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CivicSpark

Evaluation Report | 2016

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CivicSpark
Local Government Commission
980 9th Street, Suite 1700
Sacramento, CA 95814

Submitted by:

LPC Consulting Associates, Inc.
2015 J Street, Suite 205
Sacramento, CA 95811
www.lpc-associates.com

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Section 1 Background & Introduction

In recent decades, climate change has become a pressing cause for concern in communities around the world. The effects of climate change, which include rising temperatures and extreme weather events, have started to negatively impact people and the environment in a number of ways. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) acknowledges that these changes in the planet's climate "affect people's health and quality of life, including where people can live, what kinds of crops are most viable, what kinds of businesses can thrive in certain areas, and the condition of buildings and infrastructure" (Climate Change Indicators in the United States, EPA, 2016). It is likely that over time the negative impacts of climate change will only broaden and worsen if steps are not taken to combat their effects.

In California specifically, the impact of climate change is readily apparent with severe drought plaguing the State since 2012. To address climate change at the State level, in 2006 the California legislature enacted a set of ambitious climate change goals aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent below 1990 levels before the year 2030. This integrated plan proposes using a multi-pronged approach to achieve this goal, employing climate action strategies that include increasing renewable electricity production, reducing vehicle petroleum use, and bolstering energy efficiency of existing buildings, all of which will serve to safeguard California against the adverse effects of climate change.

While participation from almost all sectors of the economy is needed to accomplish these sweeping goals, a large portion of the responsibility for implementing climate action strategies falls to local government agencies. At the local level, government agencies are on the front line of planning, researching, developing policy, and implementing programs geared toward combating climate change. However, many agencies are not equipped with the tools and resources necessary to effectively carry out these efforts. For instance, local governments are often without dedicated staffing, data, formal plans, or mechanisms to track progress on initiatives. As such, there is a significant need for increased capacity among agencies and organizations responsible for achieving climate action goals over the next 15 years. While the statewide goals are integral for preventing negative effects on California's ecological and economic systems, the achievement of these goals will not be possible without local governments that have the staffing, training, and tools required to effectively address climate change at the local level.

To address these capacity issues, the CivicSpark program is designed to bolster the ability of local governments across the State to effectively respond to climate change. As a Governor's Initiative AmeriCorps program administered by the Local Government Commission (LGC), CivicSpark engages skilled AmeriCorps members to work collaboratively with government agencies on research, planning, and implementation projects in pursuit of advancing local climate change initiatives. The program model leverages the strengths and experience of AmeriCorps members to help accelerate climate action by providing these agencies with: (1) tangible products with actionable information and resources, (2) volunteer engagement support, and (3) tools and methods needed to integrate climate action into new and existing local programs. In addition, CivicSpark aims to generate a more effective and sustainable statewide response to climate change through the development of regional networks and resource sharing platforms that enable local governments to align efforts and learn from one another. Over time, it is the hope that the technical assistance and resources CivicSpark offers to these agencies will result in healthier and more resilient communities across the State.

In August 2016, the Local Government Commission contracted with LPC Consulting Associates, Inc. (LPC) to conduct an evaluation study of the CivicSpark program in pursuit of measuring program outcomes and collecting information to inform program implementation and improvement. This report presents a summary of the evaluation, with an overview of the evaluation approach (Section 2); a brief description of program components and implementation (Section 3); and evaluation findings related to capacity building, member growth, and program feedback (Section 4). The report concludes with recommendations based on evaluation findings (Section 5) to inform program refinements. The primary purpose of the evaluation is to determine the impact that CivicSpark has on the government agencies that participate and on the fellows who work to build the capacity of these partner agencies.

Section 2   Evaluation Approach

The evaluation of the CivicSpark program in the first two years of implementation included both process and outcome components. The process evaluation sought to describe the program and document the successes and challenges encountered during implementation, while the outcome component aimed to measure the immediate impact of the program on participating partner agencies and CivicSpark fellows. Table 1 lists the key research questions for the evaluation, delineated by process and outcome measures.

Table 1 | Key Research Questions

Questions	Process	Outcome
1. What are the immediate program outcomes related to climate action capacity building?		✔
2. How do local government agencies benefit from participation in the CivicSpark program?		✔
3. What lasting impact does CivicSpark have on the community?		✔
4. What do fellows learn or gain through their involvement in CivicSpark?		✔
5. How is the CivicSpark program implemented?	✔	
6. What are the most valuable aspects of the program?	✔	
7. What areas of the program could be improved in order to enhance outcomes?	✔	

The CivicSpark outcome evaluation measured program effectiveness by examining changes in partners' capacity to address climate change, as well as changes in fellows' skills and work performance. The process evaluation addressed descriptive elements of the program, and collected program feedback via interviews with fellows and partner agencies to inform program improvement. It is important to note that while CivicSpark offers two fellowship tracks, the Climate Action Fellowship and the Water Action Fellowship, this evaluation study focused solely on the climate action component of the program.

2.1   Data Collection Tools

The CivicSpark program evaluation used a mixed methods approach to optimize learning opportunities and to help triangulate evaluation findings. As such, the evaluation included a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection tools to document implementation and measure immediate outcomes. Data was collected using four different methods, including: (1) a Capacity Assessment Survey, (2) a Member Outcomes Survey, (3) fellow interviews, and (4) site supervisor interviews. Each of these evaluation activities is described in detail below.

Climate Capacity Assessment Survey

To learn how the CivicSpark program impacts partner agencies, the evaluation included a Climate Capacity Assessment survey that collected information on partner agencies' capacity to address climate change before and after the program. The pre- and post-survey tool, designed and administered by LGC, included three overarching topic areas: (1) knowledge and understanding (of policy factors, internal structure and support for action, personal understanding, and training), (2) capacity building goal achievement, and (3)

volunteer engagement. The Climate Capacity Assessment was administered online to all participating agencies in year one and year two of the CivicSpark program. In total, 161 partners completed both the pre- and post-survey (80 in year one and 81 in year two[1]). For the analysis, the evaluator calculated pre- and post-score averages and ran paired sample t-tests on each item to determine whether differences in scores were statistically significant. A comparison of the pre- and post-survey results provide insight about the degree to which CivicSpark is achieving its capacity-building goals.

Member Performance Outcomes Survey

The evaluation also included a Member Performance Outcomes Survey to measure changes in CivicSpark fellow skills and work performance over the course of the program. This tool was designed by LGC, and administered to fellows and their site supervisors once at the beginning of the fellowship and again at the end of the program. To complete the survey, fellows rated themselves on a scale from 1 to 5 on a number of professional, organizational, and leadership skills, and site supervisors rated the fellows on these same indicators of performance. The Member Performance Outcomes Survey was administered to all fellows and site supervisors through the CivicSpark online portal. In total, 80 fellows (39 in year one and 41 in year two) and 79 site supervisors (48 in year one and 31 in year two[1]) completed the survey. A comparison of pre- and post-survey results provided a measure of how the program impacts fellows' personal and professional development over the course of their participation in the CivicSpark fellowship.

Fellow Interviews

To augment the quantitative data collected by LGC, the evaluation consultant collected qualitative data about fellows' experiences via hour-long telephone interviews with 10 fellows who participated in the CivicSpark program during the 2015/16 program year. These interviews captured in-depth information about fellows' experiences with CivicSpark, perceptions of the impact they had, and feedback about the program (see Appendix A for a list of fellow interview questions). The interview protocol, designed by the evaluation team, included topics related to: (1) the fellowship experience, (2) agency and community impacts, (3) personal impacts, (4) CivicSpark feedback, and (5) future plans. Evaluation staff analyzed interview responses using content analysis to surface common themes, and used the interview data to further explain quantitative findings as well as to learn about aspects of the program not captured via the Capacity Assessment survey or the Member Performance Outcomes Survey.

Site Supervisor Interviews

Lastly, the evaluator conducted in-depth telephone interviews with CivicSpark site supervisors to add an additional layer of qualitative input to the evaluation study. LPC staff reached out to 10 interview candidates, and conducted hour-long telephone interviews with eight site supervisors who participated in the CivicSpark program during the 2015/16 program year. The interview protocol, designed by the evaluation team, collected data regarding (1) the site supervisor experience, (2) insights about fellows, (3) agency and community impacts, (4) CivicSpark feedback, and (5) future plans (see Appendix B for a list of supervisor interview questions). As with the fellow interviews, the evaluator employed content analysis to surface common themes across supervisor interview responses. Where applicable, site supervisor and fellow interview findings were analyzed together to demonstrate overlap in themes.

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[1] Year two data included surveys collected up through mid-October 2016, to allow sufficient time for analysis and reporting.

Section 3   Program Description & Implementation

The Local Government Commission launched the CivicSpark program in 2013 to address the increasingly pressing need for a concerted response to climate change throughout the state of California. To this end, CivicSpark engages AmeriCorps members to work with local governments in order to build agencies' capacity to effectively implement climate action projects. This section describes key elements of the program, and provides a snapshot of implementation during the first two program years.

3.1   Program Overview

Each year, CivicSpark places 48 Climate Action fellows with local government agencies in need of technical assistance and support on climate action projects. During the 11-month service year, CivicSpark fellows work in collaboration with their host agency to complete climate action research, planning, and implementation projects, all of which build the capacity of local governments to address specific climate change needs. Through this experience, not only do local governments receive dedicated project support, but CivicSpark fellows are able to gain valuable professional development experience as well as access to a network of colleagues in the climate action field. Ultimately, it is expected that the concerted efforts of CivicSpark fellows throughout the State will improve California's response to climate change and create a cohort of young professionals with the skills necessary to become leaders in the climate action field.

Program Regions

CivicSpark fellows serve across the State and are organized into eight geographic regions, which include: Sierra Nevada, Central Coast, Los Angeles, North Coast, San Joaquin Valley, San Francisco Bay Area, Sacramento, and Southern California. Each region has a regional team consisting of a Regional Coordinator and the CivicSpark fellows placed in that area of the State.

CivicSpark Fellows

All fellows bring a four-year college degree and relevant experience to their CivicSpark fellowship. Most CivicSpark fellows are recent college graduates and have previous training in environmentally-related fields. Over the course of the 11-month fellowship, Climate Action fellows spend 1,700 hours working full-time with their host agency on climate action projects. For their participation, fellows receive a small stipend and an education award, as well as professional development training and connection to a network of contacts in the climate field. During the program, fellows also have access to intensive mentorship and statewide networking opportunities.

Partner Agencies

To maximize program effectiveness, CivicSpark works with local government agencies, such as cities, schools, and public departments, that demonstrate a "capacity need." Local governments that are eligible to participate in CivicSpark are those that lack a full-time sustainability staff person, a formally adopted climate action plan, and/or mechanisms to track progress on climate action. Each year, CivicSpark also seeks to engage agencies considered "high need," based on levels of unemployment, energy use, and local government employment in the community where the agency is located. Although CivicSpark receives grant funding to offset the cost of project support, participation in the program requires a fiscal contribution from partner agencies based on the amount of fellow time dedicated to a project.

CivicSpark Projects

Fellows work on a range of climate change mitigation and adaption projects at their host agencies during the program year. While project topics vary, all CivicSpark fellows provide support to their host agencies through the same four-step process:

1. **Gap Assessment**: fellows collect primary and secondary data to determine current climate change needs

2. **Service Projects**: fellows implement a specific research, planning, or implementation project based on gap assessment results

3. **Volunteer Engagement**: fellows establish new volunteer programs or enhance pre-existing programs relevant to climate change

4. **Transitioning Expertise**: fellows provide training to staff and share project results with key stakeholders to sustain progress

As mentioned, the projects that CivicSpark fellows work on during their fellowship all focus on building the community's response to climate change at the local level but range widely in terms of scope and topic area. Examples of project topics completed during the first two years of implementation include: sustainable transportation, energy efficiency, solar procurement, urban forestry, sea level rise, climate action planning and implementation, greenhouse gas inventories, benchmark tracking, complete streets plans, and community campaigns. Specifically, during the first program year fellows supported the creation of 8 climate or energy action plans, 17 climate action policies, 10 vulnerability assessments, 8 greenhouse gas inventories, 12 community workshops, and 4 energy benchmarking projects. Via these projects, fellows gain hands-on experience while advancing local agencies' climate action initiatives.

3.2 Program Implementation

Over the first two years of the program, CivicSpark engaged a total of 96 fellows who worked with 76 partners to complete 172 capacity building projects for public agencies to help build California's response to climate change. Through their efforts, agencies engaged 802 community volunteers. Figure 1 presents a snapshot of program implementation in years one and two, as well as a total count of program activities since inception.

As shown in Figure 1, the program expanded in scope from year one to year two of implementation. During the first project year (2014/15), CivicSpark engaged a cohort of 48 climate action fellows who were placed with 37 project partners, and completed 86 unique capacity building projects for public agency beneficiaries that helped to address climate change issues in the community. During the first year, fellows contributed a combined total of 62,000 hours of service during their fellowship. In the second program year (2015/16), CivicSpark engaged 48 climate action fellows who who were placed with 39 project partners, and completed another 86 unique capacity building projects for public agency beneficiaries. During the second project year, fellows contributed over 72,000 hours of service to the local government agencies they served.

Figure 1 | CivicSpark Program Implementation

YEAR 1 (2014/15)	YEAR 2 (2015/16)	TOTAL (2014-16)
48 climate action fellows	**48** climate action fellows	**96** climate action fellows
37 climate action partners	**39** climate action partners	**76** climate action partners
Over **62,000** hours of service	Over **72,000** hours of service	Over **134,000** hours of service
86 beneficiary projects completed	**86** beneficiary projects completed	**172** beneficiary projects completed
238 volunteers engaged	**564** volunteers engaged	**802** volunteers engaged
1,317 volunteer hours donated	**1,598** volunteer hours donated	**2,915** volunteer hours donated

As shown in Figure 1, volunteer engagement also increased from year one to year two. In the first program year, fellows recruited 238 volunteers who spent at total of 1,317 hours participating in climate action initiatives and events hosted by partner agencies. In the second program year, CivicSpark fellows recruited 564 community volunteers, over twice as many as the previous year. These volunteers dedicated 1,598 hours to climate change initiatives during recurring and one-time events.

Section 4   Evaluation Findings

As discussed, the evaluation of the CivicSpark program included the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data to measure program outcomes and capture information about program implementation. This section of the report presents a summary of evaluation findings related to: (1) partner capacity building, (2) fellow performance and growth, and (3) program feedback. The data included in the analysis was collected via multiple methods, including a Capacity Assessment Survey, a Member Outcomes Survey, and in-depth interviews with a sample of CivicSpark fellows and site supervisors.

4.1   Partner Agency Capacity Building

The primary objective of the CivicSpark program is to build the capacity of local government agencies to more effectively address climate change, by supporting these entities on a variety of projects designed to protect the environment. As such, the CivicSpark evaluation included a Climate Capacity Assessment survey completed by partner agencies at the beginning and end of the 11-month program term. The survey asked respondents to rate their knowledge and understanding of climate change issues, as well as describe the degree to which the agency reached its goals related to project and staff development, diffusion of knowledge, and volunteer engagement. In total, 161 agency representatives completed both the pre- and the post-survey (80 in year one and 81 in year two). The following sections present the results of the Capacity Assessment as well as capacity-related findings from fellow and site supervisor interviews.

4.1.1   Knowledge Development

The first portion of the Capacity Assessment collected information on partners' knowledge and understanding of various climate change issues as well as support for climate change initiatives from local representatives. For each topic area (policy factors, personal understanding, training, and internal structure and support), partners were asked to rate their agency on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represented no understanding or support and 5 represented deep understanding or support. Figure 2 displays the aggregate average pre- and post-scores of CivicSpark partners in each area of knowledge development. As shown, all areas of development increased over the course of the CivicSpark program. Knowledge of policy factors, personal understanding of climate issues, and training all increased 0.3 points (on a scale of 1-5), while internal structure and support increased by a smaller amount (0.1 points). A comparison of year one and year two results shows that knowledge development ratings were relatively similar across program years, thus this report presents the aggregate analysis for each of the topic areas (for a breakout of year one and year two data, see Appendix C).

Figure 2 | Average Pre and Post Ratings of Partner Capacity (Years 1&2)
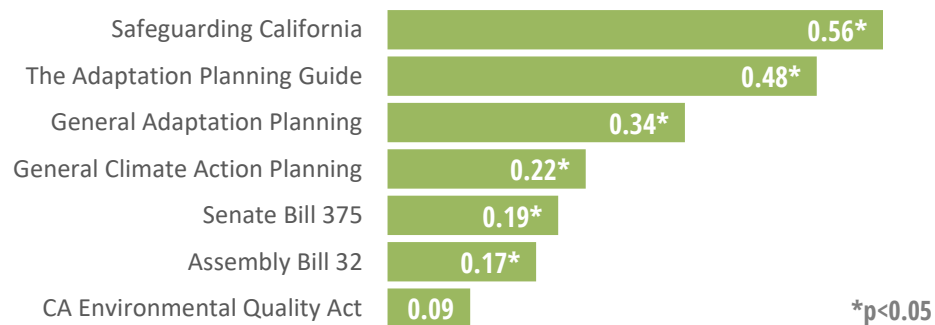**(1=lowest level and 5=highest level)**
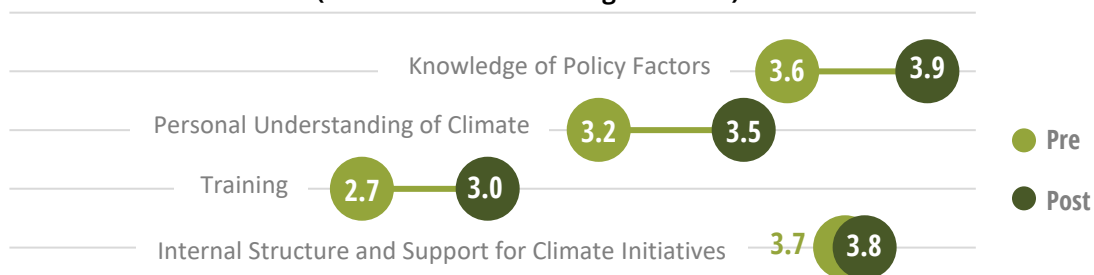
Knowledge of Climate Change Policy Factors

First, the Capacity Assessment measured partners' familiarity with state policies and climate action approaches in order to assess changes in agency awareness of climate-related legislation and familiarity with action and adaptation planning over time. Survey respondents were asked to rank their level of familiarity with various policy mechanisms and strategies on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 represented "not familiar" and 5 represented "very familiar."

As shown in Figure 3 below, partners reported an increase in knowledge on each item assessed, and this increase was statistically significant at the 0.05 level for all but one policy factor. Partners reported the greatest positive change in knowledge about Safeguarding California (0.56 increase) and the Adaptation Planning Guide (0.48 increase). There was less improvement related to knowledge of legislative bills and the California Environmental Quality Act. However, pre-survey results indicated that partner knowledge of these items was high (3.55 and above) before the program, which may explain the smaller positive change in these areas.

Figure 3 | Change in Partners' Knowledge of Climate Change Policy Factors (Years 1&2)
(ratings are on a scale of 1 to 5)

Policy Factor	Change
Safeguarding California	0.56*
The Adaptation Planning Guide	0.48*
General Adaptation Planning	0.34*
General Climate Action Planning	0.22*
Senate Bill 375	0.19*
Assembly Bill 32	0.17*
CA Environmental Quality Act	0.09

*p<0.05

Personal Understanding of Climate Action

The Capacity Assessment also captured changes in respondents' understanding of various topics related to climate change, in terms of how climate change affects the community, what the community needs, and what steps can be taken to address climate change issues. These are critical areas of understanding for effectively planning and implementing climate action initiatives, as well as for sustaining these efforts. Respondents were asked to rank their level of understanding of the various climate change topics on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 represented "little understanding" and 5 represented "deep understanding."

Partners reported a positive increase in understanding on each topic assessed, and this increase was statistically significant at the 0.05 level for all items with the exception of one, as shown in Figure 4. Based on survey results, partners showed the greatest improvement in understanding of the long term steps (0.45 increase) and near term steps (0.42 increase) to take to adapt to climate change at the community level. Partners reported the smallest positive gain in understanding where their community is most vulnerable to impacts from climate change. Considering this was the only item of personal understanding that did not show a statistically significant increase, this could be an area that CivicSpark might further support and enhance in upcoming program cycles.

Figure 4 | Change in Partners' Personal Understanding of Climate Action Issues (Years 1&2)
(ratings are on a scale of 1 to 5)

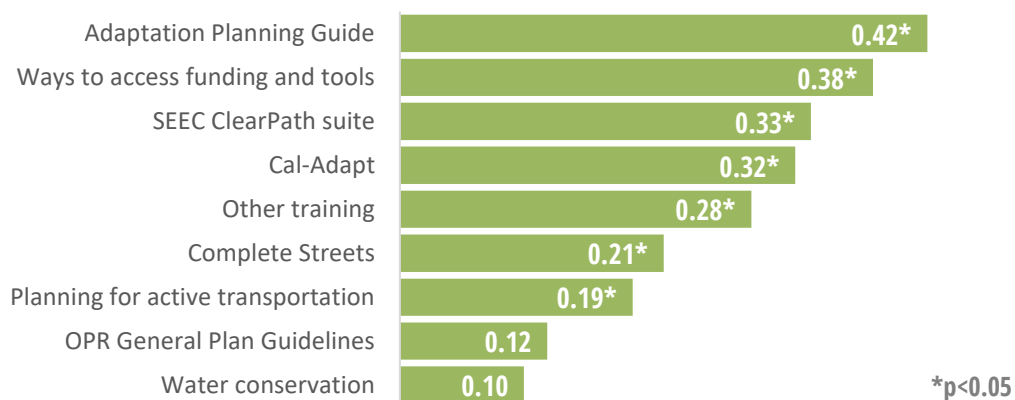|	
Long term steps to take	0.45*
Near term steps to take	0.42*
What can be done to reduce emissions	0.29*
Necessary resources to respond	0.27*
How climate change affects community	0.23*
Where the community is most vulnerable	0.10

*p<0.05

Training on Climate Action Tools

Staff training on the tools and methods needed to effectively plan and implement climate protection initiatives is essential to local governments' ability to respond to climate issues at the community level. As such, the CivicSpark Capacity Assessment asked respondents to report the amount of training agency staff received before and after participation in the program. Respondents ranked the amount of training they or their staff received on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 represented "not trained" and 5 represented "very well trained."

Overall, partners rated participation in training lower than any of the other climate capacity areas included in the assessment (an average of 2.7 on the pre-survey and 3.0 on the post-survey). This does not necessarily come as a surprise, as government personnel often wear many hats and have little time to spend in training sessions. Encouragingly, although training remained the lowest rated capacity area at the conclusion of the program, partners did report an increase in training on each of the nine areas assessed, all but two of which were statistically significant at the 0.05 level. As displayed in Figure 5, the greatest positive change was training on the Adaptation Planning Guide and ways to access funding for tools to assess and measure climate change action. Training on The Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) General Plan Guidelines and water conversation showed the least amount of change over the course of the program. The small improvement related to water conservation training was likely a result of a relatively high average rating on the pre-survey (3.58), although this was not the case for training on OPR guidelines.

Figure 5 | Change in Partners' Training on Climate Action Tools and Methods (Years 1&2)
(ratings are on a scale of 1 to 5)

|	
Adaptation Planning Guide	0.42*
Ways to access funding and tools	0.38*
SEEC ClearPath suite	0.33*
Cal-Adapt	0.32*
Other training	0.28*
Complete Streets	0.21*
Planning for active transportation	0.19*
OPR General Plan Guidelines	0.12
Water conservation	0.10

*p<0.05

Internal Structure and Support for Climate Action Initiatives

Lastly, the Capacity Assessment measured change in the amount of support for climate initiatives that partners perceive they have within their agency and in the community at large. Respondents rated the level of support for moving forward with climate action efforts on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 represented "not at all supported" and 5 represented "very well supported."

As shown in Figure 6, this was the only capacity area where there was an item with negative change over the course of the program. Although support from community members, the city manager, and department heads increased, these increases were slight and none were statistically significant at a 0.05 level. In addition, partners reported that support from elected officials decreased overall. With a new presidential administration slated to take office in 2017, garnering support from local elected officials for climate change action initiatives will only become more important. This may be an opportunity for CivicSpark to implement additional skill-building for fellows and partners in this capacity area.

Figure 6 | Change in Partners' Support for Climate Action Initiatives (Years 1&2)
(ratings are on a scale of 1 to 5)

Community Members	0.12
City Manager	0.03
Department Heads	0.02
Elected Officials	-0.04
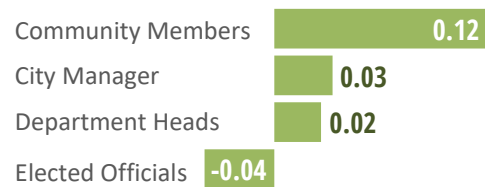
4.1.2   Goal Achievement

At the beginning of the CivicSpark program, all partner agencies develop specific goals that they hope to achieve during the program. The Capacity Assessment post-survey measured the degree to which partner agencies met these goals in three specific areas:

- **Project development goals** (i.e., completion of research project, program implementation, completion of planning document)

- **Staff development goals** (i.e., agency staff receive training and technical assistance, engage in climate change campaigns, or gain deeper understanding of community needs)

- **Diffusion of knowledge goals** (i.e., provide results to elected officials, engage key stakeholders in continued work, complete action plan for continued project work)

Based on post-Capacity Assessment results, a majority of partner agencies met or exceeded their climate initiative goals in each of the three areas over the course of the CivicSpark program. As shown in Figure 7, 62% of partners met or exceeded diffusion of knowledge goals, 60% met or exceeded project goals, and 59% met or exceeded staff development goals. A little over one-third of partner agencies reported partially meeting their objectives in each of the goal areas, and only a small portion of partners (5% and fewer) did not meet their intended goals.

Figure 7 | Partner Goal Achievement (Years 1&2)

Project Development Goals — 3%, 19%, 37%, 41%

Staff Development Goals — 5%, 13%, 36%, 46%

Diffusion of Knowledge Goals — 4%, 12%, 34%, 50%

Legend: Did not meet goals | Partially met goals | Fully met goals | Exceeded goals

A comparison of year one and year two goal achievement indicates that CivicSpark is increasingly effective at helping partner agencies reach their project, staff development, and diffusion of knowledge goals during the program. While 53% of partners met or exceeded their project goals in year one, in year two two-thirds (66%) of the partners met or exceeded their project goals (a 25% increase). Similarly, just under half (49%) of partners met or exceeded staff development goals in year one, and this increased to 69% in year two (a 41% increase). Lastly, 56% of partners met or exceeded their diffusion of knowledge goals in year one, increasing to 70% in year two (a 25% increase).

Overall, partners agreed that support from CivicSpark increased the effectiveness and efficiency of their agency's climate action work. Across years one and two, 87% of partners felt that the CivicSpark program's capacity building activities increased the effectiveness of their work, and 86% said the capacity building activities increased the efficiency with which they implemented their climate action initiatives.

87%

of partner agencies reported that CivicSpark increased the effectiveness of their climate action work

4.1.3 Volunteer Engagement

The last section of the Capacity Assessment addressed the degree to which CivicSpark helped partner agencies build and sustain volunteer engagement capacity. Based on aggregate year one and year two survey results, half (50%) of partners reported that the agency met or exceeded implementation goals related to the volunteer engagement strategy identified at the beginning of the program, while 25% "somewhat" met their goals and 25% did not meet their implementation goals with regard to volunteer engagement. Overall, 43% of partners reported that their use of volunteers for climate change activities increased and almost half (48%) said that their volunteer engagement approaches improved as a result of CivicSpark support. Compared to the other goal areas (i.e., project development, staff development, and diffusion of knowledge), these findings suggest that volunteer engagement had the weakest outcomes in terms of goal achievement.

While aggregate survey results indicate that the volunteer engagement component of the CivicSpark program is not as strong as other capacity-building areas, when comparing year one and year two results it appears that this element improved over time. Figure 8 displays the percentage of partners in year one

and in year two that reported an increase in use of volunteers and an improvement in volunteer engagement approaches. As shown, a larger portion of the agencies in year two achieved these outcomes, as compared to those in year one, although additional years of data are needed to determine whether this will be a sustained trend. In any case, it will be useful for CivicSpark staff to identify what is working well with volunteer engagement, as well as closely examine why this capacity area does not show the same degree of positive change as other program components.

Figure 8 | Volunteer Engagement Outcomes by Program Year

% of partners reporting their...
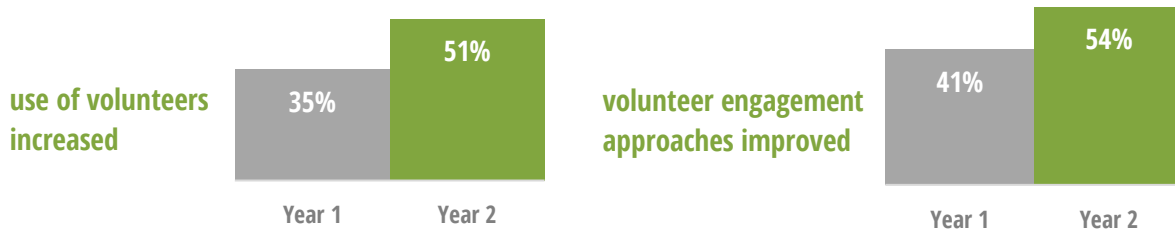
4.1.4 **Interview Findings related to Capacity Building**

To more thoroughly understand how CivicSpark impacts the capacity of local government agencies, the evaluator conducted in-depth interviews with a sample of ten CivicSpark fellows and eight site supervisors. Interview findings revealed that fellows and supervisors had a variety of perspectives related to the capacity building support CivicSpark provides to partner agencies. Most interviewees acknowledged that their agency would not have undertaken the climate action project without support from a CivicSpark fellow. Several fellows and supervisors agreed that, while the agencies may have been able to complete climate action projects without a fellow's assistance, they would not have had the capacity to do so as efficiently or to the same scale. Interview findings suggest that fellows were instrumental in taking climate action initiatives further that agency staff could have by themselves, which demonstrates that CivicSpark is helping to accelerate climate action across the State:

> *We would have gotten it done somehow I guess...but there was a lot of overlap with deadlines and project priorities...that would not have essentially happened if it wasn't for him helping me keep things afloat. –2015/16 CivicSpark Site Supervisor*

> *It would have still happened, but it would have taken a lot longer to kick off...what we were able to do was expedite [the] process. –2015/16 CivicSpark Fellow*

> *They would have been able to work on [my project], but [they would] not to be able to do all of those tasks and projects, and not at the scale accomplished. –2015/16 CivicSpark Fellow*

> *Those planning tasks were on time and done well without staff, and it may have not been done a) on time b) or well. So having them done to the standard that we like moves us along further in the process. –2015/16 CivicSpark Site Supervisor*

A number of fellows and supervisors noted that CivicSpark not only builds the capacity of local governments, but also supports the climate change efforts of the State as a whole. Fellows and supervisors alike mentioned that CivicSpark will have a lasting impact through the creation of a growing network of young people who will continue careers in the climate field after their CivicSpark fellowship concludes:

The true benefit lies in that it brings together a whole generation of young people [to get] involved in local government and climate change…What we're able to accomplish in 11 months will have a lasting impact, but it's what goes on after 11 months…[this has] motivated us to make a difference and that will have a real lasting impact. –2015/16 CivicSpark Fellow

The most valuable [aspect of CivicSpark] is…it's really making the new relationships and connections with Sacramento and the CivicSpark program, continuing that ball forward and continuing to create younger folks interested in the field. –2015/16 CivicSpark Site Supervisor

Fellows and supervisors also highlighted volunteer engagement capacity as a positive outcome of the CivicSpark program, despite Capacity Assessment results that indicated only 40% of partners increased their use of community volunteers. Fellows noticed that volunteer and stakeholder engagement strategies were successful at promoting dialogue about climate change in the community, and one fellow noted that "honing in on volunteer engagement" was one of the key skills he gained during his fellowship. Through volunteer engagement efforts, supervisors and fellows reported increased awareness of climate change issues both inside the partner agency and in the community at large. When speaking about his host agency, one fellow noted that "[Climate change] is in the forefront of people's mind now, whereas it was not discussed before."

People [in the agency] start to recognize us and say, 'These are the CivicSpark fellows. They're here to work on climate change issues.'…That's also had an impact on the dialogue on climate change in the region. –2015/16 CivicSpark Fellow

[Fellows] were pivotal in maintaining relationships…if we gain a relationship with our stakeholders, it's usually with an ED or someone, not from a temporary worker…it was lovely that they would come back with business cards from Caltrans and other agencies –2015/16 CivicSpark Site Supervisor

Site supervisors offered mixed assessments of the degree to which CivicSpark will have a long-lasting impact on climate action at the local level. While a number of supervisors agreed that fellows' efforts will result in sustainable capacity gains over the long-term, some interviewees suggested that sustainability will be dependent on the resources to hire additional staff or future CivicSpark fellows. One supervisor from an agency that has participated in CivicSpark for three consecutive years stated that each year, fellows build on the progress made in the previous year: "Everything [the fellows] are doing now in year three, it's cumulative. It's not like they start over…they continue to update and upgrade the projects." Other supervisors suggested that CivicSpark will have a long-lasting impact on the community because of gains in local infrastructure that were realized during the program:

I think that [CivicSpark] will leave a lasting impact and change for how we manage waste and how we track the city's priorities as a whole. These infrastructure improvements will be around for fifteen, twenty, twenty-five years. –2015/16 CivicSpark Site Supervisor

Although a number of supervisors were optimistic about the long-term impacts of fellows' climate action projects, several reported that they considered CivicSpark useful for completing short-term projects but not necessarily for building long-lasting capacity. As one supervisor stated, "We are using CivicSpark [fellows] to get projects done." Other supervisors voiced concern that maintaining the projects after fellows leave may be difficult, especially if projects are left partially completed:

If [the fellows] leave and the project isn't done, we're still back to the same number of staff in the office. –2015/16 CivicSpark Site Supervisor

I think what we have created with [our fellow] is not in itself is a lasting contribution to local jurisdictions. I think there's still time and effort needed to continue to go into the process. –2015/16 CivicSpark Site Supervisor

Overall, evaluation findings suggest that CivicSpark has a significant effect on the capacity of local and government agencies to respond to climate change. While some capacity areas showed greater improvement over the course of the program than others, taken as a whole, results suggest that CivicSpark is moving the needle on climate action within the agencies that participate in the program.

4.2 Fellow Growth and Performance

Not only does CivicSpark seek to enhance the capacity of local governments to address climate change at the community level, the program also helps fellows develop professionally and gain work skills to serve them in future careers and educational endeavors. To gather information about changes in fellows' work performance and professionalism over the course of the program, the evaluation included a Member Performance Outcomes Survey and in-depth interviews with both fellows and their site supervisors.

4.2.1 Member Performance Outcomes Survey Results

The Member Performance Outcomes Survey was administered to all CivicSpark fellows and site supervisors at the beginning and end of the program year. The survey included a number of statements related to fellow performance, and respondents were asked to rate themselves (or their supervisee) on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 represented "beginner" level with little to no experience, and 5 represented "expert" level with advanced proficiency. The survey also included open-ended questions to collect descriptive data on fellow achievements. In total, 80 fellows (39 in year one and 41 in year two) and 79 site supervisors (48 in year one and 31 in year two) completed both the pre-survey and the post-survey.

Figure 9 displays the average ratings of member performance at the beginning and the end of the CivicSpark fellowship. As shown, fellows increased their performance on each of the 20 indicators included in the survey. In general, fellows and supervisors reported similar ratings, although supervisors rated the fellows consistently higher than fellows rated themselves. Areas of strongest growth (where average ratings increased a full point or more among both fellows and supervisors) were related to: (1) project planning and implementation, (2) use of technical tools and systems, (3) consistency and quality of project output, and (4) implementation of record keeping tasks. Interestingly, performance areas that received the lowest ratings on both the pre- and the post-survey were related to volunteer engagement and support, which mirrors results from the Capacity Assessment survey that volunteer outcomes were less robust than other capacity areas. This provides additional support for the addition or enhancement of training to bolster fellow and agency staff capacity for volunteer engagement.

Across the 20 indicators of fellow performance, average ratings increased almost a full point from 3.2 to 4.1 among fellow respondents and from 3.5 to 4.3 among supervisors. Considering that a rating of 5 represents an "expert" level on these indicators, average post-scores of 4.1 and 4.3 suggest that fellows leave the CivicSpark program with a high level of skill and professionalism that will serve them well in their future careers.

Figure 9 | Change in CivicSpark Fellow Performance (Years 1&2)
(1=beginner level and 5=expert level)

	Average Fellow Rating		Average Supervisor Rating	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Flexibility and dependability	3.7	4.4	3.7	4.5
Reflects a professional demeanor	3.7	4.4	3.8	4.5
Appropriate communication	3.6	4.3	3.7	4.5
Understanding of and compliance with expectations	3.6	4.3	3.6	4.4
Understanding of climate change issues	3.6	4.4	3.7	4.5
Consistency of timing and attendance	3.6	4.2	3.7	4.4
Follow through on tasks	3.5	4.1	3.8	4.4
Preparation for meetings	3.5	4.3	3.6	4.4
Consistency and quality of project output	3.3	4.3	3.5	4.5
Ability to problem solve	3.3	4.1	3.5	4.4
Prioritization of competing tasks	3.3	4.1	3.5	4.4
Understanding of project planning and implementation	3.1	4.1	3.3	4.4
Collaboration with team and stakeholders	3.1	3.9	3.6	4.3
Implementation of record keeping tasks	3.1	4.1	3.3	4.5
Utilizes network for professional development	2.9	3.9	3.5	4.2
Successful use of technical tools and systems	2.9	4.0	3.5	4.5
Leadership in the office and with cohort	2.9	3.8	3.3	4.0
Understanding of technical aspects of projects	2.8	4.0	3.5	4.4
Ability to engage community members	2.7	3.7	3.2	4.1
Recruitment and support of volunteers	2.2	3.1	2.8	3.8

A comparison of year one and year two survey results indicate that positive fellow outcomes appear to be getting stronger over time. When examining fellows' self-ratings, the average change across all 20 indicators of performance was 0.5 in year one, but rose to 1.2 in year two. Similarly, the average change in fellow performance according to supervisor ratings was 0.5 in year one and rose to 1.3 in year two. This improvement in fellow performance suggests that LGC has refined and improved the program from the first to the second year, which has resulted in more robust outcomes in fellow growth and performance. These results may also indicate that site supervisors who participate in the program for multiple years become more adept at their role as mentors and managers.

Apart from collecting quantitative data on fellow outcomes, the Member Performance Outcomes Survey also gathered qualitative data about fellows' achievements. According to open-ended responses, both

supervisors and fellows agreed that CivicSpark fellows made significant personal progress over the course of the program. These achievements centered on: improved communication skills, development of project planning and management abilities, increased knowledge of climate change and use of technical tools, and enhanced professionalism.

Improved Communication Skills: Fellows and supervisors reported that fellows improved their written and oral communication skills during their fellowship, especially related to increasing their public speaking and presentation abilities. Supervisors also noticed "tangible skills" that fellows developed in professional writing and communication:

> *[The fellow] was able to improve and develop much stronger communication skills. Her projects met and even exceeded all the expectations of the project partners. Her communication skills were noted by her project supervisors and that the feedback from the project partners was always excellent. –CivicSpark Site Supervisor*

Development of Project Planning and Management Abilities: Both fellows and their site supervisors reported the fellows increased their abilities related to project planning, implementation, and management:

> *I have greatly strengthened my knowledge and skills in project planning. Through my project I had to coordinate meetings, analyze existing operations and amend them, create plans and directives, engage workers, and track progress. –CivicSpark Fellow*

> *I have made significant progress in becoming proficient enough to work with people and take personal ownership of impactful projects and see them through to the end. –CivicSpark Fellow*

> *I've created my own project from start to finish. I've researched how to communicate climate change and used this knowledge to develop educational materials to fill a gap in the community. –CivicSpark Fellow*

Increased Content Knowledge and Technical Skills: Fellows and supervisors alike also reported that CivicSpark fellows furthered their knowledge and understanding of climate change through their participation in the program. This included gaining proficiency with using and applying various industry-approved tools to move climate action initiatives forward at the local level:

> *He improved his technical capabilities (reports and independent research). He has learned to communicate effectively about climate change to public audiences. –CivicSpark Site Supervisor*

> *Reflecting on how little I knew about energy efficiency and local government operations at the beginning of the year makes me realize how far I have progressed…We went from knowing very little about the topic to running a program that gets more and more successful every month. –CivicSpark Fellow*

Increased Professionalism: Lastly, themes in survey responses indicated that fellows gained general professionalism skills related to time management, teamwork, active leadership, networking, and follow-through on tasks:

> *Working with different organizations has improved my ability to reflect a professional demeanor across all projects and stakeholders. – CivicSpark Fellow*

[The fellow] showed significant progress in her professional development this year. She practiced being in a leadership role, planning and running effective meetings, and engaging with partners and the public to drive initiatives forward. – CivicSpark Site Supervisor

I have certainly developed professionally and learned an immense amount about the career options in the environmental field. I have a clearer understanding of where I want to go in my career after this fellowship. I have also broadened my professional skill set and have unique knowledge and experience to offer. – CivicSpark Fellow

Overall, Member Performance Survey results indicate that CivicSpark is a valuable means for young people to develop themselves both personally and professionally. Through the training and work experience they receive during the program, fellows increased their proficiency on a number of tasks and developed skills required of industry professionals.

4.2.2   Interview Findings related to Fellow Performance and Growth

Fellow and site supervisor interview findings generally echoed the results of the Member Outcomes Survey, providing an additional layer of evidence regarding the personal growth fellows achieve during their CivicSpark experience. Fellows reported gaining familiarly with environmental policies, developing professionally, and learning how to frame climate change issues differently to reach a variety of stakeholder groups. Site supervisors were especially impressed with fellows' professional development and ability to learn and grow from the CivicSpark experience. Supervisors noted that fellows improved their organization and planning skills and became more adept at professionally engaging with diverse audiences:

[The fellow] was able to immerse herself in sustainability and climate in our area. And she's now well very versed in who the players are, what the current state of action is, what ideas are on the horizon. She's not yet an expert, but certainly a proficient sustainability person. –2015/16 CivicSpark Site Supervisor

[The fellow] gained a lot of experience just in general—energy action planning, sustainability measures, mitigation measures, adaptation opportunities, and communicating with the general public with what it means to have an energy action plan for local government. –2015/16 CivicSpark Site Supervisor

[The fellow] has really just become, I think, a professional changer within an institution that was really able to create and lead change and initiatives to achieve some pretty good goals. –2015/16 CivicSpark Site Supervisor

Not only was CivicSpark integral in shaping fellows' professional development, it also helped shape fellows' career trajectories. Seven of the ten fellows interviewed reported that CivicSpark provided the skills necessary to work in the environmental sector, and for many this solidified their commitment to a career in the sustainability field:

The greatest thing I've gained is being reassured that this is the career path that I want to pursue…At times, I questioned if this is what I want to do for 30 plus years. So CivicSpark gave me that spark again and that, yes, this is what I want to do. –2015/16 CivicSpark Fellow

CivicSpark really helped me mold the path I want to take in the next 5 to 10 years…that's bigger than any skill. –2015/16 CivicSpark Fellow

On a related note, fellows also mentioned that their CivicSpark experience fostered a personal commitment to the region where they worked. Five fellows who moved to their assigned region for the first time reported that they plan to remain in the area upon completion of the fellowship. Interviewees acknowledged that the social and professional network CivicSpark created was a key reason for staying local:

> *I didn't expect…having a permanent base in Sacramento. I had thought of it as temporary. With other CivicSpark fellows staying in the region, I've gotten to know people in my office and supervisors really well and that's been great. –2015/16 CivicSpark Fellow*

4.3   Program Feedback

Apart from measuring program outcomes related to partner capacity building and fellow growth, the evaluation also sought to collect information to assess program implementation and inform program improvement. Fellow and supervisor interviews elicited feedback about the CivicSpark program with regard to elements of the program that were most valuable as well as suggestions for ways the program may be improved. This section highlights themes in interview responses, which LGC staff can use to judge what is currently working well programmatically and identify areas of potential program enhancement.

4.3.1   Program Strengths

According to fellows and site supervisors, the most valuable elements of the CivicSpark program were: (1) the connection to a broad network of people and organizations in the environmental sustainability field, (2) the responsiveness of LGC staff to fellow and supervisor needs, and (3) expanded career opportunities for fellows after their fellowship concludes.

CivicSpark Network

Whether referencing personal support or job opportunities, all fellows reported that the personal network CivicSpark offered was one of the most valuable aspects of the program. Not only did CivicSpark provide fellows a connection to a wide network of people working in the field, it also offered opportunities to collaborate and build relationships with other fellows in their cohort. According to fellows, these networks were useful for sharing key resources related to project responsibilities. As one fellow stated, "We would email back different resources… [there was] a lot of back and forth of sharing tips and insights, things that were happening on the national stage or local arena." Another fellow acknowledged that the fellow cohort network was important to his success in the program, and that "If it wasn't for that core group of fellows, I wouldn't have made it through." Site supervisors agreed that the network of contacts and resources that CivicSpark provided to fellows was an invaluable element of the program. These formal and informal opportunities for collaboration and learning allowed fellows to give and receive support, as well as maintain cohort cohesion:

> *The most valuable [aspect of the program] was the ability [for fellows] to network and share experiences, both with their cohort and professionals in the field…they made a lot of opportunity to network. –2015/16 CivicSpark Site Supervisor*

> *Having informal time for talking about project specifics—that's integral to the success of a fellow… a lot of fellows experience being siloed off, so what helps with that is feeling like part of the CivicSpark team –2015/16 CivicSpark Fellow*

Responsiveness of Program Staff

A number of fellows and supervisors interviewed for the evaluation study mentioned that LGC staff's responsiveness to their needs was a core strength of the CivicSpark program. One fellow reported that they were able to contact CivicSpark staff anytime and noted that "without [them] we would be very lost." Others appreciated that LCG was responsive to feedback by making mid-year improvements to the program. Fellows acknowledged that because of this commitment to program improvement, CivicSpark would continue to increase its effectiveness over time:

> *[CivicSpark] definitely improved so much from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. A lot that could be improved upon is already being fixed and streamlined. LGC, as they move forward into third year with CivicSpark, they are [already] making a lot of changes. –2015/16 CivicSpark Fellow*

Supervisors echoed fellow sentiments that one of the most valuable aspects of the program was the responsiveness of LGC staff. One supervisor shared that he had "really good, open communication with CivicSpark staff" and appreciated the level of assistance he receives from them. When asked if CivicSpark could do anything to better support site supervisors, half of the supervisors interviewed could not provide recommendations because they "didn't have any unmet needs." This points to the success CivicSpark has had with continually addressing the needs of fellows and partners through the process, and not waiting to implement program improvements.

Expanded Career Opportunities for Fellows

Lastly, almost all the fellows interviewed reported that one of the most valuable aspects of CivicSpark is the entry it provides into climate change work and related fields. Several fellows described difficulty obtaining an entry level job in the environmental sector prior to CivicSpark, and that CivicSpark offered a "foot in the door" to career opportunities. Anecdotal reports from fellows and site supervisors suggest that many CivicSpark fellows obtained employment in a related field at the conclusion of their service term.

> *It was difficult to land a job for an entry level career in the environment field…[CivicSpark] allowed for the opportunity for relocation and to jump start my career in the environment world I preferred. –2015/16 CivicSpark Fellow*

4.3.2 Opportunities for Program Improvement

While interview respondents acknowledged a number of valuable program aspects, fellows and site supervisors also described several challenges they encountered during participation, and ways that CivicSpark might improve the program for future fellows and partners. Challenges and suggestions for improvement centered on: (1) the schedule and content of trainings, (2) insufficient fellow compensation, (3) ambiguity of the fellow role, (4) balancing project work and AmeriCorps requirements, and (5) difficulty achieving capacity goals.

Training Schedule and Content

Although fellows acknowledged that the regional and statewide trainings held during the program were helpful for professional development, a number of fellows encountered challenges with how these trainings were scheduled and conducted. For regional trainings in particular, fellows mentioned that the schedule was irregular at the beginning of the program year which made it necessary to meet multiple times a month toward the end of the program to compensate. Interviewees suggested that a way to

address this issue is to create a more consistent training schedule and communicate the schedule to fellows well in advance:

> *Not having the scheduled times for our regional meetings and statewide, it was hard to balance their requests…it would be better if I can expect every 3rd Thursday this is going to happen. –2015/16 CivicSpark Fellow*

> *Having an estimated time and date beforehand…working out technical problems…[that] could have made the trainings more efficient. –2015/16 CivicSpark Fellow*

Apart from the challenges with the training schedule, fellows noted that the content of the statewide and regional trainings was not always clear or useful. As one fellow stated, "[The regional trainings] were sort of haphazard. We all traveled to get to them and it ended up not being a good use of time." Another fellow agreed that, "There didn't seem to be a whole lot of focus [at the regional trainings]. We were meeting in person, but this could've been an email or phone call."

With regard to orientation training, while fellows appreciated the orientation for social reasons, they felt that the content was at times unclear. A number of fellows said they felt confused about CivicSpark program requirements after attending orientation. One fellow noted, "We came out very confused about hours and nitty gritty details of the program," while another said, "Orientation was actually pretty confusing. Some of the requirements were unclear, especially regarding how [to allocate] hours." Another fellow acknowledged that it was difficult to have in-depth conversations about projects at the orientation because everyone was new to the program:

> *[At orientation] we were supposed to have these meaningful conversations about our project when we had maybe three sentences of project description before orientation. –2015/16 CivicSpark Fellow*

Insufficient Fellow Compensation

According to interviewees, the most common challenge fellows faced while in the CivicSpark program was related to the amount of the AmeriCorps stipend. Several fellows mentioned that they worked other jobs or lived with family members because the stipend was not enough to support their basic living needs. While fellows understood that AmeriCorps programs offer small stipends, many felt the CivicSpark stipend was low even by AmeriCorps standards, especially for California which has a higher cost of living than many other areas of the country. Fellows were not the only group who acknowledged this challenge, as two site supervisors also mentioned that they felt fellow compensation was lacking.

> *We understand there's this base stipend; that's okay for the rest of the US but California is really expensive and we're not getting much reimbursement for working full time. –2015/16 CivicSpark Fellow*

> *The number one limitation is funding…the living stipend awarded is difficult to make ends meet in the Bay Area. –2015/16 CivicSpark Fellow*

Ambiguity of the Fellow Role

Another challenge for CivicSpark fellows was the vagueness of their role within the host agencies where they worked. A number of fellows noted that it was discouraging to be treated as an intern as opposed to a contracted staff member with specialized training. In fact, during the site supervisor interviews two supervisors used the word "intern" when describing CivicSpark fellows, which confirms that this matter continues to be an issue.

It's difficult because you're sort of seen as an intern…that can be a bit difficult because you're not on the same level as everyone else…[but] you're not doing "interny" things…you're managing a project and spending your full time on it. –2015/16 CivicSpark Fellow

The biggest challenge was being sometimes labeled as an intern…there's something about [the AmeriCorps] title that connotes "barely professional." –2015/16 CivicSpark Fellow

Some fellows connected the low compensation to not receiving the level of respect from agency staff that they deemed appropriate:

At times…my work [wasn't] really valued…some of that comes from being paid so little, then maybe they have this idea they don't have to offer as much respect to a fellow. –2015/16 CivicSpark Fellow

I [have] weariness about the stipend. You really have to consider it as a volunteer year because you never feel fully appreciated as a full time staff, which is just an unfortunate fact. –2015/16 CivicSpark Fellow

Balancing Project Work and AmeriCorps Requirements

Lastly, supervisors and fellows alike reported challenges with regards to the assignment of hours to CivicSpark programming and agency project work. One fellow expressed feeling uncomfortable leaving her host agency for AmeriCorps trainings because, "Project partners were not understanding why I was gone all the time." Other fellows noted that being a full-time employee of the host agency while still fulfilling all the AmeriCorps program requirements led to extra-long work hours:

You have a set 1,700 hours, but you're expected to work full time every week. I had a week where I had a volunteer event where I worked 60 hours, but you're expected to come back and work full time next week. –2015/16 CivicSpark Fellow

The biggest challenge was the balance between what we could spend on CivicSpark related things and how our project partner viewed us as full-time staff. –2015/16 CivicSpark Fellow

Based on interview findings, AmeriCorps program requirements were also a challenge for site supervisors. Of the four supervisors who suggested ways that CivicSpark could better support them in their role, all four mentioned providing more assistance with AmeriCorps requirements. One supervisor believed that reporting requirements in particular could be "a little less painful" and thought the reporting and invoicing process was confusing and drained staff time. Another supervisor felt unsure about his role in the volunteer engagement component of the program, and would have liked more support from CivicSpark on these tasks:

I think we weren't given a lot of guidance in terms of how do we link them up with volunteer projects, how much responsibility do we have over that, how much responsibility do we have over their hours…there are no check-ins with LGC to know "Oh, it's been 3 months, your CivicSpark member should have a concept of their volunteer program or engagement activity." It wasn't clear how much we needed to facilitate that…we weren't able to plan ahead so we ended up working really quickly to pull everything together into a volunteer program. Knowing more about the requirements so we know how to time it right would be helpful. – 2015/16 CivicSpark Site Supervisor

Difficulty Achieving Capacity Goals

Lastly, interviews with site supervisors provided insight into how some partners viewed the goals and purpose of the CivicSpark program. Several supervisors felt that the program was useful for providing

specific project deliverables but not necessarily for building lasting capacity within the partner agencies. As one supervisor mentioned, since CivicSpark fellows typically enter the program with little experience and leave after 11 months, building capacity with these limited resources is challenging. While supervisors were pleased with the project support they received through CivicSpark, some acknowledged that it was difficult to achieve capacity building goals with the CivicSpark program model:

> *The way the program is designed is to build capacity. But the way that we're doing it is on a project by project basis. So we're getting projects, but that doesn't mean we're building capacity to build technical knowledge or maintain once a CivicSpark person leaves…If CivicSpark is interested in building capacity without CivicSpark members, that's a different program entirely. –2015/16 CivicSpark Site Supervisor*

> *[CivicSpark] wants to build capacity in government offices. We see the value in that, though these [fellows] are folks that don't have years and years of career experience. We're educating them and then there's a short amount of time to bring something new. They're really working on the projects we have—and that's what we expect. –2015/16 CivicSpark Site Supervisor*

Section 5   Conclusion & Recommendations

Based on evaluation findings to date, it is evident that CivicSpark is having a positive impact on the local government agencies that participate in the program, as well as on the fellows that work closely with these agencies to build their capacity to address climate change. Through CivicSpark, partner agencies received direct support for climate action projects, which resulted in increased capacity to respond to climate change in a number of ways. Fellows developed professional skills, gained career experience, and reported that CivicSpark allowed them to obtain jobs in a related field at the conclusion of their fellowship.

While the CivicSpark program resulted in a number of immediate positive outcomes both within the local government agencies that participate as well as among fellows, evaluation findings suggest that there are opportunities to refine and enhance several program components. The following recommendations are based on the evaluation findings described in this report, and are intended to inform programmatic strategies to support the momentum and sustainability of CivicSpark moving forward.

PROVIDE ADDITIONAL TRAINING ON VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

A clear and consistent theme in the evaluation data collected for this study was challenges related to the volunteer engagement component of the CivicSpark program. According to qualitative and quantitative input from both fellows and partners, it seems that agencies and fellows are struggling with engaging community members in their climate action projects. Based on these findings, LGC staff should examine this program element in more detail to uncover the root causes of this issue and identify potential solutions. Because it is likely that fellows do not come to CivicSpark with prior community engagement expertise or experience, it seems that the program may benefit from additional training for fellows on basic volunteer engagement strategies and steps to take in order to implement effective volunteer engagement campaigns.

FOCUS SUPPORT ON IDENTIFIED PARTNER CAPACITY NEEDS

Results from the Capacity Assessment survey revealed that partner agencies made only small improvements on several specific climate action capacity areas over the course of the program. Specifically, (1) internal and external support for climate action initiatives and (2) understanding of where the community is most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, were two areas that showed small change over time. As such, LGC staff should consider providing additional support to build agencies' capacity in these areas. Furthermore, training for partner agency staff was the topic area rated lowest overall both on the pre- and the post-Capacity Assessment. Although it may be difficult for CivicSpark to provide direct training to partner agencies, this may be an area where fellows can serve as "pseudo-trainers" for local government personnel on topics of greatest relevance and need.

SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS OF PROGRAM STRUCTURE AND GOALS

According to site supervisor and fellow interview findings, there seems to be some confusion as to the core function of the CivicSpark program and the role of CivicSpark fellows. Several site supervisors mentioned that the program seems to be geared more toward providing project support rather than building agency capacity. In addition, a number of fellows reported that they felt they were treated as "interns" by their host agency. Without a shared understanding of program purpose and the role of fellows among partner agencies, achieving capacity building goals and outcomes will be more difficult. To help address these issues, LGC staff should set clear expectations with partners about the goals of the program at the onset of the partnership, and define the role of the fellows within the program and the host agency.

ESTABLISH A CONSISTENT TRAINING SCHEDULE

Fellows reported that one of the challenges they encountered during the CivicSpark program was the schedule of regional and statewide trainings. According to interviewees, these trainings were irregular and dates were not communicated to fellows well in advance. Based on this feedback, LGC staff should consider establishing a training schedule at the beginning of the program year and sharing the schedule with fellows at the onset of their fellowship.

ENHANCE PROGRAM EVALUATION

While the evaluation design described in this report is sufficient to measure basic immediate program outcomes, an expanded and more rigorous evaluation design would allow CivicSpark to more accurately determine program impacts. First, improvements should be made to the existing data collection tools (i.e., the Capacity Assessment survey and the Member Outcomes survey), which will result in the collection of higher quality and more accurate outcome data. As the program matures, there is also an opportunity to track longer-term outcomes by following-up with CivicSpark alumni (both partners and fellows) to measure the lasting effects of CivicSpark participation. Finally, LGC staff should consider implementing a quasi-experimental evaluation design by selecting a control group of agencies that do not participate in the program in order to promote the validity of results. Apart from the outcome evaluation piece, direct observation of trainings and other activities by an evaluator could provide a more objective assessment of program implementation and inform program improvement. A more robust CivicSpark evaluation will provide data that can be useful for program expansion and sustainability planning.

CONTINUE TO USE PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK TO REFINE THE PROGRAM

It is apparent that one of the principal strengths of the CivicSpark program is staff's responsiveness to partner and fellow feedback and willingness to implement changes to improve the program as needed. As evaluation results demonstrated, program outcomes improved from year one to year two, which appears to be a testament to LGC staff's ability to learn from implementation experiences and shift approaches when necessary in order to increase effectiveness and better align with program goals. As such, LGC staff should remain committed to continuous program improvement efforts and continue to use organizational learnings and feedback to adapt and refine program activities in pursuit of achieving desired outcomes.

Appendix A | CivicSpark Fellow Interview Questions

Background

1. What made you want to apply for the CivicSpark fellowship?
2. Tell me about the kind of training, education, or experience you had prior to participating in CivicSpark.

Fellowship Experiences

3. As a fellow, what region were you in and what organization or agency did you work with?
4. Tell me about the tasks or projects you worked on there. What was your role in those projects?
5. What type of training did you receive during your fellowship?
6. What was it like working with the regional team?
7. Did you encounter any challenges or limitations during your time as a fellow? Were you able to address those challenges?

Community Impacts

8. From your perspective, how did your work as a CivicSpark fellow benefit [*name of agency/organization*]?
   [Prompt: How did you help build the capacity of [*name of agency/organization*]?]
9. What are some accomplishments that may not have been realized if you had not been working at [*name of agency/organization*]?
10. How do you think your work impacted (or will impact) the greater local community?

Personal Impacts

11. What did you personally gain from your involvement in CivicSpark?
12. What skills did you learn or improve during the experience?
13. If you were to go back and start your fellowship all over again, is there anything you would have done differently?
    [Prompt: What advice would you give to future CivicSpark fellows?]

CivicSpark Feedback

14. What aspect of the CivicSpark experience was most valuable to you?
15. What did you like least about being a CivicSpark fellow?
16. How could CivicSpark improve the program for future fellows?
    [Prompt: Is there anything that could be done to better support the fellows?]
    [Prompt: Is there anything that would have allowed you to be more successful in your role?]
17. Do you feel CivicSpark is an effective way to increase the capacity of local governments to address climate change? Why or why not?
18. Would you recommend the CivicSpark fellowship to others? Why or why not?

Future Plans

19. What are your plans after you finish the CivicSpark fellowship?
    [Prompt: What do you think you will do with the education award that you receive?]
20. How do you think you will utilize what you learned or gained during CivicSpark?
21. What are your long-term career goals? Do you think your CivicSpark experience will help you to achieve those goals?
22. Did your involvement in CivicSpark change your career goals or life goals in any way? If so, how?
23. Is there anything else you would like to share about CivicSpark or your experience as a fellow?

Appendix B | CivicSpark Site Supervisor Interview Questions

Background

1. How did your agency first get involved with the CivicSpark program?
2. What made [*name of agency*] interested to apply for the CivicSpark program?
     [Prompt: Was there a particular need that [*name of agency*] had?]

Site Supervisor Experience

3. Tell me a little bit about your experience as a site supervisor.
4. As a site supervisor, what was it like coordinating with CivicSpark regional staff?

Fellow Insights

5. How would you describe the skills or experience [*fellow name*] had when he/she first started the fellowship?
6. Tell me about the tasks or projects [*fellow name*] worked on at [*name of agency*]. What was his/her role in those projects?
7. From your perspective, what skills did [*fellow name*] seem to learn or improve during the fellowship?
8. Were there any other positive changes you noticed in [*fellow name*] over the course of his/her fellowship?
9. Was there anything that would have helped [*fellow name*] be more successful in his/her role?

Community Impacts

10. From your perspective, how did [*fellow name*]'s work benefit [*name of agency*]?
     [Prompt: How did he/she help build the capacity of [*name of agency*]?]
11. What are some accomplishments that may not have been realized if [*fellow name*] had not been working at your agency?
12. To what degree do you feel [*name of agency*] has been able to increase the effectiveness of its climate change initiatives as a result of CivicSpark?
13. How do you think [*fellow name*]'s work impacted, or will impact, the greater community?

CivicSpark Feedback

14. In your opinion, what aspect of the CivicSpark program is most valuable?
15. What aspect of CivicSpark do you think was most challenging?
     [Prompt: Did you encounter any challenges or limitations with the CivicSpark program? Were you able to address those challenges?]
16. How could CivicSpark improve the program for participating agencies?
17. Is there anything that could be done to better support the site supervisors specifically?
18. Overall, do you feel CivicSpark is an effective way to increase the capacity of local agencies to address climate change? Why or why not?
19. Would you recommend the CivicSpark program to other agencies? Why or why not?

Future Plans

20. Moving forward, do you think there will be any long-lasting changes in how your agency operates or in the systems that are used because of CivicSpark?
21. How will this experience help [*name of agency*] achieve some of its longer term goals?
22. Do you think your agency will be able to sustain any gains in capacity over the long term? Why or why not?
23. Is there anything else you would like to share about CivicSpark or your experience as a site supervisor?

Appendix C | CivicSpark Climate Capacity Assessment Results

Knowledge and Understanding[*]

Year 1	Average Pre Score	Average Post Score	Change
Policy Factors (n=80)	3.22	3.54	.32
Internal Structure and Support for Action (n=80)	3.68	3.76	.08
Personal Understanding (n=80)	3.53	3.90	.37
Training (n=80)	2.66	3.00	.34

Year 2	Average Pre Score	Average Post Score	Change
Policy Factors (n=81)	3.23	3.49	.26
Internal Structure and Support for Action (n=81)	3.78	3.77	-.01
Personal Understanding (n=81)	3.69	3.90	.21
Training (n=81)	2.80	2.98	.18

Years 1&2	Average Pre Score	Average Post Score	Change
Policy Factors (n=161)	3.22	3.52	.29
Internal Structure and Support for Action (n=161)	3.73	3.77	.03
Personal Understanding (n=161)	3.61	3.90	.29
Training (n=161)	2.73	2.99	.26

Capacity Building Goals

Year 1	Did not meet goals	Partially met goals	Fully met goals	Exceeded goals
Staff Development Goals (n=80)	8%	44%	38%	11%
Project Goals (n=80)	4%	44%	38%	15%
Diffusion of Knowledge Goals (n=80)	6%	39%	48%	8%

Year 2	Did not meet goals	Partially met goals	Fully met goals	Exceeded goals
Staff Development Goals (n=81)	2%	28%	54%	15%
Project Goals (n=81)	2%	31%	44%	22%
Diffusion of Knowledge Goals (n= 81)	1%	28%	53%	17%

Years 1&2	Did not meet goals	Partially met goals	Fully met goals	Exceeded goals
Staff Development Goals (n=161)	5%	36%	28%	13%
Project Goals (n=161)	3%	37%	24%	19%
Diffusion of Knowledge Goals (n=161)	4%	34%	28%	13%

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[*]Average pre- and post-scores were calculated by averaging the average ratings for each question within a topic area category across all respondents in the sample.

Program Effectiveness

Year 1	Yes	No
Did CivicSpark increase the effectiveness of your work? (n=79)	84%	16%
Did CivicSpark increase efficiency of your work? (n=78)	82%	18%

Year 2	Yes	No
Did CivicSpark increase the effectiveness of your work? (n=80)	90%	10%
Did CivicSpark increase efficiency of your work? (n=80)	90%	10%

Years 1&2	Yes	No
Did CivicSpark increase the effectiveness of your work? (n=159)	87%	13%
Did CivicSpark increase efficiency of your work? (n=158)	86%	14%

Volunteer Engagement Goals

Year 1	Did not meet goals	Somewhat met Goals	Met goals	Exceeded goals
Was the volunteer engagement strategy successfully implemented? (n=80)	33%	25%	38%	5%

Year 2	Did not meet goals	Somewhat met Goals	Met goals	Exceeded goals
Was the volunteer engagement strategy successfully implemented? (n=81)	17%	25%	51%	7%

Years 1&2	Did not meet goals	Somewhat met Goals	Met goals	Exceeded goals
Was the volunteer engagement strategy successfully implemented? (n=161)	25%	25%	44%	6%

Volunteer Engagement Outcomes

Year 1	Yes	No
Did your use of volunteers increase as a result of CivicSpark? (n=79)	35%	65%
Did your volunteer approaches improve as a result? (n=80)	41%	59%

Year 2	Yes	No
Did your use of volunteers increase as a result of CivicSpark? (n=81)	51%	49%
Did your volunteer approaches improve as a result? (n=81)	54%	46%

Years 1&2	Yes	No
Did your use of volunteers increase as a result of CivicSpark? (n=160)	43%	57%
Did your volunteer approaches improve as a result? (n=161)	48%	52%

Appendix D | CivicSpark Member Outcome Survey Results

Member Outcomes Survey: Aggregate Results (Year 1 & 2)

	Fellow Ratings			Site Supervisor Ratings		
	Avg. Pre Score	Avg. Post Score	Change	Avg. Pre Score	Avg. Post Score	Change
Recruitment and support of volunteers	2.2	3.1	0.9	2.8	3.8	0.9
Ability to engage community members	2.7	3.7	1.0	3.2	4.1	0.8
Understanding of technical aspects of projects	2.8	4.0	1.2	3.5	4.4	0.9
Leadership in the office and with cohort	2.9	3.8	0.9	3.3	4.0	0.7
Successful use of technical tools and systems	2.9	4.0	1.1	3.5	4.5	1.0
Utilizes network for professional development	2.9	3.9	1.0	3.5	4.2	0.7
Implementation of record keeping tasks	3.1	4.1	1.0	3.3	4.5	1.2
Collaboration with team and stakeholders	3.1	3.9	0.9	3.6	4.3	0.6
Understanding of project planning and implementation	3.1	4.1	1.1	3.3	4.4	1.1
Prioritization of competing tasks	3.3	4.1	0.8	3.5	4.4	0.9
Ability to problem solve	3.3	4.1	0.8	3.5	4.4	0.9
Consistency and quality of project output	3.3	4.3	1.0	3.5	4.5	1.0
Preparation for meetings	3.5	4.3	0.8	3.6	4.4	0.7
Follow through on tasks	3.5	4.1	0.5	3.8	4.4	0.7
Consistency of timing and attendance	3.6	4.2	0.7	3.7	4.4	0.7
Understanding of climate change issues	3.6	4.4	0.8	3.7	4.5	0.8
Understanding of and compliance with expectations	3.6	4.3	0.7	3.6	4.4	0.8
Appropriate communication	3.6	4.3	0.7	3.7	4.5	0.8
Reflects a professional demeanor	3.7	4.4	0.7	3.8	4.5	0.8
Flexibility and dependability	3.7	4.4	0.9	3.7	4.5	0.9
AVERAGE	*3.2*	*4.1*	*0.9*	*3.5*	*4.3*	*0.8*

Member Outcomes Survey: Year 1 Results

	Fellow Ratings			Site Supervisor Ratings		
	Avg. Pre Score	Avg. Post Score	Change	Avg. Pre Score	Avg. Post Score	Change
Recruitment and support of volunteers	2.4	3.1	0.7	2.9	3.5	0.6
Ability to engage community members	3.1	3.7	0.6	3.5	3.9	0.4
Understanding of technical aspects of projects	3.2	4.0	0.8	3.7	4.3	0.5
Leadership in the office and with cohort	3.3	3.8	0.5	3.5	3.9	0.4
Successful use of technical tools and systems	3.2	4.0	0.9	3.7	4.4	0.7
Utilizes network for professional development	3.1	3.9	0.8	3.5	4.1	0.6
Implementation of record keeping tasks	3.3	4.1	0.7	3.5	4.4	0.9
Collaboration with team and stakeholders	3.5	4.0	0.5	3.9	4.1	0.2
Understanding of project planning and implementation	3.3	4.1	0.8	3.4	4.2	0.7
Prioritization of competing tasks	3.6	4.1	0.5	3.7	4.2	0.5
Ability to problem solve	3.5	4.1	0.7	3.7	4.3	0.6
Consistency and quality of project output	3.5	4.3	0.8	3.7	4.4	0.7
Preparation for meetings	3.7	4.3	0.6	3.7	4.3	0.6
Follow through on tasks	3.7	4.1	0.4	3.9	4.3	0.4
Consistency of timing and attendance	3.7	4.2	0.5	3.8	4.3	0.4
Understanding of climate change issues	3.7	4.4	0.7	4.0	4.3	0.3
Understanding of and compliance with expectations	3.8	4.3	0.5	3.8	4.3	0.4
Appropriate communication	3.6	4.3	0.7	3.8	4.4	0.5
Reflects a professional demeanor	3.7	4.4	0.7	3.9	4.4	0.5
Flexibility and dependability	3.9	4.4	0.5	4.0	4.4	0.4
AVERAGE	*3.4*	*4.1*	*0.6*	*3.7*	*4.2*	*0.5*

Member Outcomes Survey: Year 2 Results

	Fellow Ratings			Site Supervisor Ratings		
	Avg. Pre Score	Avg. Post Score	Change	Avg. Pre Score	Avg. Post Score	Change
Recruitment and support of volunteers	2.0	3.4	**1.4**	2.9	3.5	**0.6**
Ability to engage community members	2.4	3.9	**1.5**	3.5	3.9	**0.4**
Understanding of technical aspects of projects	2.4	4.0	**1.6**	3.7	4.3	**0.5**
Leadership in the office and with cohort	2.4	4.0	**1.5**	3.5	3.9	**0.4**
Successful use of technical tools and systems	2.6	4.0	**1.3**	3.7	4.4	**0.7**
Utilizes network for professional development	2.8	3.9	**1.1**	3.5	4.1	**0.6**
Implementation of record keeping tasks	2.8	4.2	**1.4**	3.5	4.4	**0.9**
Collaboration with team and stakeholders	2.7	4.1	**1.3**	3.9	4.1	**0.2**
Understanding of project planning and implementation	2.9	4.3	**1.5**	3.4	4.2	**0.7**
Prioritization of competing tasks	3.0	4.1	**1.1**	3.7	4.2	**0.5**
Ability to problem solve	3.1	4.2	**1.0**	3.7	4.3	**0.6**
Consistency and quality of project output	3.1	4.4	**1.2**	3.7	4.4	**0.7**
Preparation for meetings	3.3	4.4	**1.1**	3.7	4.3	**0.6**
Follow through on tasks	3.4	4.1	**0.7**	3.9	4.3	**0.4**
Consistency of timing and attendance	3.4	4.3	**0.9**	3.8	4.3	**0.4**
Understanding of climate change issues	3.4	4.6	**1.2**	4.0	4.3	**0.3**
Understanding of and compliance with expectations	3.4	4.5	**1.1**	3.8	4.3	**0.4**
Appropriate communication	3.6	4.5	**0.9**	3.8	4.4	**0.5**
Reflects a professional demeanor	3.7	4.6	**0.9**	3.9	4.4	**0.5**
Flexibility and dependability	3.6	4.5	**0.9**	4.0	4.4	**0.4**
AVERAGE	*3.0*	*4.2*	*1.2*	*3.7*	*4.2*	*0.5*