to host the first optional "Beyond Land Acknowledgement" training during a joint Equity Team, BIPOC Caucus and White Anti-Racism Caucus meeting. Upon its successful completion, our coalition organized to advocate for the establishment of a mandatory statewide "Beyond Land Acknowledgement" training for future cohorts. However, in response to the administration's draft RE-AP we'd like to advocate for a series of action items that will further support our main goal of the training: To advance Indigenous equity and capacity via the CivicSpark program.

Below is a list of 11 action items that we ask to be incorporated into the RE-AP. The table shows how each action item is aligned with the RE-AP's program areas and goals.

Proposed Action Items + Reasoning	Action Plan Program Area(s)	Action Plan Goal(s)
<p>1. Mandatory statewide "Beyond Land Acknowledgement" training for fellows at the beginning of the service year.</p> <p>To ensure fellows are equipped with the historical context and tools to develop Land Acknowledgements that move beyond performative statements to calls to action that support Indigenous Sovereignty and lead to continuous communication with Indigenous communities/Tribal entities at their placement sites and in their future careers.</p>	Fellow Training	Content: The CivicSpark training curriculum provides Fellows with knowledge, strategies, and tools to effectively apply a racial equity lens to their service projects.
<p>2. Budget funding for the development of an Indigenous informed "Beyond Land Acknowledgement Training" with funding reserved for Indigenous speakers.</p> <p>To ensure the statewide training reflects what Indigenous communities want from allies in positions of influence and power, the training must be developed in partnership with Indigenous leaders who are properly compensated for their expertise, time, and energy. Space and time must also be reserved for Indigenous speakers when the training takes place.</p>	Fellow Training Staff Culture and Program Support	Content: The CivicSpark training curriculum provides Fellows with knowledge, strategies, and tools to effectively apply a racial equity lens to their service projects. Implementation of the Racial Equity Action Plan is funded.
<p>3. Budget funding for Indigenous leaders to lead or inform the creation of a proper Land Acknowledgement for statewide events.</p>	Fellow Training	Content: The CivicSpark training curriculum provides Fellows with knowledge, strategies, and tools to effectively apply a racial equity lens to their service projects.

<p>To ensure Land Acknowledgements at CivicSpark events are Indigenous informed, intentional, and action provoking rather than performative. To signal to fellows that CivicSpark is committed to racial equity work, including combatting Indigenous erasure.</p>	<p>Staff Culture and Program Support</p>	<p>Implementation of the Racial Equity Action Plan is funded.</p> <p>REAP policy and procedure adaptations are incorporated holistically in CivicSpark programming.</p>
<p>4. Expand the number of projects that build Indigenous / Tribal capacity and resilience by conducting greater outreach to Indigenous CBOs, Tribal entities, and agencies that support them.</p> <p>To ensure projects directly benefit more Indigenous communities. To ensure the program is more visible to Indigenous community members so they are encouraged to apply.</p>	<p>Partnerships</p>	<p>CivicSpark’s commitment to racial equity is emphasized in the Partner recruitment and selection process.</p>
<p>5. Require potential partners to take a “Boosting Equity in Local Govt” training as part of the application process and explain how their projects will include an equity component for BIPOC, Tribal, and working class communities in their application.</p> <p>To ensure partners are aware of CivicSpark’s commitment to advancing racial equity work. To ensure this commitment is reflected in all projects.</p>	<p>Partnerships</p> <p>Staff Culture and Program Support</p>	<p>CivicSpark’s commitment to racial equity is emphasized in the Partner recruitment and selection process.</p> <p>Racial Equity is embedded into onboarding and start-up processes for the placement and project, including partner orientation, supervision, and project goal-setting assessments.</p> <p>REAP policy and procedure adaptations are incorporated holistically in CivicSpark programming.</p>
<p>6. Require partners to develop a plan on how they intend to support fellows with their racial equity needs and what gaps they would like CivicSpark to assist them with in their pre-capacity assessment</p> <p>To ensure placement sites reflect a similar commitment to fostering workspaces where racial equity is valued and fellows are supported.</p>	<p>Partnerships</p>	<p>Racial Equity is embedded into onboarding and start-up processes for the placement and project, including partner orientation, supervision, and project goal-setting assessments.</p> <p>Partners receive regular racial and cultural sensitivity support and training.</p>
<p>7. Increase recruitment of Indigenous fellows and hiring of Indigenous staff.</p> <p>To ensure the CivicSpark community is inclusive and representative of its racial equity commitments. To ensure Indigenous community members hold space in CivicSpark’s decision making and learning spaces.</p>	<p>Fellow Recruitment and Hiring</p>	<p>Fellow recruitment methods are effective at building a racially diverse candidate pool</p>
<p>8. Budget funding for BIPOC affinity groups.</p> <p>To ensure BIPOC affinity groups have adequate funding</p>	<p>Fellow Supervision</p>	<p>Peer-to-peer affinity groups support all Fellows in pursuing anti-racism and navigating through</p>

to foster safe spaces, invite speakers of their choice, and advocate for organizational change.	and Support Staff Culture and Program Support	negative racialized experiences. Implementation of the Racial Equity Action Plan is funded.
9. Provide stipends for fellows leading BIPOC affinity groups and Equity trainings. To ensure BIPOC and white anti-racism fellows are fairly compensated for their expertise, time, and energy in developing trainings and facilitating safe spaces and discussions.	Fellow Training	Leadership: Racial equity trainings are delivered by a diverse group of subject-matter experts who are fairly compensated for their labor
10. Budget funding for more Environmental Justice curriculum that is not confined to BIPOC affinity groups. To decolonize fellows' understanding of the environmental movement by ensuring that BIPOC leadership and issues in the environmental and climate movement are recognized.	Fellow Training Staff Culture and Program Support	Content: The CivicSpark training curriculum provides Fellows with knowledge, strategies, and tools to effectively apply a racial equity lens to their service projects. Implementation of the Racial Equity Action Plan is funded.
11. Include community organizing as an "allowable activity" for fellows during the service year. To ensure fellows are able to move beyond education and outreach to meaningfully support their partners and the communities they serve. Excluding community organizing from allowable activities fails to decentralize power from institutions that are inaccessible for many BIPOC communities, and therefore, reduces a projects' ability to boost community capacity and empowerment.	Staff Culture and Program Support	REAP policy and procedure adaptations are incorporated holistically in CivicSpark programming.

We feel strongly that the 11 preceding action items can strengthen CivicSpark's commitment to racial equity work, and we will continue to organize for the incorporation of these items until they are achieved. We look forward to working with you to advance racial equity inside and outside the program.

With Power,

CivicSpark '20-'21 Fellows

Amanda Caswell, Aronriti Mey, Bryan Redden, Elizabeth Menchaca-Guhl, Nicole Cheng, Shivali Gowda, Vannesa Reyes Salazar

We, as supporters/stakeholders of CivicSpark, would like to uplift these additional action items presented and would like to show our support for the inclusion of these actions and goals to be considered in the 2021 Racial Equity Action Plan:

STAKEHOLDER SIGNATURE OF SUPPORT (Name & affiliation)
1. Anne Shalamoff (CivicSpark Fellow 2020 - 2021)
2. Ashoka Alvarez (CivicSpark alumni 17-18, former CS staff)
3. Dominique Dashwood (CivicSpark Fellow 2019 - 2020, 2020 - 2021)
4. Amanda Cobb (CivicSpark fellow 2019-2020, 2020-2021)
5. Megan Honey (CivicSpark Fellow 2020-2021)
6. Mayra Garcia (CivicSpark Fellow 2020-2021)
7. Skyler Kriese (CivicSpark Fellow 2020-2021)
8. Pricila Roldan (CivicSpark Fellow 2020-2021)
9. Jack Boyce (CivicSpark Fellow 2018-2019)
10. Paulina Mejia (CivicSpark Fellow 2020-2021)
11. Sam Bowman (CivicSpark Fellow 2019-2020)
12. Erin Ronald (CivicSpark Fellow 2019-2020)
13. Angelica Gonzalez (CivicSpark Fellow 2020-2021)
14. Matthew Renfro (CivicSpark Fellow 2020-2021)
15. Lexi Daoussis (CivicSpark Fellow 2020-2021)
16. Vanessa Shin (CivicSpark Fellow 2019-2020)
17. Kory Burt (CivicSpark Fellow 2020-2021)
18. Hoi-Fei Mok (CivicSpark alumni 2015-2016)
19. Emma Diamond (CivicSpark alumni 2019-2020)
20. Ryan Silber (CivicSpark alumni 2016-2017)
21. Erica Copeland (CivicSpark Fellow 2020-2021)
22. Elizabeth Havey (CivicSpark Fellow 2020-2021)
23. Miles Gordon (CivicSpark Fellow 2019-2020)

24. Harrison Ashby (CivicSpark Fellow 2020-2021)
25. Trinity Smyth (CivicSpark Fellow 2019-2020)
26. Edgar Barraza (CivicSpark alumni, 2018-2019)
27. Alice Tiffany (CivicSpark Fellow, 2020-2021)
28. Andrew Bake (CivicSpark Fellow 2020-2021)
29. Mahogany Smith-Christopher (CivicSpark Fellow 2020-2021)
30. Marjan Kris Ramos Abubo (CivicSpark alumni, 2018-2019)
31. Melanie Fornes (CivicSpark alumnus 17-18)
32. Sy Baker (CivicSpark Fellow 2020-2021)
33. Michelle Geldin (CivicSpark Fellow 2019 - 2020, 2020 - 2021)
34. Ngozi Chukwueke (CivicSpark Fellow 2020-2021)
35. Sarah Kolarik (CivicSpark Fellow 2017-2018)
36. Em Emily Ontiveros (CivicSpark Fellow 2019-2020)
37. Julian Nesbitt (CivicSpark Fellow 2020-2021)
38. Serena Pelka (CivicSpark Alumni 2019-2020)
39. Maggie O'Shea (CivicSpark Fellow 2020-2021)
40. Kelsey Berger (CivicSpark Fellow 2020-2021)

From REPG Survey

BIAS: An error in evaluating performance, skill or potential. In evaluating performance, bias leads to lower assessments for some and more lenient ones for others—despite the same qualifications and level of accomplishment (Steinpreis, Anders, Ritzke 1999)

MICROAGGRESSIONS: Microaggressions are “the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership,” (Sue et al., 2007)

INTERPERSONAL/INDIVIDUAL RACISM: Individual racism can include face-to-face or covert actions toward a person that intentionally express prejudice, hate or bias based on race (i.e., using coded language, questioning someone’s competence based on their race or ethnicity, etc).

Interpersonal or individual racism also exists within individuals, including when one holds negative ideas about his/her own culture, even if unknowingly. Xenophobic feelings or one’s internalized sense of oppression/privilege are two examples of individual or internalized racism. Microaggressions are a form of interpersonal racism. (Source: Intergroup Resources).

WHITE PRIVILEGE: Refers to the unquestioned and unearned set of advantages, entitlements, benefits and choices bestowed on people solely because they are white. Generally white people who experience such privilege do so without being conscious of it. (McIntosh, 1988).

INSTITUTIONAL/STRUCTURAL/SYSTEMIC RACISM: A system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. It identifies dimensions of our history and culture that have allowed privileges associated with “whiteness” and disadvantages associated with “color” to endure and adapt over time. Structural racism is not something that a few people or institutions choose to practice. Rather, it has been a feature of the social, economic and political systems in which we all exist. (i.e. people of color have been left out of wealth creation, home ownership as a result of centuries of structured racialized practices, police are likely to focus on certain areas of a city where there are predominantly Black and Latino people etc.).

ALLYSHIP: Allyship is the lifelong practice of self-reflection and action, which involves reevaluating beliefs, working in solidarity with marginalized individuals and groups, and building relationships based upon the ability of social privilege to support the marginalized group. Allyship involves two types of behaviors: Supportive behaviors: being present for and listening to the struggles of marginalized groups and providing support; and Advocacy behaviors: educating peers, confronting discriminatory attitudes and behaviors, and advocating for better policies and resources to support marginalized groups. (Stanford: Setting the Frame: Privilege, Power and Allyship)

INTERSECTIONALITY: A lens, originally developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, for seeing how the various axes of systemic inequality – such as race, class, gender and sexuality – operate together to uniquely shape a person’s life, sometimes in ways that exacerbate their experiences of oppression (Crenshaw 1989; Collins 2000).



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The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
United States Senate
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Support for the CORPS Act S. 1165

Dear Senator Feinstein,

As the Program Director for National Service at Local Government Commission, I am reaching out to express our full-hearted support for the CORPS Act introduced by Sens. Coons (D-DE) and Wicker (R-MS) on April 15, 2021.

Over the past seven years, Local Government Commission has supported nearly 500 AmeriCorps Fellows to help build capacity for local governments to address community resilience issues such as climate change, water resource management, housing, and mobility. These Fellows have played a critical role in addressing emerging issues facing the state of California.

Specifically, we'd like to call attention to the provisions which call for **an increase in the living allowance to 175% of the poverty line for a single individual, the removal of the cap on cost per member-service-year and federal tax exemptions for the Americorps living stipend and the Segal Education Award.**

Currently, our Fellows are asked to sign up for SNAP benefits, often rely on housing support from family and friends, and frequently need to find another job on top of their 40 hour a week role to make ends meet. Even with these factors present, the challenges they face often cause them to go into debt and leave little room to weather unexpected life events. This is unacceptable and a significant barrier for people from low-income families, and disproportionately people of color, taking part in national service.

We urge you to support and co-sponsor this important piece of legislation. Thank you for your time and attention to this issue.

Sincerely,

Shauna Goodman
Program Director, National Service

Cc: Kate Meis Wright, Executive Director



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Playworks
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Rebuilding Together Acadania – LA
Rebuilding Together New Orleans - LA
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Seeds 4 Success
SEEDS Ecology and Education Centers
Serve New Mexico Commission
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Service Year Alliance
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States for Service Coalition
Stewards Program
Strive Together
Student Conservation Association
Student Conservation Association in LA

Student Conservation Association in NE
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