

# PUBLIC SECTOR NEWS

## LAURA JAMES NAMED CEO FOR COACHELLA VALLEY ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP



Laura James, CEO, CVEP

The Coachella Valley Economic Partnership (CVEP) has appointed Laura James as Chief Executive Officer. With CVEP since 2014, James has progressed rapidly by pursuing professional development and building strong relationships in the Coachella Valley. She served as Vice President of Innovation for five years and, more recently, as Interim CEO. James led several innovative projects during her tenure, including the Coachella Valley Fast Pitch, the COVID-19 business impact survey, and the monthly Morning Insights event for entrepreneurs and relocated workers. In 2024, she initiated a strategic planning process to prepare CVEP for future regional economic development. James has over ten years of experience in economic development strategy, holding an M.B.A. from Auburn University and certificates in Nonprofit Management, Information Systems Management, and Economic Development. In 2022, she earned the Certified Economic Developer (CEd) credential from the International Economic Development Council, becoming one of fewer than forty Certified Economic Developers in California. Her leadership emphasizes innovation and economic growth. James actively participates in various regional volunteer positions, including on the Desert Regional Medical Center Governing Board and the LifeStream Blood Bank Board. "I am honored to assume the CEO role at CVEP," James states. "CVEP has been key to economic prosperity in the Coachella Valley. I am committed to enhancing our regional partnerships for sustainable growth." "We are confident Laura will lead us to new opportunities for all communities," says CVEP's Board Chairperson Deborah McGarrey. "Her extensive experience and understanding of the Coachella Valley make her the ideal candidate.

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## RIVERSIDE COUNTY SHERIFF LAUNCHES AVIATION EXPANSION

Last week, the Riverside County Sheriff's Department revealed an ambitious plan to expand its aviation unit to improve public safety and emergency response across the extensive county. The announcement was made during a press conference at Hemet-Ryan Airport, detailing an initiative to enhance aerial operations through new equipment, upgraded facilities, and additional personnel. The department intends to add two helicopters to its fleet, boosting its capacity for search-and-rescue missions, firefighting support, and high-risk law enforcement operations. Sheriff Chad Bianco highlighted aviation's essential role in a diverse and vast county like Riverside, remarking, "Our aviation unit is frequently the first on the scene during emergencies, from wildfires in remote areas to urban law enforcement situations. This expansion ensures we can respond faster and more effectively."

Key elements of the expansion include advanced training programs for pilots and tactical flight officers and the integration of state-of-the-art technology, such as thermal imaging and real-time video streaming, to assist in critical missions. Community leaders strongly support the initiative, acknowledging its potential to save lives and bolster public safety. Supervisor Karen Spiegel termed it "a vital investment in the health and safety of Riverside County residents." The expansion plan also includes a new hangar and maintenance facility at Hemet-Ryan Airport, establishing the base as a regional center for aviation operations. Construction will begin early next year and be completed by mid-2026.

This announcement comes as the Sheriff's Department addresses evolving challenges, such as population growth and rising wildfire incidents in rural areas. By enhancing its aerial capabilities, the department seeks to tackle these issues directly while setting a new benchmark for regional public safety. With community support and a clear vision for the future, the Riverside Sheriff's Department's aviation expansion represents

a significant advancement in safeguarding and serving the county on land and in the air.

## GRID IE AND NHSIE NAMED 2024 BANK OF AMERICA NEIGHBORHOOD BUILDERS

Bank of America named GRID Alternatives Inland Empire (GRID IE) and Neighborhood Housing Services Inland Empire (NHSIE) its 2024 Neighborhood Builders. The prestigious program provides transformative support to nonprofits, combining \$200,000 multiyear grants with comprehensive leadership training and access to a network of peers to amplify community impact. Since its launch in 2004, the Neighborhood Builders program has supported 33 Inland Empire organizations, representing a \$6.6 million philanthropic investment in the region. This year's honorees exemplify the program's mission to drive economic mobility and create lasting local solutions. GRID IE plans to use the grant to enhance community engagement in climate adaptation in underserved areas, expand training programs in green technology, and increase residential solar installations. Since 2011, GRID IE has outfitted 4,069 Inland Empire homes with no-cost solar panels, significantly reducing energy costs for moderate-income families while curbing greenhouse gas emissions. Executive Director Jaime Alonso emphasized the importance of the grant, stating, "This funding and leadership training will empower us to deepen our impact and strengthen our efforts to combat climate change and bring renewable energy benefits to our communities." NHSIE will leverage its grant to support 5,000 residents in achieving housing stability through innovative programs like the Neighborhood Dreams Outreach Initiative. These efforts include real estate projects, strategic education, and financial resources tailored to meet the community's needs. Over its 40-year history, NHSIE has facilitated over \$1 billion in home sales and down payment assistance, helping more than 10,000 residents. CEO Kailin Scott Peoples highlighted the timeliness of the award, noting, "This grant will enable us to launch new initiatives like our lease-to-own pilot program, fostering generational wealth and stronger communities." Since its inception, Bank of America's Neighborhood Builders program has invested over \$300 million nationally, underscoring its commitment to effectively empowering nonprofits to address pressing community challenges.

## CALIFORNIA'S FAILED MINIMUM WAGE AND RENT CONTROL PROPOSITIONS.

Political analysts in California attribute the failure of propositions to increase the minimum wage and allow more robust rent control to inflation and voter confusion. Proposition 33 aimed to give local governments the authority to implement stricter rent-control laws. Christian Grose, a professor of political science and public policy at the University of Southern California's Dornsife College and Price School of Public Policy, indicated that voters may have perceived the measure as too complex. "We conducted polling in September and found that many individuals were undecided," Grose explained. "I believe this initiative is confusing for many voters, and often when people are uncertain about its implications, they tend to vote 'no.'" Opponents of Proposition 33 contended that increasing rent control would deter the construction of new rental units, thereby hindering efforts to boost the housing supply. Proposition 32 proposed raising the minimum wage to \$18 per hour for companies with 26 or more employees and \$17 for smaller firms. Grose expressed surprise at the defeat, noting that California had recently increased the minimum wage, albeit only for fast-food workers. "With inflation concerns, there's apprehension that raising the minimum wage could further elevate costs. Therefore, individuals who typically support minimum wage hikes might find themselves opposed," he mentioned. Critics of Proposition 32 argued that it would harm California businesses and raise prices for goods and services. Keely O'Brien, a policy advocate at the Western Center on Law and Poverty, emphasized that Proposition 32 would have benefited the working poor at a time when poverty levels are the highest in years. "In early 2023, 31% of Californians were classified as poor or near-poor, and nearly 76% of low-income families had at least one working adult. These families are working diligently yet still lack the resources they need," O'Brien stated. **TPA**