

**CIVIC ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE
CITY OF PALM DESERT
STAFF REPORT**

MEETING DATE: April 17, 2025

PREPARED BY: Ryland Penta, Community Relations Supervisor

SUBJECT: ANNUAL REVIEW OF CURRENT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the committee provide feedback on civic engagement programs over the past fiscal year, 2024-2025, and offer input on potential improvements and new engagement opportunities moving forward.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS:

The City of Palm Desert offers several opportunities for the community to be informed and engaged in our municipal operations. These programs include the Civic Academy, Palm Desert Discussions, and the Palm Desert High School Civic Engagement Day. The City continues to explore innovative ways to expand the reach of these civic engagement opportunities while ensuring they meet the needs of the community and are an efficient and effective use of staff time. This is the first review of our current programs, and moving forward, this will be an annual process.

1. **Civic Academy** – This spring will mark the fifth Civic Academy program. The five-session course has proven to be a highly sought-after and effective program, providing residents with an in-depth look at municipal operations and governance while fostering relationships between the community and staff. Since its inception in October 2023, the program has been refined to include a day at the City-owned Desert Willow Golf Resort, a presentation on Short-Term Rentals, and adjustments to better address frequently asked questions from participants. While this program has been a success, the Committee is encouraged to share ways to enhance this experience.

2. **Palm Desert Discussions** – This program was designed to complement the Civic Academy by featuring partner agencies responsible for functions outside the City’s municipal scope, such as public safety and water management. Below is a list of discussions held this past year:
 - **July 31, 2024:** Water Management with CVWD
 - **September 25, 2024:** Emergency Readiness Expo
 - **November 20, 2024:** Resources for People Facing Homelessness
 - **January 30, 2025:** City of Palm Desert Wellness Expo
 - **March 15, 2025:** City-Wide HOA Community Meeting

While Palm Desert Discussions was intended to enhance civic engagement, attendance has not met expectations. To optimize resources, staff asks for feedback from the committee about shifting Palm Desert Discussions to an as-needed schedule while continuing successful annual events such as the City-Wide HOA Meeting and the Emergency Readiness Expo.

3. **Palm Desert High School Civic Engagement Day** – This new program surpassed expectations by effectively engaging students in local government operations and civic responsibility. During this event, high school students participated in interactive sessions with City officials and staff, toured key municipal facilities, and engaged in discussions about local policy-making and civic leadership. The enthusiasm and level of engagement demonstrated by students reinforced the program’s value as a meaningful introduction to local government. Due to its success, staff intends to continue this program on an annual basis and is looking for feedback on potential enhancements to further enrich the experience.

Staff welcomes input from the Civic Engagement Committee on ways to improve these programs and explore additional civic engagement initiatives.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact related to this staff report.