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The Desert Center for Leadership and Innovation

Helping residents of the Coachella Valley, the State of California, and the nation make a good living and live a good life

The Coachella Valley (CV) in California is a unique space of small towns bound together by big ideas. It is an ideal, circumscribed laboratory for research on and development of a number of social and economic issues that are transforming the nation and the world. The Agua Caliente Indians were the first settlers in the Coachella Valley, drawn to its hot springs more than 400 years ago. Now, hundreds of thousands of visitors and residents from around the world are drawn to the CV every year to engage with its creative and rich resources. Community leaders have long recognized the special nature of this unique space and have created numerous enterprises to take advantage of special circumstances idiosyncratic to the CV.

The College of the Desert is celebrating its 60th anniversary as one of the most established and significant institutions of higher education in all of California. It has become a force in the economic and social development of the CV providing a sound education for one of the most diverse group of students in the United States. It is a mature institution with strong leaders and strong community support that is now well positioned to begin a new chapter to reflect Bob Hope's commencement address to the class of 1976: "You are the future. You will determine the road that this country and this world will be following." Hope was speaking to the students, but his message also applies to the College itself with its core values reflected in goal and mission statements:

- College of the Desert will be a center of collaborations and innovations for educational enrichment, economic development, and quality of life in the Coachella Valley and surrounding communities.

- College of the Desert's community partnerships provide outstanding enrichment opportunities that contribute to the success and vitality of our community.
- We embrace the diversity of our community and uphold the dignity and worth of the individual.

President of the College of the Desert, Dr. Joel Kinnamon, has set a vision of the future for the College and for the Coachella Valley when he said, “I’d like to find the road to travel that all other community colleges would want to follow.” Dr. Kinnamon, the Board of Trustees, and the Foundation Board propose to expand the idea of “community” in community college by exploring with Coachella Valley leaders and organizations a new approach to leadership and innovation to build on the outstanding record already established.

The Desert Center for Leadership and Innovation would be a collaborative effort of the College of the Desert and other educational institutions, community leaders and organizations, city and county elected officials, business and industry, and philanthropic leaders. The purpose of the Desert Center would be to catalyze the ideas and resources of leaders to improve and expand the quality of life for all residents and visitors—to help people make a good living and live a good life. There are special and visible populations in the CV that could benefit from this collaborative effort: Seniors, Hispanics, Native Americans, the Homeless, Residents Below the Poverty Line, and the LGBTQ Community, to name a few.

There is a very strong culture of philanthropic support in the CV, with over 1,000 fund-raising events annually, that could support the operations and the projects and activities of the Desert Center. California is home to 9,382 foundations with assets of \$228.4 billion giving \$16.7 billion in 2016. Some of the leading foundations include the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Silicon Valley Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, the James Irvine Foundation, the Ahmanson Foundation, and the Annenberg Foundation.

Because the Center is a creative idea of collaboration and networking with multiple entities focused on social and economic issues that are transforming the world, as well as an expansion of the community college idea, national foundations could also be tapped for support. Some of the leading foundations committed to supporting educational innovations in the community college include the Ford Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Lumina Foundation, W. K. Kellogg

Foundation, MetLife Foundation, Mott Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Walton Family Foundation, and Annenberg Foundation.

Some Areas for Project Exploration Special to the Coachella Valley

1. Consider bringing a world-class Community College Leadership Program (CCLP) to the Coachella Valley as an anchor of the Center. The program would be designed specifically for aspiring community college leaders for the College of the Desert, for the 114 community colleges in California, and the over 1500 community and technical colleges in the nation. The CCLP would be created in collaboration with California State University San Bernardino, University of California Riverside, (both have programs in the CV) and/or with other appropriate sponsors that can grant the doctoral degree.
2. The Center would coordinate with state community colleges, associations, and the California Community College Chancellor's Office to develop and offer professional development training for administrators, faculty, classified staff, and trustees. Currently every entity works independently to offer such training mostly under resourced and with leadership that constantly turns over.
3. The Center would create a University Transfer Program where representatives from various universities would recruit, advise, and offer some instruction to College of the Desert students who plan to transfer to a university.
4. Here is a list of possible project areas for community leadership development and innovation:
 - Wind and solar energy
 - Date production and distribution
 - The hospitality industry
 - Entertainment
 - LGBTQ
 - Tribal art, desert art, public art
 - Mid-century architecture & design
 - Cannabis production, distribution, and research
 - Casino management

- Restoration of the Salton Sea
- Water management
- Diversity
- Climate change
- Earthquake preparation
- Golf, tennis, polo, mountain biking, pickle ball, etc.
- Preservation of endangered species