



**DATE:** May 4, 2026

**TO:** Council Economic Development Committee

**FROM:** Chief Economic Development Officer

**SUBJECT:** Hayward Amplified: Program Overview

**RECOMMENDATION**

That the Council Economic Development Committee receives updates on the launch of the Hayward Amplified Grant Program.

**SUMMARY**

Hayward Amplified is a new business activation grant program designed to support local businesses in hosting events and experiences that increase foot traffic, strengthen customer engagement, and support vibrancy across Hayward’s commercial corridors. The program builds on lessons learned through prior activation efforts, including Hayward Live, while shifting from a City-run event model toward a business-led activation model, where businesses design and host experiences aligned with their brand, customer base, and location.

The program will award approximately \$75,000 in funding, with grants of approximately \$15,000 each to support a limited cohort of businesses through a competitive application process.

**BACKGROUND**

Activations and events are an emerging tool being used by retailers and restaurants to draw in consumers. These businesses have witnessed reduced foot traffic resulting from a myriad of reasons including the accelerated use of online shopping (e-commerce), increasing consumer preferences for convenience and rising prices. Businesses that are evolving traditional retail and dining excursions from a mere transaction point to vibrant experiences are drawing back consumers and expanding their brands.

By focusing on activation and customer engagement beyond the product itself, businesses can create a “social multiplier” effect where their customers become the marketing ambassadors, sharing their experiences online and building authenticity around their brand. This organic marketing helps attract other customers that seek more value for their dollar and replicate

what they saw online. These types of events also increase “dwell time” – an industry term for keeping a customer in the space longer, which leads to more spending. Activations also help create the “third place” where people can exist between where they live and where they work.

The “third place” is not just about being between these locations or getting more value, it also addresses consumer demand for more social experiences and agency. Modern consumers crave collective experiences where they are active participants in group settings rather than passive solo viewers. Market examples of this trend include movie theaters offering live streaming concerts and sporting events and restaurants and retail stores partnering to hosting themed events, pop-ups and watch parties for trending shows.

In 2023, the City launched Hayward Live to help reactivate Downtown Hayward following the pandemic through music, art, and small-scale activations in the public right-of-way. While successful in generating activity, that model was primarily event-focused and geographically concentrated downtown.

## **DISCUSSION**

Hayward Amplified is structured as a pilot competitive grant program that provides businesses funding and technical support to support creating the “experiential retail” environments that modern consumers demand. This innovative program represents an evolution of that work by expanding activation opportunities citywide and providing direct support to businesses to serve as organizers and place-makers within their own commercial corridors.

The program is also intended to help businesses leverage emerging opportunities tied to regional activity, including the upcoming FIFA World Cup, through activations such as watch parties and themed events that encourage customers to gather locally.

The program will award approximately \$75,000 in funding, with grants of approximately \$15,000 each to support a limited cohort of businesses through a competitive application process. The program is expected to support approximately five businesses citywide. Eligible activation concepts may include:

- Live music and DJ events
- Community meetups and themed activations
- Food and retail collaborations
- Influencer-hosted events
- Watch parties and cultural events
- Other creative experiences that increase customer activity

Applications are being reviewed based on activation concept, feasibility, anticipated economic impact, and geographic distribution.

In addition to grant funding, the program includes technical assistance and promotional support from Economic Development staff.

The program is intended to help test a scalable model for business-led activation that may inform future corridor programming. The approach will help build local businesses' technical capabilities and enable them to continue to organize and host activations going forward.

ED staff will monitor program performance and provide a report back to CEDC on the program's impact and lessons learned.

### **ECONOMIC IMPACT**

The program is intended to generate economic activity through increased foot traffic, higher customer engagement, and additional spending at participating businesses, while contributing to broader corridor vitality.

By supporting destination-oriented experiences led by businesses, the program also advances the City's economic development objectives related to placemaking, small business support, and local revenue generation.

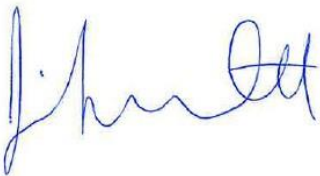
### **FISCAL IMPACT**

Hayward Amplified is funded at approximately \$75,000 through existing Economic Development program funds and will be administered using existing staff resources. No additional General Fund appropriation is requested at this time.

*Prepared by:* Daniel Mao, Economic Development Specialist

*Recommended by:* Paul Nguyen, Chief Economic Development Officer

Approved by:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jennifer Ott".

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Jennifer Ott, City Manager