



FY17 IMPACT PROGRESS REPORT

Sarah Andes, Director of Programming
Yasmine Mahdavi, Measurement & Evaluation
October 2017

Table of Contents

I.	Executive Summary	3
II.	Overview	5
III.	Measurement and Evaluation Methodology	8
IV.	Evidence and Discussion of Impact	10
V.	Lessons for the Future	17

I. Executive Summary

Barbara Jordan, a former member U.S. Congresswoman from Texas, once remarked, “A government is invigorated when each of us is willing to participate in shaping the future of this nation.” At Generation Citizen (GC), we share her conviction and work to ensure that every student in the United States receives an effective Action Civics education which provides them with the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in our democracy as active and engaged citizens.

This report, one of our annual progress reports, allows us to reflect on our commitment to learning and growth by drawing broader lessons from our work in the past year. The outlined observations and recommendations should serve chiefly to inform what is working well and could be working better about our programming. The results will help us to iterate our curricular and training content and pedagogy, staffing structures, and program design. As such, the report is not meant to be a definitive statement of our impact.

Our FY17 report reviews programming and data from the fall 2016 to spring 2017 school. During this period, we served 9,600 students across 107 middle and high schools in the regions of and surrounding Providence, Rhode Island; Boston, Massachusetts; New York City, New York; and California’s San Francisco Bay area; as well as in newly launched sites in Central Texas and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Below is a summary of our findings, as drawn from student pre- and post-semester surveys, mid- and end-of-semester feedback from teachers and college volunteer Democracy Coaches, classroom observations, and a focus group study with select GC student alumni in the spring of 2017.

Program Impact Highlights

Perhaps most importantly, overall, survey feedback from students and teachers suggested that students made gains on nearly every measured indicator of civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic dispositions.

Additionally, it is important to note that our program quality, including student outcomes and participant satisfaction, remained consistent from last year despite a 45% increase in the number of students GC served, and the establishment of brand-new programs and partnerships in two previously unfamiliar regions of the country.

Other notable successes include:

- Students’ skill development was most pronounced in the areas of critical thinking and public speaking, as they gained confidence and ability in their capacities to analyze community issues, construct strategic action plans, and present their projects to adults in the course of action or at Civics Day.
- Through their participation in GC, many students engaged in fundamental civic behaviors for the first time. Similar to last year’s findings, there was a 110% increase from pre- to post-programming in the number of our students who had ever contacted or met with a public official, and there was a 66% increase in the number of students who had written an article, op-ed, or letter to the editor.
- By the end of the program, 72% of students felt like they had the power to make a difference in their communities, an increase from 64% at the beginning of the semester. This shift was reinforced by a focus group participant who reflected on her GC experience by saying that “at the end of the day, it’s not only realizing the problem, but it’s realizing that you actually can do something.”
- Students’ efforts bolstered youth voice and addressed pressing issues in communities across the country, including 79 student-led projects focused on influencing legislation and others which established city Youth Advisory Boards, organized gun buyback programs, and lobbied for solutions to the opioid epidemic.
- GC expanded its alumni programming to support 49 student alumni (more than double the size of the program last year) in Community Change Fellowships in Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island.
- We built upon the success of our founding Student Leadership Board by welcoming 12 new members (including representatives from Oklahoma and Texas) and 2 returning members to our 2017-18 cohort.

Priority Areas for Growth

- Observations and anecdotal feedback from partners suggest that students who are most engaged are strongly affected by the program but that not all students within the classroom are consistently actively engaged. Curriculum revisions in the summer of 2017 focused on building an engaging Participatory Action Research process into the first half of the semester and on enhancing the program's accessibility for English Language Learners to address this challenge.
- Our focus group project highlighted a difference in middle and high school students' interactions with the program. While high school alumni clearly extrapolated their GC experiences to their lives as future civic actors, middle school alumni more frequently focused their reflections on what they learned about the specific focus issues their classes tackled. This insight is not surprising and aligns with general theories of youth development and adolescent education. It does underscore the need for intentional differentiation of programming for younger and older learners moving forward in order to support the civic development of all students.
- We were not able to conduct as in-depth analysis of some aspects of our programming this year as we would have liked. We began aggregating information about our classes' actual engagement with adults from the community, such as guest speakers or conversations with decision makers. However, inconsistent recordkeeping prevented us from reporting on these with confidence. Additionally, small survey samples of teacher-led programming participants limited our ability to draw meaningful conclusions about differences in program models from these results. Before the 2017-18 academic year, we clarified procedures for our teams in order to standardize project output tracking. We also will be engaging in qualitative analysis of our multiple program models this spring.
- Last year's focus group study was primarily an effort to examine GC's real and broad impact on students in order to prepare us to engage in more in-depth longitudinal analysis of the program's effects on young people's civic behavior. We must use this information for an analysis of GC's effects on students' civic participation long-term.

Lastly, several data points stood out to us as differing in results from the previous year. We posit that the influence of the rancorous national political climate played a role in these fluctuations. For example, we noticed similar gains to last year in students' self-described development of intrapersonal skills, which measure their critical thinking and communication abilities. Compared to last year there was a decline, however, in students' self-assessment of growth in interpersonal skills which entailed interacting with others, including their ability to effectively work with others to solve a problem or to lead others to care about a problem. We also observed a marked (43%) *decline* in the percentage of students interested in running for public office, a dramatic drop from the 33% *increase* we saw in the percentage of students who reacted favorably over the 2015-16 school year.

At the same time, there was little change demonstrated in students' likelihood of engaging in protest from pre- to post-programming. Additionally, there was positive change related to their interest in contacting public officials, attending community meetings, and engaging in other types of political behaviors. We are eager to collaborate with others in the year ahead to explore whether these experiences are shared by young people beyond our program and to consider the role of organizations like ours in encouraging local political participation, despite the federal rancor.

Analyzing and reflecting on last year's programming coincided for us with an internal strategic planning process which will guide the organization's growth and development in the next three years. This [strategic plan](#) commits GC to strengthening its program portfolio, expanding its program footprint, and advocating for Action Civics at the state-level in the years to come. The lessons outlined in this report played a significant role in the articulation of those national strategic priorities, as have the experiences of our students, partners and community in the past seven years since our founding. We have accomplished much in that time, and there remains much left to do. In the words of former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, "No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime." We at GC are fully committed to this evolution, for our organization, for ourselves, and for our students, the next generation of civic change makers.

II. Overview

Organization and Programming

Generation Citizen (GC), a seven-year-old national organization, works to ensure that every student in the United States receives an effective Action Civics education which provides them with the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in our democracy as active citizens. We envision a country of young people working as active and effective citizens to collectively strengthen our American democracy.

In our work across the country (Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New York, California, and our newest sites in Oklahoma and Texas), GC partners directly with schools to implement a comprehensive Action Civics education program. Our state-standards aligned curriculum is taught twice weekly over the course of a semester, typically in a middle or high school government or social studies class. Students identify and research an issue that directly affects their lives, determine root causes of the problem, and assess specific ways they can take action toward a collectively determined goal. They then take concrete action to accomplish their goal, including lobbying, coalition-building, and community outreach. At the end of the semester, GC student representatives present their projects to community members and leaders at Civics Day, a science fair-style showcase, in which students receive feedback on and support for their work.

Core Program Models

Our ultimate aim is to ensure that every student has access to a high-quality Action Civics education. In order to scale our work while meeting the needs of diverse localities and districts, we have developed and currently run two program models. Both models share our foundational Action Civics curriculum, our innovative training approach to local advocacy planning, and participation in GC-organized Civics Day project showcase events and include significant support and supplemental resources for students, teachers, and schools.

Democracy Coach Program: In GC's historical model, we recruit, train, and supervise college volunteer Democracy Coaches ("DCs") who support teachers in facilitating our Action Civics curriculum. Action Civics pedagogy is demanding, requiring customization according to each class' interests and issue focus. This entails extensive local research, community outreach, and project coordination. DCs offer near-peer mentorship to students while also providing capacity and extra hands in the classroom to support this work.

Teacher-Led Program: In this newer approach which we have begun to pilot in several of our markets, we work directly with teachers to support their own implementation of an Action Civics curriculum. The goal of this model is to help individual schools build in-house capacity to lead effective Action Civics programming themselves through multi-year, staged partnerships in which we train and develop on-site Teacher Leaders to institutionalize Action Civics on their campuses and in their communities.

In the 2016-17 school year, teacher-led classrooms comprised 28% of our programs nationally. Seventy-eight percent of these classes were based in Massachusetts, where our teacher-led programming was first piloted out of demand for partnership with school districts outside of Boston and where this model has been instituted on the largest scale thus far. Outside of Massachusetts, all sites have concentrated on their Democracy Coach program portfolio and engaged in teacher-led programming only when the needs of geography or scheduling made that infeasible. We are committing to moving this model out of pilot stage and dedicating resources to its development and growth as a priority in our 2017-2020 strategic plan.

Activities Beyond the Classroom

Student Leadership Board: In the summer of 2016, GC launched a Student Leadership Board ("SLB") to help inform our perspective on our students' experience and drive improvements in our programming and national advocacy work. Our inaugural board was comprised of eleven 14-20 year-old GC student alumni from our original four states (CA, MA, NY, and RI). Their activities included engaging in local DC training, Civics Day, and other events and engaging in monthly virtual meetings to offer insight, feedback, and support to the organization at large.

The SLB's pilot year proved promising. All participating members attended a three-day summer retreat in NYC, and students and staff alike were encouraged by the depth of relationships students built immediately and by their belief in the power of Action Civics. In their work over the course of the year, the board created a "Students' Guide to Being a Democracy Coach" which we now share at DC training, added their perspective on the student

experience at DC training and teacher orientation events, led workshops at local GC events, and grounded our stories of action and impact.

From their reflections, members identify the SLB as a pivotal opportunity to build relationships with teens from diverse geographies and to continue developing their skills as civic change makers and as leaders. Members specifically identified the areas of time management, group collaboration, and public speaking as personal areas of growth over the course of the year. As NYC SLB member Adalberto shared, “Having passion and working with the Generation Citizen community made me realize that my voice matters and I can make a difference by using it.”

Building on its initial success, there remain opportunities for continued development of the SLB in its second year. To strengthen student leadership and ownership of the board, outgoing members worked with peers to conduct all phone interviews of 2016-17 applicants. We also created a role for two returning members so that veterans would work with staff to co-facilitate elements of the board’s summer retreat and transfer institutional knowledge.

SLB members and staff also elected this year to do more to promote participation in monthly meetings and in local site events. On this year’s board, GC staff from across the organization will join each SLB meeting to pose important questions their teams face and to solicit the SLB’s feedback. Students have already made recommendations on the organization’s approach to social media and will be reviewing updated curricular lesson plans, among other projects, in the months ahead. The 2016-17 SLB is comprised of 14 students, including two returning members and two members from each of GC’s newest Oklahoma and Texas sites.

Community Change Fellowship: The Community Change Fellowship (“CCF”) program is a summer opportunity for high-performing GC middle and high school alumni to continue to develop and exercise their civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes after the semester in a professional civic engagement environment. Fellows hold a summer internship with a stipend in political, advocacy, and governmental offices and receive GC weekly staff-led professional development throughout the program. In 2017, GC supported 49 student alumni in fellowships across Greater Boston, New York City, and (receiving funding to launch for the first time) Providence, Rhode Island. This was an increase from 2016, in which we supported 23 program alumni in Boston and New York only.

Highlights from our 2017 program include:

- At the end of the summer, all Fellows would recommend the program to a peer.
- Fellows’ confidence in their abilities increased on every skill measured, most notably their confidence in leading a meeting and speaking in public.
- All Fellows hosted informational interviews with their internship supervisors this summer, activating their skills cultivated in new email communication and informational interviews workshops.
- There was a notable increase in the number of Fellows who agreed with the statement “I know where to find more information if I am concerned about a community issue” (17% increase).
- In terms of the program affecting future life plans, we observed the greatest gains in the number of students interested in pursuing a career in advocacy and politics (59% increase), interested in running for public office (26% increase), and interested in attending community meetings (23% increase).

“Little did I know that it would be a rewarding summer, extending my career goals and social skills. I learned an excessive amount on being professional in various kinds of settings, how to communicate with coworkers and bosses and build strong relationships by networking to reach my full potential.”

- Radeha, Community Change Fellow at NYC Civilian Complaint Review Board

National Advocacy Work: In addition to our direct programming, GC recently launched efforts to build demand for Action Civics nationwide through a combination of thought leadership, coalition building, and policy. We have published numerous reports on the importance of Action Civics, convened scholars, young people, and activists in multiple forums, and begun to advocate for concrete policy solutions to promote the expansion of effective Action Civics throughout the country.

We are in the process of defining metrics to track the progress of our advocacy and policy efforts. As such, this report will focus on the impact of our programming on the students we currently directly serve. To offer a sense of the potential for impact from this branch of the organization, we note below activities we engaged in during the 2016-17 academic year:

- Published two white papers making the case for Action Civics: [Education Paves the Road to Sustained Democracy](#) and [Action Civics: Current Landscape and Rationale](#).
- Began a [Medium blog](#) to share regular point of view pieces from our staff, board members, and students; to date we have published 50 posts.
- Collaborated with key stakeholders (policymakers, other nonprofits, teachers, district and state education leaders) and funders to discuss the current state of and opportunities for improved civics education.
- Engaged state elected officials on Action Civics education legislation. In Massachusetts, we worked with State Senator Chandler's office to introduce legislation requiring student-led civics projects, which is currently pending.
- Conducted a [policy analysis of current civics education policies](#) and newly introduced legislation across all 50 states. We found that while many states require a minimum of one civics or government course, most require courses focused on historical and governmental knowledge and not on educating students with skills for citizenship.
- Launched a [Beyond the Ballot](#) campaign to engage audiences in the importance of local civic action, providing lesson plans for teachers and an Action Toolkit for citizens and youth across the country.
- As part of our Vote16 campaign to support youth-led efforts to lower the voting age to 16 for local elections in cities around the country, created a Youth Advisory Board to organize the effort and led an historic ballot measure campaign to lower the voting age in San Francisco in 2016. The proposition earned more than 172,000 votes to finish with 48% of the vote after polling at 36% just seven months prior, proving that Vote16 is a viable policy idea that voters are ready to seriously consider.

Purpose of the Report

Reflection is a central component of our students' Action Civics experience and integral to GC's learning and growth. In the words of education philosopher and reformer John Dewey, "We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience." The annual exercise of drafting and sharing a comprehensive report on our activities, experiences, and incremental outcomes is an opportunity to step back from our regular data collection and consider broad trends within our classrooms, sites, and programs. This allows us to evaluate our progress in achieving our [Theory of Change](#). Our goal is to showcase our strengths, review our challenges, and offer general observations and lessons pertinent to our own advancement, and for that of the Action Civics field at large.

Changes Made in Last Year

As a direct outcome of last year's report, leading into and over the course of the 2016-17 school year we refined our program in a variety of ways:

- To prompt students' interaction with adults outside of the classroom, we updated our curriculum to dedicate one class period to students' learning from community leaders through calls or in-person visits.
- In order to deepen students' understanding of root cause and of systemic factors impacting their issues, we created a new lesson, "Analyzing Root Cause." We also introduced language to better illustrate how systems influence individual behavior.
- To encourage students' engagement in the Action Civics process, we edited the curriculum to better explain our program's goals and the steps of Action Civics. We also created a "Research Toolkit" to assist teachers, DCs, or students in more effectively engaging in strong Action Civics research.

- We developed new resources to organize and support students in reflecting on their group collaboration in the action phase of the semester, and built a new DC training workshop designed to enhance DCs' facilitation skills.
- To improve survey response rates, we created a new student survey tracking checklist to centralize and standardize team collection procedures across sites. We also shortened DC and teacher surveys to focus on essential progress details and feedback. Finally, we replaced teacher mid-semester surveys with individual mid-semester check-in conversations.

Learning Questions

In addition to building on the lessons from the 2015-16 school year, we entered the fall of 2017 with new learning questions to explore in the year to come:

- How could we effectively scale our program (launching two sites simultaneously) while maintaining excellent quality? How would new non-coastal and less liberal geographies react to GC programming?
- How do differences in program variables (model, DC demographics or efficacy, curricular alignment, grade) affect student achievement?
- How is GC impacting our partner schools' cultures, if at all?
- How can we better understand our program's actual (versus intended) long-term impact on students?

III. Measurement and Evaluation Methodology

We revised our national Theory of Change and Logic Model in the course of a strategic planning process last spring (and therefore not related to the content of evaluation measures presented in this report). Central to our Theory of Change in the past and moving forward is our focus upon three indicators, which are the best predictors of a student's likelihood of future civic engagement:

- **Civic knowledge:** a student's grasp of the governmental process and core concepts related to advocacy and democracy, such as who the players are and ways citizens can influence the political process;
- **Civic skills:** a student's ability to use acquired skills effectively to participate in the political process, including the abilities to think critically, communicate persuasively, problem-solve, and work collaboratively;
- **Civic dispositions:** a student's desire to actively participate in the political process and take action on community issues.

In order to assess our students' development on each of these metrics and more broadly, we utilized a range of data collection tools, whose uses, benefits, and drawbacks are outlined in the chart below.

Table A: Summary of Data Collection Methods

Method	Type of Analysis	Overall Purpose	Advantages	Challenges
Classroom Observation	<i>Qualitative and Quantitative</i>	To gather information on class progress in real time and to provide immediate feedback to DCs and teachers.	Offer immediate feedback on student, teacher, and DC needs and the option of direct and relevant support.	Laborious and time-intensive recordkeeping of range of data collected, and to date lack of analysis of quantitative data.
Student Pre- and- Post-Semester Surveys	<i>Quantitative</i>	To gather self-assessment reports from student's experiences.	Random sampling of classes presents an unbiased view of student development.	Labor intensive; requires cooperation of students and understanding of survey questions; imperfect tool to gauge skill and disposition development, as students learn through challenges.

Method	Type of Analysis	Overall Purpose	Advantages	Challenges
Teacher Mid-Semester Check-Ins and End-of-Semester Surveys	<i>Qualitative and Quantitative</i>	To gather information on teachers' opinions and reflections on the program and to provide immediate feedback for program improvement.	Complement potential gaps in students' own self-awareness of learning; aggregate valuable feedback on program efficacy from veteran educators.	Quick semester timeline requires diligence of staff and cooperation of partners in order to schedule check-ins and collect survey responses.
DC Mid- and End-of-Semester Surveys	<i>Qualitative and Quantitative</i>	To gather information on DCs' opinions and reflections on the program and to provide immediate feedback for program improvement.	Invite feedback on multiple aspects of programming; share real-time classroom progress and opportunities for program improvement.	Response rates vary across programs; quick semester timeline requires diligence of staff and cooperation of partners.
Student Focus Groups*	<i>Qualitative</i>	To hear directly from students about their memories of and take-aways from their GC experiences in order to calibrate their program's stated goals with our true impact on students.	Reveal more information about students' experiences than surveys and allow for discussion of impacts not anticipated by surveys.	Laborious and time-intensive, requiring the collaboration of school partners to connect with student alumni and local IRB approval for new evaluation projects; limited sample size.

* Not a standard aspect of data collection. Utilized on a per-project basis, as needed.

Classroom Observations

GC staff conduct regular observations of all of our participating classrooms, with a national goal of 80% of classes receiving two observations or more during the semester. End-of-year data suggest that staff observed 65% of classes at least two times in the 2016-17 school year, though this number was likely higher due to inconsistent tracking across sites.

Student Surveys

We employed a clustered probability sample for our student survey design, in which classrooms were clustered into small groups by region and then randomly selected to be surveyed. Surveys were distributed and administered by GC staff or classroom teachers in hard copy or electronically. We surveyed 49 schools (45% of partner schools) and 75 classrooms (20% of all classrooms). We ultimately collected pre- and post-survey responses from more than 1,687 students, nearly 18% of all students served. The number of matched pre-and post-surveys (surveys completed by the same student) was fewer, numbering approximately 460 respondents for each question, or 27% of all surveys collected (considering that some respondents left some questions blank), an increase from the 17% of surveys for which we had matched responses last year. Our analysis calculated the results of each question within both the set of matching surveys and within the full set of responses, and we have shared matching responses in this report, unless otherwise indicated.

Teacher and DC Surveys

All participating DCs were surveyed online at the middle and end of the semester about their experiences at training, in their classrooms, and in chapter meetings, and about their class' plans and progress. We collected 265 end-of-semester surveys from DCs (61% response rate, up from 53% last year).

Similarly, teachers participated in in-person or virtual middle of semester check-ins with GC staff and end of semester online surveys. Collection efforts were led by local program staff. We collected 116 end-of-semester surveys from teachers (57% response rate, up from 47% last year).

Focus Group

Last spring, we conducted focus groups in New York and Rhode Island designed to help us link the relationship between our intended program outcomes to medium-term impact and to identify students' interest in future engagement with the organization. The goal of these focus groups was to prepare the organization for effective longitudinal evaluation by better understanding the breadth of the potential long-term impact of the program. We partnered with one school in New York City and one in Providence, Rhode Island for this project. The study design

was centered around 45-60-minute conversations with four groups of 3-5 students at a time, for a total of 14 students across the conversations. Students had participated in the program either once or twice, and between 4 months to 1.5 years has passed since their engagement with GC. These learning opportunities provided a new lens into student experiences and better visibility for possible development of an alumni engagement framework, and insight into the types of impact we hope to see long-term.

IV. Evidence and Discussion of Impact

FY17 Program Composition and Breadth



Table B. Program Size across Sites

	CA	MA	NY	OK	RI	TX	Total
Classrooms	53 (14%)	129 (34%)	131 (34%)	11 (3%)	45 (12%)	15 (4%)	384
Schools	16 (15%)	27 (25%)	36 (34%)	6 (6%)	14 (13%)	7 (7%)	107
Students	1325 (14%)	3225 (34%)	3275 (34%)	275 (3%)	1150 (12%)	375 (4%)	9600

Table C. Number of Classrooms per Program Model across Sites

	CA	MA	NY	OK	RI	TX	Total
Democracy Coach	45 (16%)	44 (16%)	124 (45%)	11 (4%)	40 (15%)	11 (4%)	275
Teacher-Led	8 (7%)	85 (78%)	7 (6%)	0	5 (5%)	4 (4%)	109

Students

Nationally, 51% of GC classes served high school students and 49% served middle school students. From the students surveyed, the majority of our students were female (54%). More than a third of students were Hispanic (34%), with the remainder of the surveyed cohort comprised of Asian (24%), Caucasian (14%), and African American/black (13%) students, respectively. (Ten percent of students identified with more than one ethnic group, and 5% chose not to answer this question.)

Democracy Coaches

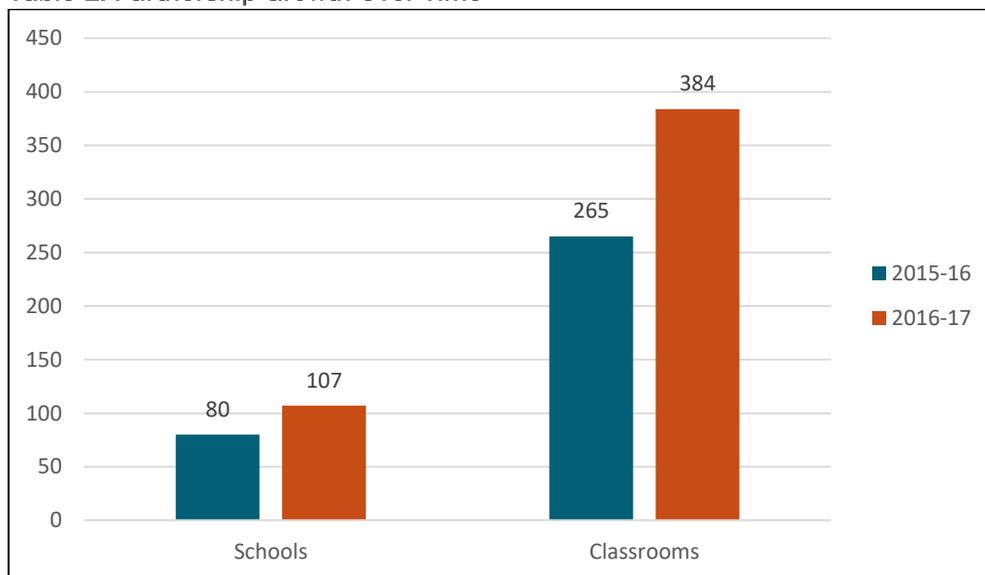
Within the DC program, our volunteers came from 27 colleges and universities across our six sites. Over two-thirds of DCs (68%) were female. Volunteers' participation ranged fairly evenly overall across freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior years of college. The vast majority of 2016-17 DCs (85%) were volunteering with the program for the first time; 15% were returning DCs, though more veteran DCs were involved with the organization in a volunteer managerial capacity, as Chapter Directors helping recruit and support DCs on their campuses.

Table D. Democracy Coach Race/Ethnicity across Sites

	CA	MA	NY	OK	RI	TX	Total
American Indian/Alaska Native	0%	2%	0%	11%	0%	0%	1%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%	4%	1%
Decline to State	1%	0%	1%	6%	0%	4%	1%
Black /African American	4%	5%	17%	0%	1%	4%	8%
Other	10%	7%	9%	6%	4%	7%	8%
Asian	23%	18%	15%	6%	4%	4%	14%
Hispanic/Latino	25%	5%	13%	6%	13%	39%	14%
White/Caucasian	36%	64%	44%	67%	76%	39%	53%

Schools

Table E. Partnership Growth Over Time



In the 2016-17 school year, we grew our school partnerships by 34% and classrooms served by 45%, including expanding into two new regions. Teachers’ surveys reveal that, out of 12 possible options, their top priorities for working with GC were: the opportunity to deepen students’ engagement with the community, GC’s emphasis on civic development, and GC’s focus on project-based learning.

At the same time as we experienced significant program growth, we retained 72% of our 2015-16 school partners nationally. Anecdotal analysis by program staff suggest that the primary reasons for non-retention of partners were due to teacher or administrative turn-over or program quality. We are interested in engaging in an in-depth exploration of past partnerships to help inform our understanding of the challenges impacting sustained programming. We look forward to exploring ways to help create funding opportunities, and strengthening our partnerships to prevent gaps in programming during time of school staff transitions.

We are also interested in exploring Action Civics’ penetration within our partner schools and the extent to which it can be expected that all students will participate in Action Civics before they graduate (a term we refer to internally as “saturation”). Recordkeeping on this metric was too inconsistent across sites in the 2016-17 school year to reliably report on, though we have clarified tracking procedures in order to collect clear data in the year ahead.

Qualitative Evidence of Learning Civics by Doing Civics Nationwide

In our FY15 Impact Report, we identified two priorities for deepening student learning through their action projects. We aimed to improve curricula and facilitator training to support students in:

- 1) Pursuing more politically specific goals by targeting governmental and other systems of power to achieve systemic solutions and, and
- 2) Interacting more with community stakeholders and decision-makers beyond the classroom.

We feel that anecdotal examples from this semester helps to demonstrate our progress in achieving these goals.

California

The school day begins at 8:00am at Oakland Charter High School students. Since the majority of students have long commutes from Fruitvale or East Oakland, they often struggle with arriving to school on time. One class worked to solve some of the transportation issues students faced by addressing a range of factors affecting students' travel. They organized a meeting with a transportation planner at AC Transit (the public transportation provider serving the western portions of Alameda and Contra Costa counties) to give feedback on their experience with Oakland's bus routes. They also surveyed their classmates to identify students who lived nearest to one another and designed a school-wide carpool system, which they presented to their school administration along with a proposal for a less punitive tardy policy.

Massachusetts

Students at Lowell High School focused their work on gun violence and its relationship with mental health and child safety. They researched other communities' steps to broach this topic and set an ambitious goal of creating a gun buyback program to make homes safer in Lowell. They pitched their idea at a meeting with the Lowell Police Department, the Sheriff of the Middlesex County, and the Lowell Health Department. All stakeholders agreed to sign on to the campaign. To advertise the program, students wrote an op-ed which was published in the local newspaper and posted fliers locally about the event in multiple languages. Additionally, in partnership with 35 houses of worship, 21 nonprofit organizations and local businesses, the class raised \$4,500. This money was used to purchase gift cards which were given in exchange for each gun collected.

On the day of the event, in a span of five hours the students, with the help of the Lowell Police Department and the Lowell Health Department, successfully collected 38 guns, one of which was loaded.

New York

A class of Brooklyn middle-school students focused on the availability of affordable health foods in their neighborhood. They were frustrated that healthy food was not accessible to students and began exploring the rules and regulations governing public school cafeterias in NYC. After their research, they set a goal to raise the caliber of schools' cafeterias in terms of healthy food options as well as sanitation and advocated in support of a City Council bill that required school cafeterias to publicize their health inspection scores. Their lobbying efforts were successful, and the bill was passed into law by New York City Council last summer. This accomplishment brought awareness and accountability to the state of school dining facilities as well as expanded and deepened discourse about healthier food options in public schools among students and in their homes and communities.

Oklahoma

Seniors at Southmoore High School identified legislation which would address high incarceration rates in the State of Oklahoma, which they determined disproportionately affected students of color and their parents. While working with former state legislator Chris Steele, the leading advocate for criminal justice reform in Oklahoma, the class identified and lobbied for legislation that would reduce sentences for nonviolent crimes. Their Democracy Coach, Tamah, reflected at the end of the semester that "the students who are representing the class at Civics Day were the least motivated at the beginning of the year. However, they are now the most passionate about making change in our community. I have full confidence that each of my students will be change makers in their future."

Rhode Island

Students identified and were debating the dual issues of bullying and LGBTQ rights when they discovered that in the last legislative session the Rhode Island General Assembly had considered but failed to pass a bill outlawing conversion therapy aimed at changing a child's sexual orientation. They set a goal of convincing representatives to reintroduce the bill and pass the measure in the 2017 session.

They met with the woman coordinating the campaign and then had a phone call with the previous bill's sponsor, Senator Nesselbush, to encourage her to reintroduce the measure. Students then met with the Chair of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services to lobby for his support and, after learning that the previous measure had failed partly because the ACLU had opposed it, students reached out to the ACLU to make an appeal.

After the semester, students continued to support the now introduced legislation. By the end of the session, the Senate and House passed legislation, an effort led primarily by the two elected officials the students had lobbied directly, and the bill was signed into law by Governor Gina Raimondo.

Texas

In Bastrop, Texas, high school students found there were limited activities available for 14-16-year-olds in their town after school hours. To remedy this, they proposed that youth voice be considered in the creation of city-wide programming and advocated for the creation of a City Youth Advisory Council. After researching Youth Advisory Councils in nearby towns, students reached out to similar groups across Texas, getting input from local city managers, other Youth Advisory Councils, and Parks and Recreation departments to draft a proposal. Students presented their findings to the City Manager and City Council, and their plan was ultimately approved.

Focus Group Learnings

Our spring focus group project ([full report here](#)) added to the qualitative evidence of impact we collected throughout the year. The focus groups unanimously suggested that students gained civic knowledge, skills, and motivation in the near-term. Many components of the program - content proficiency, critical thinking, collaboration, problem solving, and public speaking - resonated strongly with students. Furthermore, students described a process of identity development they went through during GC. They started the program seeing themselves as consumers of information and unengaged bystanders and became over time producers with agency who could make a difference.

Consistent with previous GC studies, students who participated in the program in middle school reflected more on their learning about their focus issue itself than high schoolers, who were extrapolating their experiences to engage in civic activities within their schools and communities. Older students offered that they felt prepared to step out of their comfort zones, and empowered to make a change at any age and any time. In the future, there is opportunity to improve our ongoing relationship with middle and high school alumni by organizing extended learning opportunities to build on the skill development sparked within the program. Additionally, we can do more to clearly paint a vision of the long-term civic behaviors we aspire our students to demonstrate.

Evidence of Impact

We taught approximately 9,475 students over the course of the year and observed gains overall across all three domains of civics knowledge, skills and disposition development. (In reporting on data from student surveys below, we have generally calculated point change from the beginning to the end of the semester in the percentage of students answering correctly or positively per surveyed question, in order to identify areas of more or less student development.)

Gains in Civic Knowledge

"You don't have to contact the mayor to make something happen, you can contact a local council member who is more likely reachable. From there on you take a path to where your voice will be heard."

- Arnab, GC student alumnus and former Student Leadership Board member, Queens, NY

"Learning the differences between systemic causes and individual causes was a game changer for our students, not just for their work with the GC curriculum but in their social/emotional development as people. They gained new language for how to talk about the issues they face every day, and were able to hold more sophisticated examinations of their own actions and influences."

- Ms. Anderson, GC teacher, Boston, MA

According to teachers, more than three-quarters of students (80%) students gained civic knowledge over the course of the program (up from 72% last year). These gains were slightly more pronounced than those of participants in the 2015-16 school year, perhaps owing to curricular enhancements designed to promote student reflection and encourage direct engagement with political structures and processes. It should be noted that students' baseline

civic knowledge scores were higher on this year's surveys than in years past, perhaps a response to teachers covering more standard civic knowledge content in their regular courses in light of teaching during a presidential election year.

Additional findings from our student surveys include that:

- We saw a 27% increase in the number of students who could identify a systemic-level root cause of an issue (with 66% of students correct on post-surveys), whereas last year there was a 6% drop in students' mastery of this question from the beginning to end of the program.
 - We attributed the previous drop to students' confusion with the language of the question. This year, we built into our lessons a more explicit introduction to and exploration of how systems, beyond individuals, affect communities and their challenges and changed the survey question to align with this language.
- The percentage of students who correctly identified a strategic decision maker for an action plan increased by the same percentage (22%) as last year.
- Students continued to show gains in understanding the functions and structures of the local executive and legislative branches of government, though there was a 26% increase the average number of students answering these questions correctly last year, and only a 7% increase this year.

Past GC reports and reflections have detailed the challenge of assessing students' civic content mastery in the context of their engagement in local site-specific and issue-specific political action. In our curricular edits in the summer of 2016, we revised the lessons in our research unit so that students were more consciously analyzing the governmental branches and their structures on a state and local level, and we were hoping to see more demonstrated growth as a result on these survey questions. While students largely did demonstrate gains here, their outcomes were slightly lower than last year's. Teachers' perceptions of student learning did demonstrate more significant gains. This continues to present an opportunity for learning for us, and we plan to collaborate with other Action Civics practitioners in the year ahead to learn how they support and assess their students' growth in fundamental civic knowledge.

Development of Civic Skills

"Students became better at listening to others and acknowledging other points of view."

- Ms. Blevins, GC teacher, Moore, OK

"[At the beginning of the semester, a particular student] was really shy and not confident of his ability to speak English, especially in public. It really warmed my heart that by the end of the course he was ecstatic about speaking during the presentation and offering all sorts of information about his interests."

- Rene, Democracy Coach from San Francisco State University, CA

"Certain students who struggled with more traditional classwork (reading/writing/essay assignments) really blossomed through this program. Their critical thinking skills were stoked via group brainstorming sessions and they shined doing person to person outreach and public speaking. Others, who were full of anxiety about the public speaking part, found themselves motivated enough by the issue to push through their fears and discover new sides of themselves."

- Ms. Ullmann, GC teacher, Providence, RI

Teachers observed development of civic skills among nearly three-quarters (72%) of their students (up from 70% last year), and consistently cited collaboration and teamwork, critical thinking, public speaking, and outreach to and engaging with adults as the most notable areas of their students' growth.

We also observed interesting changes from students' surveys in the 2015-16 school year:

- On two indicators, students demonstrated gains similar to their growth last year, with the most improvement from this section in their confidence in their ability to speak in public (a 21% increase from pre- to post-surveys in both years) and in their ability to construct a strategic plan of action (a 12% increase, compared to 13% last year).

- We saw a marked decline from last year, however, in students' self-reported ability to collaborate with others to solve a problem (a 5% decline this year from pre- to post-surveys) and to lead others to care about a problem (a 3% gain as opposed to a 15% gain the year before).

We hypothesize that confusion caused by the language of survey questions is obscuring a clear picture of student skill development, and we have edited the skills questions on our student survey moving forward. We have also elaborated in previous reports on the universal challenge of assessing skill development via surveys, which capture only students' confidence demonstrating particular skills, not their proficiency in doing so. Similarly, students' confidence in their abilities may drop as they learn the skill required to demonstrate them at the same time as their actual competence in the skill is increasing. These challenges underscore the need to continue contextualizing our student survey processes within other methods of evaluation, like portfolio rubrics and qualitative assessments.

As we further reflect on these responses, we notice self-reported growth in students' intrapersonal skill development (those skills demonstrated individually and cultivated within one's own mind) substantially exceeded their growth in their interpersonal skills (those requiring interactions with others). This observation warrants further study, but it is interesting to consider the potential influence here of the current highly partisan and rancorous political climate on students' perceived confidence relying on themselves versus working effectively with others.

Cultivation of Civic Dispositions

"Students are wondering, "What can I do?" instead of being resigned that things will stay the way they are."
 - Mr. Turner, GC teacher, Boston, MA

"We had to work with people we didn't necessarily like sometimes, and it showed me a lot about being patient and thinking before I speak. Seeing a difference in our community has shown me that I want to do more things like that."
 - Nikolas, GC student alumnus and Student Leadership Board member, Bastrop, TX

Civic dispositions are the underlying beliefs and mindsets which make people inclined to participate in the political process, including a sense of responsibility to community and belief that they can make a difference, as well as their motivation to participate. Teachers in the 2016-17 school year identified that 62% of their students cultivated civic dispositions as an effect of the program (compared to 68% last year).

Students' survey results validated the impacts that we observed last year:

- Students' demonstrated the largest gains over the semester in their likelihood of participating in the most active and strategic political activities offered as choices, such as writing an article, op-ed, or letter to the editor in the future (42% growth), contacting or meeting with a public official (29% growth), signing a petition (27% growth), attending a community meeting (13% growth), or volunteering for a campaign (10% growth).
- Of the list, GC's effect on students was most negligible on general activities such as volunteering in their community (1% increase) and following the news (3% increase), though these were also the activities with the highest baseline of students interested at the beginning of the term (73% and 68%, respectively).

This realm of student learning warrants more attention. We notice, for example, that students are entering the program with a curiously high level of commitment to voting in future elections, with 81% of students ranking this as a likely behavior they will pursue, a statistic which has held steady over the past several years of programming. We know, however, that less than 50% of eligible 18-24 year olds voted in the 2016 election, and only 12% voted in the 2014 midterms.¹ This data mismatch might be exacerbated by the wording of our survey questions, suggest that students are volunteering answers which they suspect adults want to see, or perhaps demonstrate the effect of barriers (to voter registration or actual voting itself) preventing students from ultimately engaging in activities in which they are interested.

¹ http://civicyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/CIRCLE-Full-Exit-Poll-Analysis_Final.pdf

Experience with Civic Action

After their GC semesters, a group of 11th grade students in New York organized a walk-out at their school in protest of a governmental policy and contacted news media to report on it. In sharing this story during our focus group discussions, one reflected that during GC, “I was a part of the phone call committee, so I feel like if I was not a part of this committee, never would I ever have called New York 1 [local news station], or told other people “yeah, you should call!”

Knowing that habits of civic participation are set early in life, in the past two years of GC programming we have elevated students’ experience engaging in the activities of civic engagement alongside our priority of supporting their civic knowledge, skill, and disposition development. Our students’ surveys ask them about their experience with civic engagement before and after the program so that we can understand and increase the number and type of civic behaviors are students are practicing within their GC semesters.

During the 2016-17 school year, we observed that:

- Before GC, almost three-quarters (73%) of students had never contacted or met with a public official and the same percentage had never written an article, op-ed, or letter to the editor of a newspaper, magazine, or blog (down from 78% and 75% respectively, last year).
- Before GC, two-thirds (66%) had never attended a community meeting (down from 83% last year).
- By the end of the program, more than half (56%) of students had contacted or met with a public official (a 110% increase from the beginning of the program).
- By the end of the program, 44% had written an article, op-ed, or letter to the editor (a 66% increase over the course of the semester) and 44% had attended a community meeting (a 41% increase).

As noted last year, the response options in this section were confusing (requiring students to identify activities they had never done, done but not within the past 12 months, and done recently). We kept these the same in the past year to compare information over time but have edited these questions on FY18 surveys to minimize confusion.

It should be noted that this section of students’ surveys reveals the most significant gains of any competency measured and suggests that engaging students in new civic behaviors is a clear value-add of the program. At the same time, as apparent from the data above, the baseline of students’ responses on pre-semester surveys was higher throughout this section this year than in the 2015-16 academic year. We again attribute this to the possible heightened engagement of individuals in political events during presidential campaign cycles.

Program Feedback

As we learn and evolve as an organization, it is essential that we are meeting the needs of our partners and students and improving our operations based on their experience and insight. Last year’s surveys, check-ins, and observations offered us a range of information about the satisfaction and suggestions of our stakeholders.

Students’ surveys reveal that nearly 70% (69%) of students would recommend GC to their friends (consistent with last year’s reporting) and 50% of the student respondents said they tried new things in GC more than in other classes (last year 46% responded this way). Reminiscent of last year’s results as well, over 40% of students said that they collaborated with peers, engaged in real-world learning, and had a say in projects they worked on more than in other classes. The most consistent anecdotal feedback we collected from student alumni (through their SLB applications) was that they wished that had had more time to work on their projects and that they wished that all students were as involved and invested in GC as they were.

The vast majority of DCs report enjoying the program, gaining personal and professional skills through participating in it, and working hard to fulfill their commitments. More than 80% of DCs (84%) had a “Good” or “Excellent” experience overall, and over three-quarters (78%) would confidently recommend participating to a peer, consistent with our findings in past academic years. They report committing on average six hours a week to GC (from preparation to travel to classroom time to meetings).

Table F. Percentage of DCs who Report GC Having a “Positive Impact” on their Development

Communication skills	90%	Knowledge of local politics	83%
Ability to effectively engage with people of different backgrounds or perspectives	89%	Professionalism	83%
Leadership skills	89%	Confidence taking action on issues that matter to you	82%
Self-awareness	87%	Time management skills	75%
Commitment to your local community	86%	Interest in a career related to government	56%
Ability to work with a group to achieve a goal	83%	Interest in a career related to education	54%
Intent to be politically engaged	83%	Interest in running for public office	40%

Teachers similarly offered positive reflections on their engagement with the program, with over 90% (91%) reporting a “Good” or “Excellent” experience overall, almost all teachers (97%) having had “Good” or “Excellent” overall interactions with GC staff, and more than three-quarters (78%) confidently recommending partnership to others.

Teachers’ anecdotal feedback highlighted needs to support students in engaging in action earlier in the semester, to better differentiate the curriculum for middle and high school students, and to continue making more resources (including students’ handbooks) accessible and interactive online. In addition to highlighting opportunities for growth, they also identified students’ engagement with personal community issues, GC staff, DCs, and Civics Day as notable assets of the program.

An Acknowledgement of the Effects of the Political Climate

This report’s analysis covers students’ participation in GC during the 2016-17 school year. In addition to learning and reacting to their GC experiences during this time, students were simultaneously living within and affected by the broader national political climate, which became increasingly vitriolic in the lead-up to the presidential election in November of 2016. This political rancor has only increased in recent months, especially on the federal level.

In the “Civic Skills” section above, we suggest possible ramifications of this context on students’ stunted development of interpersonal skills (at arguably a time when they need those most). In the “Civic Action” section, we highlighted a higher baseline this year in students’ reporting of having previously engaged in civic behaviors. We also observed this year a marked (43%) *decline* in the percentage of students interested in running for public office, a dramatic drop from the 33% *increase* we saw in the percentage of students considering their potential candidacy over the 2015-16 school year.

Though protest has garnered much attention in popular media and public discourse as a means of action since the November elections, there were much greater gains in the percentage of students interested in volunteering for political campaigns (10% increase), attending community meetings (13% increase), signing or circulating petitions (27% increase), contacting public officials (29% increase), and writing to a newspaper or magazine (42% increase) than there were in the percentage of students interested in participating in protest (6% increase) at the end of their GC experiences. This statistic underscores our intention of teaching young people to know and explore diverse opportunities for civic engagement and to be intentional and strategic when constructing action plans.

V. Lessons for the Future

FY17 Takeaways

Program and Impact

The 2016-17 school year offered dramatic headlines in national politics. Meanwhile at GC, we significantly expanded our program (adding breadth in our current sites, launching in two new geographies, and increasing access to our summer programming) while maintaining strong student outcomes and participant satisfaction. Our capacity to sustain program quality throughout growth was a significant accomplishment for us as we enter a

period of more dramatic scale. Our students demonstrated gains across the board in civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Additionally, we improved our student, DC, and teacher survey response rates, thereby increasing our confidence in the validity of their lessons, and delved into new projects which taught us more about the impact of our program beyond the numbers.

This impact analysis reinforces our understanding that when students are actively engaged in the work of constructing, collaborating on, and communicating about their Action Civics projects, they experience significant skill development and identity evolution. This reflection has highlighted the need for us to grapple in the year ahead with how to deepen *all* students' engagement in the course of their GC semesters, before the action phase of the term and beyond those most piqued by the project. We have already taken steps to tackle this challenge through several projects in the summer of 2017:

- We reorganized students' research process in the curriculum, structuring a new unit around working groups engaged in Participatory Action Research - analyzing articles, calling elected officials and community experts, and surveying their community about their issue.
- We created resources to better support English Language Learners in our classrooms, including a modified Spanish-language student handbook and a series of online skills tutorials for DCs.
- We designed and are piloting a modified DC role in our MA and TX sites, in which teachers' expertise is utilized for lesson planning and facilitation and DCs' roles are maximized to enable them to support class advocacy research and build on their near-peer mentorship relationships with students.
- We updated our classroom observation rubric, a tool which helps staff determine classroom progress and offer feedback to DCs and support to teachers, to reframe it from analyzing facilitator behavior to analyzing student engagement and demonstration of learning.

Our evaluation has also prompted us to consider how we can begin engaging in more student alumni programming this year, and our interesting assumptions about the influence of national elections on student learning underscores the need for long-term evaluation of the program's impact on student behavior.

Process and Evaluation Methods

Owing to increased staff capacity and improved organizational systems, our team was better able to coordinate survey administration and focus group implementation across sites than in years before. However, inconsistent recordkeeping procedures between site offices limited our ability to evaluate changes in school saturation rates, guest speaker visits, and certain action project outcomes as we had intended. Leading into the 2017-18 school year, we clarified and standardized consistent methods to collect and record data this school year. Teams will be held accountable for reviewing and reflecting on data on an ongoing basis. Additionally, we created new online surveys integrated with our data management platform, Salesforce, to build efficiency in our data collection efforts.

We also note that surveys are only one tool of program monitoring and evaluation. While we believe that surveys are necessary to keep us informed about program progress, strengths, and opportunities for growth, previous reports have elaborated on their limited utility in unpacking students' skill development and long-term changes in attitude or behavior. This year's focus groups offered a valuable opportunity for deeper learning about our program's impact. We will be engaging this spring in qualitative analysis of unique elements of our Democracy Coach and teacher-led program models, as well. Limited capacity has prevented us from engaging in this in-depth analysis in a meaningful way from quantitative data alone.

Plans for FY18 and Beyond

This year, we will embark on the first year of a new ambitious three-year [strategic plan](#) for the organization. This plan calls for us to strengthen our Action Civics program portfolio by developing program models accessible to students across geographic and academic settings, increase our program footprint to serve 30,000 students in rural and urban areas annually by FY20, and advocate for Action Civics nationally by focusing on advancing state-level policy change.

Underlying each strategic plan priority is the need to evaluate the impact of our efforts in order to guide the implementation of this plan. In the coming year we must make strategic investments to enable this learning and

growth as well as to act on lessons from the past year. In this pursuit, in FY18 we will:

- Implement an updated Theory of Change and Logic Model to guide our measurement and evaluation work and program design;
- Hire our first full-time Director of Measurement and Evaluation to align our diverse array of evaluation activities, drive development of new monitoring and evaluation tools and projects, and determine a plan for longitudinal evaluation design;
- Engage in strategic program pilots to inform iteration of our programming, including rural/urban student interaction, DC volunteers in midlife or older, and new tools for relationship development in the classroom;
- Create resources to better help our teachers, schools, and districts assess their students' learning over the course of the program and, in turn, demonstrate the value of Action Civics in their own communities;
- Cultivate new partnerships to test creative approaches to scaling Action Civics and to support the development of high-quality evaluation tools for the field at large.

Since its inception, GC has been propelled forward by the productive tension and energy of holding two of its [core values](#) concurrently at heart - open-mindedness and action. In the past seven years, we have engaged more than 40,000 students through Action Civics and we have learned much along that journey of the work it takes to support teachers and schools in this most important and difficult of endeavors. Every insight, however, has created new questions to explore in our work moving forward. We have no doubt that we will continue in this tradition of reflecting, learning, innovating, and reflecting again in the year ahead.