

CITY OF PALM DESERT STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: September 11, 2025

PREPARED BY: Erica Powell, Management Analyst
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SUBJECT: 2026 CALIFORNIA DESERT PLEIN AIR FESTIVAL SPONSORSHIP
REQUEST

RECOMMENDATION:

Approve sponsorship for the 2026 California Desert Plein Air Festival.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS:

Palm Springs Life and the Desert Plein Air Association (DPAA) have requested continued sponsorship for the 2026 California Desert Plein Air Festival. The inaugural 2025 festival—rebranded under the ‘California Desert’ identity—established Palm Desert as the hub of plein-air activity in the Coachella Valley.

On August 28, 2025, the City Council held a Study Session during which Palm Springs Life presented a post-event recap of the 2025 California Desert Plein Air Festival. The presentation reviewed outcomes related to attendance, promotional value, regional positioning, and reinforced the event’s contribution to the City’s arts and tourism goals.

Headquartered at the Artists Center, located at 72-567 Hwy 111, Palm Desert, the 2025 festival spanned three weeks from January 8 through February 2, 2025, and included four days of paint-outs at scenic locations, artist workshops, lectures, exhibitions, and artwork sales. The event featured over 40 professional plein air painters from across the country, with a \$15,000 Best in Show prize.

The festival established a solid foundation in both attendance and promotional reach:

- Attendance: Over 3,000 people participated in festival programming, including strong turnout for public events held in Palm Desert.
- Artist Participation: The event attracted nationally recognized plein-air painters, many of whom have expressed interest in returning.
- Marketing Reach:
 - Editorial Impressions: 241,765 (valued at \$32,068)
 - Media Impressions: 1,066,520 (valued at \$71,604)
 - Total Advertising Value: \$103,672

The 2025 festival demonstrated measurable benefits in tourism, economic activity, and cultural branding during a peak visitor season.

At its meeting on June 11, 2025, the Cultural Arts Committee voted 5-0 to recommend approval of continued sponsorship for the 2026 California Desert Plein Air Festival.

Staff supports renewing the sponsorship to build on the festival's momentum and to strengthen Palm Desert's reputation as a premier destination for arts and cultural programming.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The total proposed sponsorship for FY 2025-26 is \$25,000, the same level as in FY 2024-25. Funding would be split evenly between the Public Art Fund (Account No. 4364650-4309200) and the City's Marketing Fund (Account No. 1104417-4322201) and has been included as part of the approved FY 2025-26 Annual Budget.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. June 11, 2025, Cultural Arts Committee Staff Report
 - a. 2026 California Desert Plein Air Festival Proposal
 - b. 2025 CA Desert Plein Air Festival Summary
 - c. FY 2024-25 Plein Air Budget
2. Approved minutes from June 11, 2025, Cultural Arts Committee meeting
3. 2025 California Desert Plein Air Festival Summary Report