

KINS Community Comment

CivicSpark – A one year perspective by Larry Goldberg

Mark Twain once said, “Everybody talks about the weather, but no one does anything about it.” While this may be true of the daily weather, it’s definitely not true when it comes to the climate. We have increasingly been living in the shadow of climate change for several decades now but are just beginning to see the real face of the issue: stronger and more frequent storms, widespread droughts, devastating wildfires and significant economic impacts from crop loss, invasive species and loss of productive habitat.

In California, we have been leaders in developing practical and needed responses to climate change – both through adaptation strategies and mitigation responses. Governor Jerry Brown initiated a unique program called CivicSpark that utilizes the energy and passion of youth through AmeriCorps and the experience and guidance of senior project managers through a program called Encore, thus producing a powerful program that yields significant on-the-ground results that have a lasting impact. I’m proud to say that I worked as the Northcoast Regional CivicSpark supervisor for the past year overseeing the work of four capable and energetic recent college grads who gave a year of their lives to serve in Americorp working to make an impact on Climate change.

Over the past year, CivicSpark fellows statewide implemented 37 projects, including projects on climate adaptation, sustainable transportation, energy efficiency, solar procurement, urban forestry and sea-level rise, in support of 88 local government agencies and their climate change priorities.

On the California North Coast, CivicSpark projects included:

- Hanna Nielsen helped develop and disseminate local climate change curriculum and education resources for 9th grade science teachers in Arcata. The curriculum is being integrated into this year’s science curriculum in several elementary schools.
- Steven Luther and Drew Clark supported the expansion of alternative transportation and alternative fuels options in the North Coast region including electric, hydrogen and biofuels infrastructure planning activities.
- Drew Clark provided support for the expansion of electric vehicle charging infrastructure for the North Coast region and the development of a local governments’ buyers guide to electric charging infrastructure.
- Steve Luther prepared Greenhouse Gas Inventories for the Cities of Eureka, Arcata, Blue Lake, Scotia, Trinidad and Rio Dell and the County of Humboldt.
- Steve Luther helped document the potential of trail use to reduce auto trips and GHG emissions, to support policy-makers and demonstrate that trails are a viable tool to address climate change, thus enabling travel via trails by bike and foot as a viable choice in the menu of transportation options.

During the 11-month service year, CivicSpark climate fellows statewide supported a wide range of concrete climate actions, including development of 8 climate or energy action plans, 17 climate action policies, 10 vulnerability assessments, 8 greenhouse gas inventories, 4 benchmark analyses, organized 12 climate education workshops, and engagement with over 1,000 community members and business owners.

I'm proud of the accomplishments of these young workers and believe that while we can't do anything about the weather, maybe we can have an impact on the climate of the future or, at the least, be prepared for what's coming.