

*2017 CSAC Challenge Awards
Executive Summary*

County of San Diego – CIVICS PROGRAM

OVERVIEW:

San Diego County's Parks and Recreation department and Sheriff's Department collaborated to form the Community Involved Vocational Inmate Crew Service (CIVICS) program.

CHALLENGE:

With more than 50,000 acres of park land and 350 miles of trails the San Diego County Department of Parks and Recreation (Parks) needed a reliable work force to help make sure our parks and trails meet and exceed customer expectations. Tasks such as trail maintenance, tree removal, stormwater pollution control, and health and safety improvements remained unassigned. Parks needed a supplemental workforce to take ownership of them, a workforce that possessed the right level of knowledge, determination and accountability. The Sheriff's Department needed a service program that could involve non-violent inmates in work projects that could be used to teach job skills and reduce recidivism.

INNOVATIVE SOLUTION:

The CIVICS program is managed jointly by the Sheriff Department's East Mesa Reentry Facility (EMRF) and Parks through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) initiated in April 2014. Before being assigned to a County job site, CIVICS Program inmates are taught skills by an instructor from Grossmont College's landscaping and horticulture program and perform practical applications of learned concepts, both on reentry facility grounds and in the field. There are three main components of the CIVICS Program:

- Instruction in community service and community engagement, provided through the CIVICS Program by Sheriff's Department Correctional Counselors.
- Community service performed in County parks and in areas of the San Diego community that are recovering from fire, flood and drought-related events. Currently there are two work crews, consisting of 5-to-7 inmates that are supervised by a Deputy Sheriff.
- Construction by inmates over the past year of a greenhouse on the grounds of the East Mesa Reentry Facility. As part of the CIVICS program, Parks and the Sheriff's Department developed a native plant grow-out program. The inmates learned to propagate native seeds in the greenhouse, which are then planted in County parks for land stewardship and landscaping projects.

Park Rangers meet the Sheriff's Department work crew at the park site to discuss the details of the project and provide technical assistance and specialized tools. Examples of work projects that have been completed by CIVICS work crews include fire recovery, maintaining stormwater channels and water conveyances, trail maintenance, and storm and natural disaster response. This program aligns with the 2016-2021 County of San Diego Strategic Plan supporting the Strategic Initiatives "Safe Communities" and "Operational Excellence."

ORIGINALITY:

The Civics Program uses restorative justice principles and provides a comprehensive, cost-saving program that not only benefits the community but also the inmates who participate. It provides relevant vocational training while saving tax payer money on labor costs. The program also strives to help County parks regrow endangered plants and trees that have been threatened by recent drought conditions and insect infestation.

COST EFFECTIVENESS (if applicable):

No new general fund costs or additional staffing hours were needed for this program. The success of the program is demonstrated in the number of accomplishments and strong cooperation between Parks and the Sheriff Department. Over the past two years, the CIVICS Program has provided over 6,669 hours of community service in County parks. This equates to a direct cost savings of \$160,000 in operational expenses to Parks and allows the department to use those funds to provide parks, recreational programs and services to the community.

RESULTS:

The CIVICS program is an excellent example of using intergovernmental collaboration and cooperation to address important social, public safety, and resource management issues to benefit society. This program provides inmates with training in landscaping, horticulture, trail maintenance and environmental rehabilitation. As part of their community service work, inmates have learned the concepts of accountability, responsibility and community as part of the instruction. These are skills can lead to employment when inmates reenter the workforce. CIVICS assistance in maintaining parks has saved DPR \$160,000 that has been used to improve parks for the use of County of San Diego residents.

PROJECT CONTACT:

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