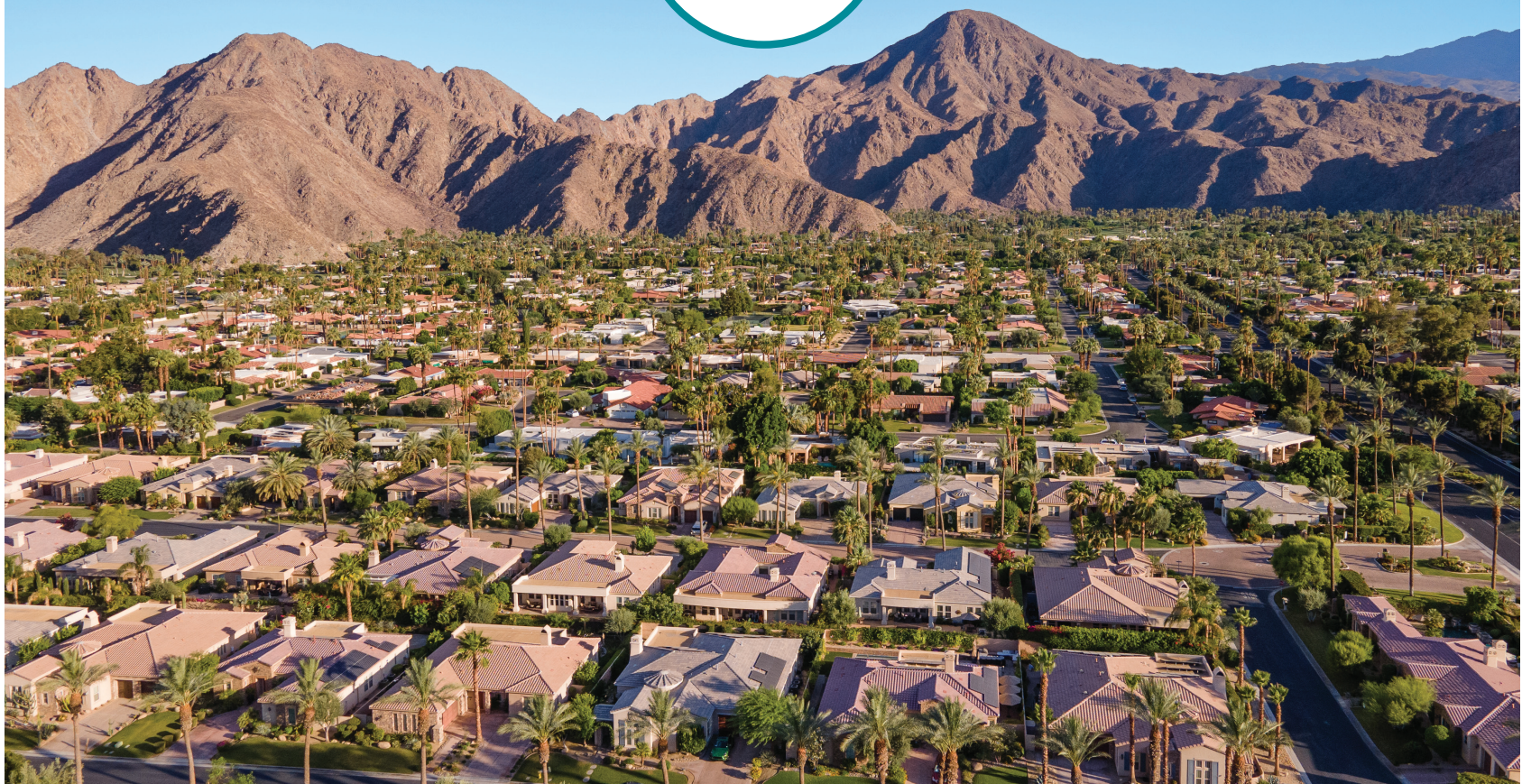




GREATER PALM SPRINGS LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM

2025



9 cities. *one* beautiful oasis.

palm springs | desert hot springs | cathedral city | rancho mirage | palm desert | indian wells | la quinta | indio | coachella



Visit Greater Palm Springs (VGPS) is the official destination marketing organization representing the Coachella Valley, which includes the nine cities of Palm Springs, Desert Hot Springs, Cathedral City, Rancho Mirage, Palm Desert, Indian Wells, La Quinta, Indio, and Coachella, along with unincorporated areas of Riverside County. Established in May 1989 as a Joint Powers Authority, VGPS was created to stimulate the region's tourism economy. Today, it serves over **5,000 business partners**, focusing on sales, marketing, and public relations efforts targeted at leisure travelers, as well as the meetings, conventions, and events markets.

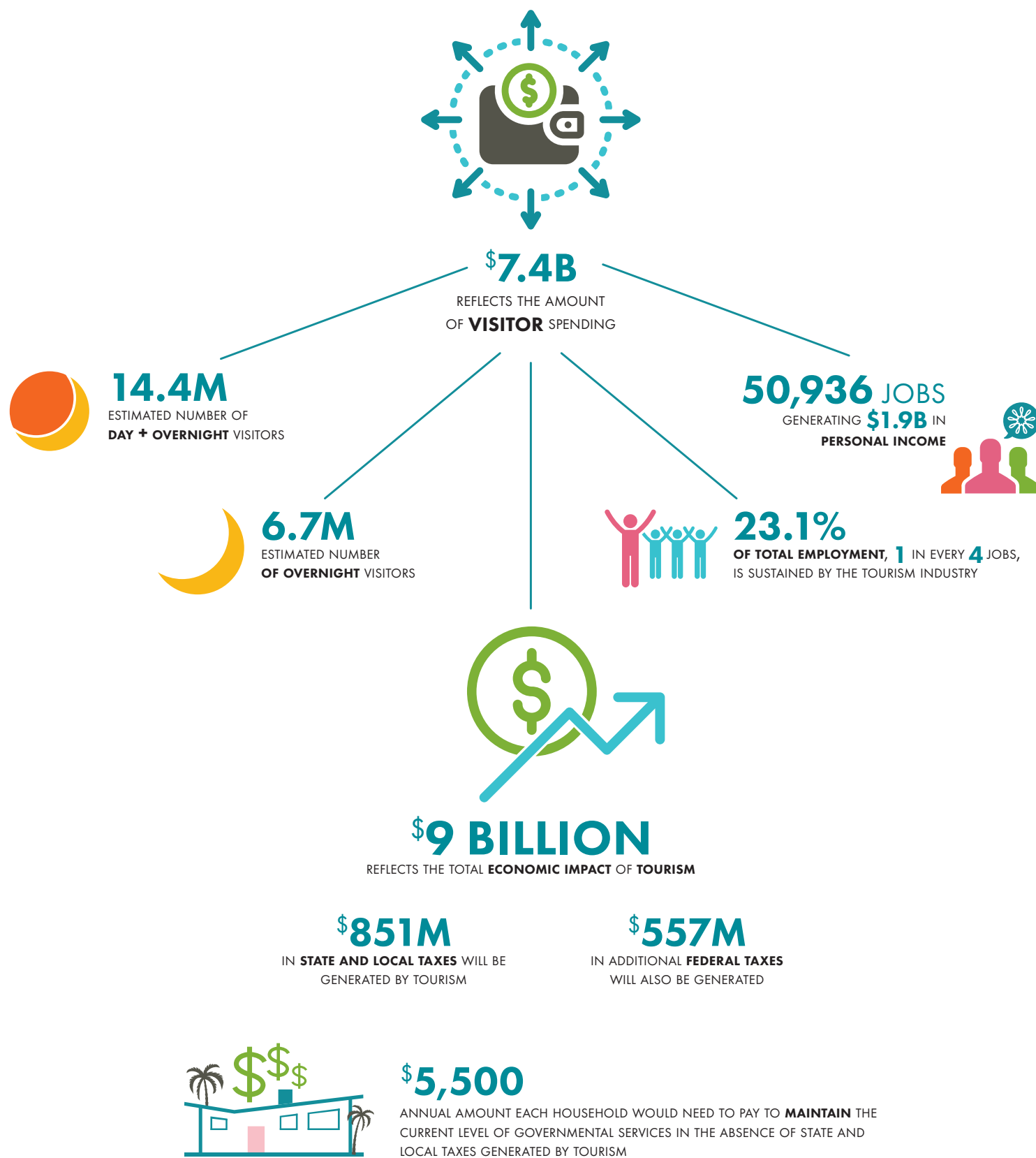
Tourism is the cornerstone of the Greater Palm Springs economy, supporting **one in four local jobs**. In 2023, the area welcomed **14.4 million visitors** who generated **\$9 billion** in total economic impact. These visitors not only support local businesses but also contribute significantly to public services through state and local tax revenues, amounting to an estimated **\$851 million** in 2023. This contribution translates to **\$5,500** in tax savings for every local household.

Recognizing that the growth of the tourism industry requires more than traditional sales and marketing, VGPS is also committed to **diversifying the regional economy**. This includes ensuring the availability of a trained workforce, providing affordable housing for that workforce, developing new and enhanced visitor experiences, improving sustainability practices, and enhancing transportation access. Under the guidance of its Board of Directors and member jurisdictions, VGPS has identified key priorities, including **growing the tourism economy** through targeted leisure marketing, attracting new meetings, conventions, and events, and driving demand during need periods for both leisure and group segments. VGPS is also dedicated to research that measures impact and effectiveness, educating the community and homeowners about vacation rentals, and developing best practices in these areas. **Regional collaboration** remains a vital focus, especially in expanding air service and supporting new transportation options. Furthermore, VGPS is committed to advancing **diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), sustainability, accessibility, cultural heritage, and workforce development**.

The purpose of this legislative platform is to guide VGPS in tracking and analyzing priority legislative, budgetary, regulatory, and administrative issues **at the state level**. It provides a framework for staff and lobbyists to navigate policy matters that could impact the operation and implementation of VGPS programs and services. This document is essential in shaping a state and regional strategy and developing a **focused action plan** to address the **needs and priorities** of VGPS and its member jurisdictions.



2023 ECONOMIC IMPACT OF TOURISM



SOURCE: TOURISM ECONOMICS REPORT 2023

VGPS WILL ENGAGE IN PROACTIVE ADVOCACY BY:

- Collaborating with state legislators and agencies to advance our legislative priorities.
- Participating in coalitions and partnerships that support shared goals in tourism, transportation, workforce development, and community development.
- Conducting outreach to local communities, businesses, and stakeholders to ensure broad support and alignment with our advocacy efforts.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

By targeting marketing efforts and new product development on the unique assets that speak to the positive, authentic experiences available in all nine cities, the assets are leveraged in a coordinated way. New events, conferences, programs, and marketing efforts based on these assets benefit both the resident and the visitor, and the destination brand is strengthened.

TOURISM

The hospitality sector is the backbone of Greater Palm Springs' tourism-driven economy, supporting one in four local jobs. VGPS is committed to supporting hotels, short-term rentals, and other hospitality providers by advocating for a fair and reasonable regulatory environment and protecting the industry from policies, fees, or taxes that deter visitors or investment.

SUPPORT ☑

- Support legislation that promotes California as a premier destination for domestic and international travelers, with a focus on the unique offerings of the Coachella Valley.
- Support legislation that strengthens the existing assessment laws, including the Property and Business Improvement District Law of 1994, to protect against legal challenges.
- Support legislation that compels the collection of tourism business improvement district assessments by short-term rental platforms.
- Support legislation that gives cities and counties authority to create entertainment districts, expand hours for alcohol sales, maintain outdoor dining decks, or make other modifications to existing laws that support tourism.

OPPOSE ☑

- Oppose legislation that would impose undue regulations or taxes on tourism-related businesses that could negatively impact the Coachella Valley's tourism economy.
- Oppose legislation that overburdens hotel or short-term rental operators or put them at a competitive disadvantage compared to other regions or states.
- Oppose legislation that would restrict local governments from enacting regulations around zoning or regulating hotels and vacation rentals.
- Oppose legislation that would create statewide assessments, fees, or taxes on hotels or short-term rentals.
- Oppose legislation that would further limit or delay development of tourism-related projects in the Coachella Valley, such as attractions, venues, and hotels.





TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Transportation access is crucial for sustaining and growing the local economy. VGPS prioritizes regional collaboration to **expand air service, establish passenger rail service, and improve transportation options**, ensuring visitors can easily access Greater Palm Springs and our workforce can easily traverse from their homes to their place of employment. Enhancing transportation infrastructure supports not only tourism but also the **overall regional economy**, making it a key focus for VGPS.

Infrastructure development is critical for sustaining the growth of the tourism industry in Greater Palm Springs. VGPS advocates for investments in infrastructure that enhance the visitor experience, support new and existing businesses, and improve the overall quality of life for residents. This includes everything from transportation networks to public amenities.

SUPPORT ☑

- Support legislation that improves transportation infrastructure, including roads, airports, and public transit systems, to better connect the Coachella Valley with surrounding regions.
- Support efforts to expand air service, rail service, and transportation options for visitors and residents to the Coachella Valley.
- Support legislation and efforts that accelerate the timeline for the Coachella Valley Rail Project.
- Support policies, programs, and funding for electric vehicle charging infrastructure.
- Support programs that leverage technology to improve mobility, increase the movement efficiency of goods, reduce emissions, and help to mitigate environmental impacts.
- Support legislation that expands the I-10 corridor west of the Coachella Valley to reduce traffic on busy weekends or during events, including the addition of toll lanes.
- Support funding and implementation of the Coachella Valley's Middle-Mile Broadband Initiative and the programs to assist with last-mile connections that bridge the digital divide in the Coachella Valley.
- Support efforts by the California Department of Transportation, Riverside County Transportation Commission, San Diego Association of Governments, and the San Bernardino Association of Governments to implement congestion projects identified in the Inland Empire 8 Multimodal Corridor Plan that increase mobility to and from the Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG) region, including increased funding for bypass roads, bridges, and transportation improvements in the pass area.
- Support efforts that streamline project delivery, build local capacity such as additional technical assistance, and provide increased flexibility to innovate and strategically invest funds to meet local needs.

- Support regional efforts to increase passenger rail service between Los Angeles and the Coachella Valley, including funding opportunities and actions by the Facilitate Equitable Deals task force to improve coordination and collaboration with Union Pacific Railroad (FED-UP).
- Identify programs and support legislation that provide funding for clean energy, energy efficiency, decarbonization, and green building programs.
- Monitor actions related to the 1934 Agreement of Compromise between Imperial Irrigation District and the Coachella Valley Water District and support Coachella Valley Energy Commission efforts to achieve a permanent service option and governance structure between Coachella Valley stakeholders and IID post-2033.

OPPOSE ☒

- Oppose legislation that cuts transportation funding or that could hinder regional connectivity or reduce the quality of infrastructure supporting the tourism economy.
- Oppose program guidelines that use transit-oriented development standards, such as the Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities program, that disproportionately favor large urban centers and do not reflect the reality of growth and development in the Coachella Valley.



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION

A **trained workforce** is essential for the continued success of Greater Palm Springs' tourism industry. VGPS is focused on workforce development initiatives, including TEAM GPS, to ensure a **skilled labor pool** that meets the needs of local businesses. This priority also includes advocating for **affordable housing** to support the region's workforce.

SUPPORT ☑

- Support legislation that funds workforce development programs tailored to the hospitality and tourism industries, including vocational training and partnerships with local educational institutions.
- Advocate for tourism- and hospitality-related training to be included in the qualifications for existing workforce development funding.
- Support legislation that increases workforce development funding for programs in the Coachella Valley specifically.
- Advocate to establish a full 4-year university in the Coachella Valley.
- Support policies that allow community colleges to offer bachelor's degrees for programs not available through a nearby 4-year university.

OPPOSE ☒

- Oppose legislation that reduces funding for workforce development or limits access to education and training opportunities within the Coachella Valley.
- Oppose policies that disqualify tourism or hospitality-related career training from funding or other program opportunities.





SUSTAINABILITY, ACCESSIBILITY & SOCIAL INCLUSION

VGPS is dedicated to promoting sustainability practices that protect Greater Palm Springs' natural environment while supporting economic growth. Ensuring accessibility for all visitors is a key priority for VGPS. This includes advocating for improvements that make the region more welcoming and navigable for individuals with disabilities. By focusing on accessibility, VGPS aims to create a more inclusive destination that meets the needs of all travelers. This priority includes efforts to reduce the tourism industry's carbon footprint, promote responsible resource use, and ensure that the region remains an attractive destination for future generations.



SUPPORT

- Support legislation that incentivizes businesses, through cost savings, rebates, or other means, to adopt sustainability practices including initiatives that promote water conservation, renewable energy adoption, and sustainable land use.
- Support legislation that incentivizes or provides funding or rebates for cities, counties, or businesses to plant trees or build shade structures.
- Support legislation that protects and expands key regional, state, and national parks and outdoor spaces that attract visitors to the Coachella Valley.
- Support legislation that recognizes cultural heritage sites and events that celebrate the diverse history and culture of the Coachella Valley.
- Support legislation that creates policies or programs supporting visitors and residents on the autism spectrum and/or provide funding or incentives for autism awareness and sensitivity training.

- Support legislation that provides grants, rebates, or other funding opportunities for diverse small business owners.
- Support policies that ensure criteria for defining disadvantaged communities and environmental justice areas accurately represent eastern Riverside County, including those that mirror AB 1550 community mapping, in order to ensure the region can compete for funding opportunities.
- Support legislation that fosters community engagement in tourism initiatives, ensuring that local voices are heard and respected in the development process.

OPPOSE

- Oppose legislation that perpetuates systemic inequalities within the tourism sector.
- Oppose legislation that would diminish the cultural heritage or community character of the region.

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Affordable housing is vital for maintaining a stable and thriving workforce in Greater Palm Springs. VGPS advocates for policies and initiatives that increase access to affordable housing for workers in the tourism industry. This priority supports the region's economic growth by ensuring that the local workforce can live and thrive in the communities they serve.

SUPPORT ☑

- Support California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) reform to expedite and streamline housing development.
- Support legislation and programs that provide more funding and incentives for rural and underserved communities like the Coachella Valley.
- Monitor the Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities Program and advocate for increased flexibility and changes that ensure a greater share of funding is available to areas that don't have Transit Oriented Developments (TOD) and thereby more accurately account for unique community characteristics and growth patterns in the Coachella Valley.
- Support increased investment in, and creation of, programs that assist local governments, counties, and regional collaborations to address the challenges associated with homelessness.

- Support and advocate for increased funding for vouchers to increase access to safe and affordable housing in the Coachella Valley and Riverside County, and eliminate barriers to effectively serve the homeless population.
- Support legislative efforts that would allow local jurisdictions to implement, if they choose, programs and ordinances that require unsheltered individuals to accept housing solutions and treatment solutions.

OPPOSE ☒

- Oppose legislative changes that create or strengthen a nexus between the availability of transportation funding and local jurisdictions' ability to meet their requirements under the Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) numbers.
- Oppose legislative and regulatory actions that utilize CalEnviroScreen and high-housing density criteria, which favor large urban centers, to determine allocation of state grant funds and would decrease funding competitiveness for areas such as the Coachella Valley.
- Oppose program guidelines that use transit-oriented development standards, such as the Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities Program, that disproportionately favor large urban centers and do not reflect the reality of growth and development in the Coachella Valley, therefore decreasing funding opportunities for the Coachella Valley.



SALTON SEA

The Salton Sea, a critical ecological and economic asset in the Coachella Valley, is facing significant environmental challenges that threaten public health, wildlife habitats, and regional sustainability. Significant economic opportunity also exists in the region, including the potential for lithium extraction, biofuels, thermal energy production, and agricultural innovation. The restoration of the Salton Sea is essential not only for preserving the natural environment but also for supporting tourism and economic development in the region. VGPS is committed to advocating for policies and funding that will advance comprehensive restoration efforts and mitigate the adverse impacts on local communities.



SUPPORT ✓

- Advocate for state and federal funding for the restoration and revitalization of the Salton Sea, including the implementation of the Phase One: 10-Year Plan.
- Support legislation that provides funding for the restoration and revitalization of the Salton Sea to limit regional impacts to air quality, wildlife habitat, and health of communities, including the Phase One: 10-Year Plan.
- Monitor the Southeast California Economic Region and support efforts to enhance the competitiveness for federal, state, and local funding, as well as Lithium Valley and clean energy development investment opportunities in the Eastern Riverside County and Imperial County communities.
- Support legislative efforts that promote environmentally sensitive development in the Salton Sea region, such as geothermal energy projects and lithium extraction, which can provide economic benefits while addressing environmental concerns.
- Back policies that protect public health by reducing air quality impacts from exposed playa and ensuring that restoration efforts prioritize the well-being of local communities.

OPPOSE ✗

- Oppose any legislative or regulatory actions that delay or reduce funding for the Salton Sea restoration or that undermine comprehensive restoration plans.



FUNDING PRIORITIES

Funding for Programs Managed Directly by VGPS



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT TRAINING

VGPS plays a key role in developing the local hospitality workforce, a sector employing over 50,000 residents. To enhance skill levels, VGPS partners with the College of the Desert to offer industry-relevant certificate programs. VGPS seeks state and federal grants to expand these training programs, enabling greater career growth and earning potential for residents. This includes pursuing funding from the California Employment Training Panel (ETP) and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds, as well as private foundations focused on workforce development.



AUTISM CERTIFICATION GRANTS

VGPS has partnered with the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES), a global leader in professional autism and neurodiversity training and certification, to become a Certified Autism Destination. The designation requires local tourism-facing businesses like hotels, restaurants, attractions, events, and retail to become Certified Autism Centers. VGPS aims to secure grants to support businesses in earning their Certified Autism Center designations. VGPS seeks funding from sources such as the California Health and Human Services Agency, philanthropic grants focused on accessibility and inclusion, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs that prioritize neurodiverse communities. These funds will help cover training costs for local businesses, promoting an inclusive tourism economy.

FUNDING ADVOCACY

VGPS has identified certain projects and programs as key to the success and future economic development of the region and advocates in support of the partner agencies or local governments responsible for them.



AMATEUR SPORTS FACILITY

VGPS will advocate for state grants, such as those from the California Department of Parks and Recreation, to develop a regional amateur sports complex. The facility would attract sports tournaments, boosting tourism and improving local quality of life. Additionally, VGPS will pursue funding through public-private partnerships and from organizations focused on youth sports and community development.



FOUR-YEAR UNIVERSITY CAMPUS IN THE COACHELLA VALLEY

To advance educational opportunities, VGPS supports the development of a full 4-year university campus. Potential funding sources include the California State University system, state educational bonds, and legislative appropriations. VGPS will work with the local educational community to secure these investments.



PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE

VGPS strongly supports the Coachella Valley Rail Project and will support the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) and Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG) in their efforts to complete the project. This includes advocating for federal funds from programs like the Federal Railroad Administration's Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) program, as well as state funding from the California Transportation Commission (CTC) to complete this project.



PALM SPRINGS INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT EXPANSION

To support the growth of Palm Springs International Airport (PSP), VGPS advocates for state and federal grants to enhance its infrastructure, including customs facilities and increased passenger capacity. Potential funding sources include the Federal Aviation Administration's Airport Improvement Program (AIP) and state transportation infrastructure bonds.



INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

VGPS will further support efforts by CVAG and RCTC to secure funding from the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), including SB1 Road Maintenance and Rehabilitation Program (RMRP) funds, to enhance regional roadways and transportation networks. VGPS will also advocate for funds from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) program.



JACQUELINE COCHRAN REGIONAL AIRPORT EXPANSION

VGPS will work with Riverside County to advocate for funding to expand the Jacqueline Cochran Regional Airport. This could involve advocating for federal infrastructure grants and state allocations to support regional aviation capacity.



SHADE AND EXTREME HEAT PROJECTS

VGPS advocates for use of Climate Bond funding supporting projects in the Coachella Valley that increase shade trees and manufactured shade, and other projects aimed at mitigating the effects of extreme heat. In addition to improving the quality of life for residents, these measures will boost the local economy by creating a more year-round visitor destination.



SALTON SEA RESTORATION AND DEVELOPMENT

VGPS supports the restoration and economic development of the Salton Sea and will advocate for state and federal grants focused on geothermal energy, lithium extraction, habitat restoration, dust suppression, and water quality improvements. This includes potential funding from the Climate Bond, California Natural Resources Agency, and federal environmental grants. VGPS also supports the establishment of long-term funding mechanisms to ensure sustained investment in the Salton Sea's ecological health.

VGPS JOINT POWERS AUTHORITY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

CHAIR

Gary Gardner, Council Member
City of Desert Hot Springs

VICE CHAIR

Waymond Fermon, Council Member
City of Indio

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Jeffrey Bernstein, Mayor
City of Palm Springs

Steve Downs, Mayor
City of Rancho Mirage

Greg Sanders, Mayor
City of Indian Wells

Mark Carnevale, Mayor
City of Cathedral City

Linda Evans, Mayor
City of La Quinta

V. Manuel Perez, 4th District Supervisor,
County of Riverside

Jan Harnik, Mayor Pro Tem
City of Palm Desert

VGPS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

CHAIR

Rolf Hoehn
Indian Wells Tennis Garden

VICE CHAIR

Peggy Trott
Kimpton Rowan Palm Springs

TREASURER

Aftab Dada
Hilton Palm Springs

SECRETARY

Tom Scaramellino
Westin Rancho Mirage
Golf Resort & Spa

BOARD MEMBERS

Kate Anderson
Agua Caliente Band of
Cahuilla Indians

Dermot Connolly
La Quinta Resort & Club

Patrick Klein
The Gardens on El Paseo
El Paseo Village

Greg Purdy
Palm Springs Aerial Tramway

Lorraine Becker
Cabot's Pueblo Museum

Tim Ellis
Ellis Hospitality Services

Kelly McLean
Poppy Vacation Rentals

Tim Pyne
Renaissance Esmeralda
Resort & Spa

Sejal Bhakta
Hampton Inn & Suites

Eddy Estrada
Smarter Property Management

Nusrat Mirza
JW Marriott Desert Springs
Resort & Spa

Saverio Scheri
Agua Caliente Casinos

John Bolton
Oak View Group

David Feltman
VRON of Palm Springs

Allen Monroe
The Living Desert Zoo &
Gardens

Bob Schneider
Desert Consulting

Celeste Brackley
The Line & Saguaro Hotels

Shannon Gilbert
The Ritz-Carlton, Rancho Mirage

Lee Morcus
Kaiser Restaurant Group

Ankit Sekhri
Two Bunch Palms Resort & Spa

Gary Cardiff
Cardiff Limousine &
Transportation

Mark Girton
Goldenvoice & Empire Polo

Michael Murray
Hotel Paseo

Barb Smith
Eventis Destination Services

Kenny Cassady
Acme House Company

Rob Hampton
Palm Springs Convention Center

Liz Ostoich
FARM and Tac/Quila
Restaurants

Boris Stark
Palm Desert Vacation Properties

Jay Chesterton
Fantasy Springs
Resort Casino

Dan Johnson
Hyatt Regency Indian Wells
Resort & Spa

Brad Poncher
Homewood Suites by
Hilton La Quinta

Joseph Tormey
CSUSB Palm Desert Campus

Jerry Keller
Lulu California Bistro

Doug Watson
Innovation | Co.



70100 Highway 111, Rancho Mirage, CA 92270
VisitGreaterPalmSprings.com

CONTACT:

Davis Meyer

Vice President, Government & Industry Relations

davis@visitgreaterps.com

760-969-1360