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AIC VIRTUAL COMMISSIONING™ PILOT PROCESS EVALUATION

Summary of Findings from
Participant Interviews

7/8/2021



Project Scope

Key Objective: Gather information on the successes, challenges and experiences of customers participating in the Virtual Commissioning™ Pilot

- ✓ Identify opportunities for improvement in the early stages of the Pilot
- ✓ Understand participant satisfaction with different aspects of the Pilot
- ✓ Conduct exploration of the potential for free-ridership and spillover

Project Approach

- Conducted in-depth interviews with four participants
 - The four participants represented banking and school facilities
 - The interviewed participants held a variety of roles and possessed different backgrounds
- Interviews covered 48% of all Pilot projects, as of Q2 of 2021
 - Pilot participants may have been responsible for more than one project

Overall, participants are very satisfied with their Virtual Commissioning™ participation experience



VERY LIKELY TO RECOMMEND

Participants were very likely to recommend the Pilot to others (9.9/10)



MAJORITY OF RECOMMENDATIONS WERE FEASIBLE

Recommendations took anywhere between a few hours and a few weeks to implement



INCREASED ALREADY POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS OF AIC

“They make their living off energy but they're willing to help us be better at it, which I think is tremendous.”



MATERIALS & INFORMATION WERE ACCESSIBLE

- Graphics and spreadsheets were nicely put together and straightforward to interpret
- Power TakeOff staff were responsive to questions about the materials



LIKED “VIRTUALITY” OF PILOT

- Overall, participants preferred the virtual format to an onsite format and appreciated the flexibility to make changes on their own time
- Bank staff did not have to worry about the security risks of onsite visits



POSITIVE REVIEWS OF ENERGY ADVISOR

- Overall, participants provided glowing reviews of energy advisor relationship
- “*Very satisfied*”, “*Wonderful*”, “*Very impressed*”

Participants identified three main drivers of participation



Building ownership structures and certain site characteristics created barriers to participation

- Participants faced challenges with “*Good sites, [with] no opportunities*” which include:
 - **Cases where the building had been leased out** - In these situations, participants had no control over HVAC temperature setpoints or lighting schedules and could not make the recommended changes
 - **Facilities that are old buildings or have old equipment that could not be modified** – In some cases the existing equipment did not have the capabilities to be programmed with the recommended system changes and participants might wait for end of life to replace/upgrade the equipment
 - Ex. Outdated HVAC systems, non-programmable thermostats
 - **Shared office spaces where there is a 3rd party tenant**– These pose a similar challenge to leased out buildings. The increased need for coordination makes it more complicated to get facility managers and stakeholders in the building to agree on implementation
- Participants did not report experiencing challenges with internal coordination and corporate buy-in when prompted

Pilot benefits included financial and energy savings and the virtuality aspect of the Pilot. Participants struggled to identify challenges.



BENEFITS

- Most participants identified trackable financial savings and reduced energy use as key benefits
- The virtuality of the pilot was a benefit during COVID-19. There was no lag or adjustment period to transition to a remote system, and participants were able to continue to investigate potential changes virtually
 - “It wasn’t put on halt, because it was a virtual program.”
- There were no operational benefits/costs identified– typically changes only applied to unoccupied times

CHALLENGES



- The COVID-19 pandemic reduced the energy savings potential at different facilities by impacting the occupancy hours and decreasing energy-consuming activities.
- Staff responsible for making the recommended changes had to prioritize cleaning responsibilities due to the pandemic
- One participant suggested AIC provide clients with a list of easy scheduling changes as well as some longer-term recommendations
- Overall, participants did not identify many areas for improvement
 - “At the end of the day, this is a slam dunk. I mean, this is probably one of the easiest things I've done that has decent financial returns for a limited amount of effort.”



Preliminary results show low likelihood of free-ridership

- All participants reported that if they had not participated in the Virtual Commissioning™ Pilot, they would have been:
 - **Unlikely** to make the changes to their facility at the **same time**
 - **Unlikely** to make the **same number** of changes to their facility
- There was more variation in the likelihood that participants would have made the changes **at all** if they had not participated in the Virtual Commissioning™ Pilot (2 unlikely, 1 possible, 1 likely)
- Qualitatively, participants reported that they were not aware of the changes that needed to be made prior to the discussion with their energy advisor
- Participants may have addressed these changes at some point in the future but reported the changes would likely have resulted in less energy savings due to fewer changes identified and the delayed implementation timeline

Virtual Commissioning™ helps support, but is not the primary motivator for spillover actions at participating facilities

- The recommendations might support a decision to make further changes, such as replacing an HVAC system, but would not have been the driving factor in implementing the change.
 - “It's helped us identify locations. Again, it's a support function where we know we have issues and we need to focus capital on making improvements on those sites, but it's not the right data to drive the decision.”
 - “Hasn't driven a change as much as it supports it.”
- Participants reported their participation in the Pilot had minimal influence on decisions to make changes at other facilities
- Possible explanations for low instances of spillover can likely be explained by participants' lack of control over leased-out facilities, lack of additional facilities, or that the recommendations were tailored to one specific facility

Virtual Commissioning™ participants are good candidates for other AIC offerings



Interviewed participants reported low awareness of, and low to no prior participation in, other AIC initiatives.

- Some interviewees caveated that their company may have been previously involved with an AIC program, but not during their tenure



No participants reported enrolling in any AIC initiatives since their first contact with the Virtual Commissioning™ Pilot.

- However, participants were still early in the participation process, and all intended to participate in the future
- “If the net result is the results that I have been seeing month over month, absolutely.”



Participants reported services of interest.

- Participants are interested in rebates/financial incentives for HVAC upgrades, lighting, and gas boilers
- Technical assistance and support
 - Onsite visit that consists of an audit of the facility and identification of areas of high energy usage and spending



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KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Leverage cross-program participation with targeting “Long-term list”

TAKEAWAYS



- None of the interviewed Virtual Commissioning™ participants had participated in other AIC initiatives, yet all expressed an interest in participating in the future
- One participant suggested AIC provide clients with a list of easy scheduling changes in addition to some longer-term recommendations, while another recommended onsite technical support to provide an audit of the facility and its energy consumption

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consider providing participants with a short term “low-hanging fruit” list in addition to a higher effort list of recommended actions at their facility. Use the higher effort list and the information on old buildings and outdated equipment, to better channel participants into additional AIC programs
- Continue to work to develop a logical pathway for cross-program participation. For example, Power TakeOff and AIC could direct Virtual Commissioning™ participants to the Small Business Direct Install (SBDI) Initiative and then on to Standard offerings, such as HVAC rebates, if appropriate

Successful implementation and targeting

TAKEAWAYS



- Overall, participants have high satisfaction with all aspects of the Pilot and reported the participation process was seamless
- The Pilot successfully targeted a hard-to-reach customer segment that had low to no experience with AIC initiatives, yet has interest in participating in the future
- Participants appreciate the virtual format of the Pilot

RECOMMENDATIONS

- As Virtual Commissioning™ was a Pilot in 2020, AIC may want to consider continuing to scale the Initiative to serve more customers in future program years

Preliminary results show AIC can expect low free ridership and minimal spillover for Virtual Commissioning™ in future program years

TAKEAWAYS



- Preliminary analysis revealed low instances of free-ridership in the Pilot. Participants were unlikely to make the same number of changes or make the changes at the same time if it had not been for the Pilot
- Instances of spillover will likely be minimal because the program plays a contributing roll in motivating spillover actions, but is not the driving factor

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The SAG-approved 1.0 NTGR for Virtual Commissioning™ is supported by this research and should be maintained in future years
- Additional net-to-gross research around free-ridership and spillover for Virtual Commissioning™ should not be an evaluation priority in upcoming years



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