



MARICOPA
COMMUNITY COLLEGES

FREE EXPRESSION

ANNUAL REPORT | FISCAL YEAR 2025

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Executive Summary

The 2025 Free Expression Annual Report showcases Maricopa County Community College District's (MCCCD) continued leadership in promoting dialogue, civic learning, and inclusive participation across all ten colleges. Rooted in the Arizona Revised Statutes §15-1868 and guided by the MCCCD Governing Board's commitment to academic freedom, this report illustrates how the District's community of learners and educators continues to uphold and advance the principles of open inquiry and free speech.

As the nation's largest community college system, MCCCD serves over 140,000 learners annually across 10 colleges and numerous community touchpoints. Our commitment to open dialogue and civic participation remains a defining pillar of our educational mission while adopting the principles of the Chicago Statement.

In an era marked by rapid social change and increasing polarization, the Committee on Freedom of Expression affirms MCCCD's responsibility to protect and promote environments where diverse ideas can be expressed with dignity, respect, and intellectual curiosity. The Committee, in partnership with the Center for Excellence in Inclusive Democracy (CEID), continues to ensure that faculty, staff, and students are equipped with tools to engage in dialogue that reflects the values of academic freedom, inquiry, and civil responsibility.

During the 2024–2025 academic year, MCCCD hosted campus and districtwide events celebrating the power of speech and dialogue, from Constitution Day to civic forums and communitywide partnerships such as the Arizona Town Hall and the Free Speech Roadshow. Each effort underscored our shared belief that free expression is both a right and a responsibility that strengthens the social fabric of our colleges and the communities we serve.

As this report reflects, the exercise of free expression across our system remains vibrant, respectful, and deeply tied to MCCCD's mission of fostering student success, public trust, and community engagement.

At the Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD), freedom of expression is not merely a constitutional obligation, but a living practice that defines who we are as a learning community.

A photograph of three students in a classroom setting. A woman in the center is smiling and gesturing with her hands while talking to two men on either side of her. The image is partially covered by a dark blue overlay on the left and top.

BUILDING A CULTURE OF EXPRESSION

At its core, the Maricopa County Community College District recognizes that free speech and freedom of expression are essential to **cultivating critical thought and developing an informed citizenry**. These principles align with the vision set forth by the Truman Commission, which emphasized education as the foundation for a thriving democracy. It calls on every learner to think critically, communicate respectfully, and contribute meaningfully to society.

A Legacy of Civic Learning

Since its founding, MCCCCD has regarded education as a civic responsibility. Each college contributes to a larger system of engagement that brings people together to explore shared challenges and shape the communities they serve. Whether through service-learning partnerships, public dialogues, or student-led civic initiatives, the District's approach to civic education connects academic learning with real-world application.

The Center for Excellence in Inclusive Democracy (CEID) continues to lead these efforts by advancing programs that create spaces for open dialogue and respectful debate. CEID's collaborations with community partners such as Arizona Town Hall and Civic Influencers have deepened opportunities for students to participate in conversations that strengthen both local and institutional democracy.

The District's approach to civic education connects academic learning with real-world application.

Commitment to Neutrality and Inclusion

MCCCD's governance model emphasizes open dialogue, mutual respect, and representative decision-making. The district's shared governance framework provides structure and accountability for ensuring that diverse viewpoints are considered in institutional policies and actions.

By fostering communication across divisions, councils, and task forces, the District continues to reinforce a culture that values listening as much as speaking. Every college plays a role in this mission of developing educational programs, facilitating civic events, and addressing challenges related to free expression in ways that reflect both institutional values and community trust.



Districtwide Engagement and Collaboration

Over the past year, CEID and the Committee on Free Expression have engaged faculty, staff, and students in a shared exploration of what it means to sustain a campus climate where all voices can be heard. Initiatives such as:

- **Promoting Civic Education** to support colleges in connecting academic learning to civic outcomes, such as the Civics Council, which supports Constitution Day, voter engagement, and civic literacy programs.
- **Advancing dialogue and understanding through partnerships** such as Arizona Town Hall, which equip students, employees, and the community with tools to engage in structured, nonpartisan conversations about pressing societal issues.
- **Educating students on policy-making through the Student Public Policy Forum (SPPF)**, an experiential academic program that gives students the skills and experience to meaningfully engage in government and public policy processes at the local, state, and national levels.
- **Training for responsible expression** through initiatives like the Free Speech Roadshow provides interactive education on the First Amendment, campus policies, and the principles of civil discourse.
- **Building collaborative networks by bridging colleges with community organizations** such as the YMCA, Clean Elections, and local municipalities to create shared opportunities for civic service, student learning, and dialogue.
- **Connecting with national civic groups to consistently evaluate and improve our approach to civic engagement best practices**, such as Campus Compact, PEN America, CLDE Coalition-Civic Learning & Democratic Engagement, and American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)
- **Empowering student voice through college-level student governments and clubs**, as well as a district-level student senate that represents learners across all 10 colleges.
- **Recognizing Civic Achievement by honoring the Chancellor's Civic Leadership Medallion** to students who demonstrate exceptional commitment to civic engagement, leadership, and free expression.
- **Establishing standard operating procedures for communications** to ensure consistency, transparency, and the maintenance of institutional neutrality.

THE STATE OF FREE EXPRESSION AT MARICOPA

Across the Maricopa County Community College District, the practice of free expression extends far beyond compliance. It is a culture embedded in classrooms, governance councils, and community partnerships. Each college plays a vital role in advancing the District's mission to promote academic freedom, civic responsibility, and respectful discourse.



This year, the District's Committee on Free Expression, in collaboration with the Center for Excellence in Inclusive Democracy (CEID), led campus-level conversations on the importance of expression and civic literacy. Workshops, student forums, and public dialogues engaged thousands of students and employees in exploring the boundaries and responsibilities of speech in a pluralistic society.

Through proactive education and intentional dialogue, the District continues to ensure that each college can respond swiftly and thoughtfully to challenges, while celebrating the diverse ways in which students and faculty bring the principles of open inquiry and mutual respect to life.



COLLEGE SPOTLIGHTS

Following is a summary of how each of the 10 colleges has contributed to this collective culture of free expression and civic engagement.



Chandler-Gilbert Community College (CGCC)

Chandler-Gilbert Community College continues to be a leader in experiential civic learning through initiatives that connect coursework with community-based problem solving. This year, CGCC featured 61 free expression activities, both on-campus and virtual. Some of those activities included freedom of expression training offered and promoted college-wide, and free speech events on campus, like “Maricopa Free Speech Updates”, “Free Speech History”, and “National Perspectives” In addition, CGCC applied for and was awarded the Highly Established Action Plan Seal from the All In Democracy Campus Challenge, which highlights their non-partisan approach to student engagement. The college’s commitment to civic awareness fosters an environment where students are encouraged to voice their ideas, ask challenging questions, and engage meaningfully in the civic process.



Estrella Mountain Community College (EMCC)

At Estrella Mountain, civic and cultural expression thrive in collaborative spaces where students are invited to learn, question, and connect. They hosted a “Voting and Elections in Arizona” West Valley Community Town Hall to explore ways to strengthen Arizona’s voting systems and better serve its communities. Also, the college successfully navigated a potentially tense situation as a group arrived on campus to protest recent federal actions. The right to free speech and expression was protected.



GateWay Community College (GWCC)

GateWay Community College’s efforts this year emphasized fostering civil discourse and community connection. Throughout the academic year, Student Civic Engagement and Student Life host programs, forums, and workshops that address related themes, often incorporating expression, dialogue, and civic engagement. The college hosted campus-wide events featuring guest speakers who discussed the importance of civic engagement and civil discourse.



Glendale Community College (GCC)

Glendale Community College has long prioritized civic awareness as a core component of student development. Glendale Community College (GCC) demonstrates its commitment to free speech by embedding opportunities for expression into student life, academics, and campus events throughout the year. For instance, GCC marked Constitution Day with educational webinars, social media campaigns, and featured guest speakers, including Arizona Secretary of State Adrian Fontes. Additionally, GCC welcomes external organizations to exercise their rights. For example, in November 2024, the Center for Bio-Ethical Reform hosted a controversial display in the Center Mall. The college upheld institutional neutrality and ensured a safe environment for all participants.



Mesa Community College (MCC)

Mesa Community College continues to set the standard for integrating civic engagement and expression into the student experience. The college's Center for Community & Civic Engagement partnered with CEID to host large-scale community dialogues on public service, free expression, and digital citizenship. For example, our Center for Civic and Community Engagement hosts bi-weekly "coffee chats" that encourage students to discuss current events and hot topics in the community and on campus, practicing civil dialogues. Additionally, MCC was the site of a boisterous protest during the spring semester. Campus police, administrators, and staff maintained a calm presence, reminding both students and protestors of their rights and responsibilities to uphold free expression laws.



Paradise Valley Community College (PVCC)

Paradise Valley Community College emphasized reflection and collaboration in its approach to free expression this year. As part of their commitment to free speech and expression, they can provide tables and chairs with just 48 hours notice for requests. Of the 91 formal requests made for space, with an unknown number of campus visitors arriving on campus without prior notification, none were prevented from exercising their right to free expression. Some of those requests include Stand Indivisible, RISE Up, Turning Point USA, Shepherd's House Bible Church, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and Gideon's International, among others. PVCC faculty also incorporated civic expression modules into general education courses, helping students understand how open inquiry enhances academic freedom.



Phoenix College (PC)

As the oldest college in the District, Phoenix College has a rich tradition of community dialogue and leadership. This year, PC strengthened its legacy through campus dialogues on constitutional freedoms, co-hosted by CEID and local civic partners. Student organizations led voter education and free expression awareness campaigns, encouraging peers to understand both their rights and responsibilities. In addition to hosting activities for U.S. Constitution Day, PC also conducted a "Communication: Adulting 101 Series" to help educate students on the skills necessary for independent living, including financial literacy, health, civic engagement, and career readiness.



Rio Salado College (Rio)

With its online and hybrid learning environment, Rio Salado College continues to innovate in digital discourse. Students in online forums practiced digital citizenship through moderated discussions on national and local issues, ensuring that even virtual engagement reflects MCCC's values of openness and respect. The college partnered with Campus Vote Project for Breaking Down Barriers: Challenges to Voting Access, Your Voice, Your Vote: Navigating the 2024 General Elections Ballot discussion sponsored by AZ Clean Elections; and The Power of Your Vote: Understanding the 2024 Primary Election Ballot discussion, which was collaborated with AZ Town Hall for Voting and Elections in Arizona. In recognition of Student Life's voter support efforts on the 2024 election, it was awarded as a 2024 ALL IN Most Engaged Campus, and a student member was named to the 2025 ALL IN Student Voting Honor Roll.



Scottsdale Community College (SCC)

Scottsdale Community College offers a range of programs and initiatives designed to promote civic engagement, free expression, and open dialogue throughout the campus community. These efforts create structured opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to engage in constructive conversations, consider multiple perspectives, and practice respectful exchange of ideas. They hosted The Unify Challenge College Bowl (a forum for students to discuss topics, share perspectives, hear alternative viewpoints, and practice respectful disagreement). Additionally, Arizona Town Hall: Voting and Elections in Arizona facilitated discussions to promote civic engagement. These efforts underscore SCC's belief that understanding diverse viewpoints strengthens the academic community.



South Mountain Community College (SMCC)

South Mountain Community College remained committed to civic engagement and public dialogue. They hosted a Your Vote Your Power conference open to all students and community members. The day featured panels on voting and leadership. Information on ballot initiatives was presented in a nonpartisan manner, helping to educate students and the community on what would be on their ballots.

ALLOCATION OF STUDENT ACTIVITY FEES DISTRIBUTION

As required by A.R.S. §15-1868 (5), none of the colleges charged or allocated any fees to student organizations or for freedom of expression.



ENSURING INTEGRITY AND NEUTRALITY

Safeguarding the Culture of Free Expression

The Maricopa County Community College District continues to strengthen its reputation as a system that promotes not only the right to speak but the responsibility to listen. Across all 10 colleges, free expression is embedded into policy, leadership training, and student experience. Every reportable instance of concern, whether related to expressive activities, facility use, or disagreement over viewpoint inclusion, was met with swift, transparent, and educational action.

Each college adheres to a districtwide protocol that reflects MCCCDC's values of fairness, inclusion, and due process. The Center for Excellence in Inclusive Democracy (CEID) and the Committee on Free Expression collaborate closely with the Student Affairs and Academic Affairs offices to ensure that responses to expression-related incidents are handled consistently and in alignment with legal and institutional expectations.

Addressing Barriers and Disruptions

During the 2024–2025 academic year, only one incident was reported that involved a concern over perceived limitations to speech. In this instance, the administrative team prioritized educational conversations over disciplinary measures, focusing on clarifying guidelines and reaffirming the District's commitment to open discourse.

Estrella Mountain Community College has a student who brought forth an instructional complaint regarding the use of explicit language in a classroom assignment, in which the student felt unfairly graded. While the student was dissatisfied with the outcome, the instructor followed the syllabus and did not find that the complaint was substantiated.

No incident across the District resulted in disciplinary action or restriction of protected speech. Instead, every occurrence reinforced MCCCDC's model of education through dialogue and awareness.

Administrative Handling and Resolution

The District's Free Expression Procedures Framework emphasizes proactive communication, shared governance, and procedural clarity. When concerns arise, colleges are guided by three key principles:

1. **Education before enforcement:** Administrators engage all parties in learning-centered discussion to clarify rights and responsibilities.
2. **Consistency through collaboration:** Each report is reviewed in partnership with CEID and the college's leadership to ensure alignment with District and legal standards.
3. **Transparency in resolution:** Outcomes are documented and communicated to maintain trust and confidence in institutional neutrality.

Districtwide training and advisories led by CEID equip college leaders and faculty with practical tools for handling expression-related matters. These sessions highlight the importance of impartial facilitation, fact-based decision-making, and adherence to both state statutes and District policies.

Maintaining Institutional Neutrality

Neutrality remains central to MCCC's civic and educational mission. The district's leadership, guided by its Shared Governance Blueprint, recognizes that institutional credibility depends on striking a balance between free expression and equitable participation in decision-making.

Neutrality is not silence; it is the disciplined act of creating space for multiple perspectives to coexist. Maricopa's commitment to neutrality is expressed through:

- **Faculty-led dialogues and shared governance councils**, where academic freedom and institutional responsibility are discussed openly.
- **Civics Council initiatives**, which help colleges connect civic discourse to community outcomes rather than partisan alignment.
- **Administrative consistency**, ensuring that facility use, event approval, and guest speaker policies are applied evenly across all campuses.

The district's posture of neutrality is not passive, but intentional, as it develops ongoing training, awareness, and evaluation to ensure that all voices can participate without fear or favoritism.



A System Rooted in Civic Responsibility

The Maricopa County Community College District remains a trusted steward of civic education and community leadership. Through shared governance, responsive administration, and intentional learning, the district affirms that free expression is not a challenge to manage, but it is a value to nurture.

Every conversation, classroom exchange, and community event builds upon this foundation, ensuring that Maricopa's colleges remain places where ideas can flourish, differences can be explored, and democracy can be practiced every day.



Commendations, Reflections, and Recommendations

Commendations

The Committee on Free Expression commends all ten colleges for their proactive role in fostering safe and open environments for dialogue. Specific commendations are extended to:

- **CEID**, for advancing districtwide initiatives such as the Free Speech Roadshow and Constitution Week series, which reached thousands of students and employees.
- **Civics Council members**, for aligning civic engagement activities with principles of open inquiry and student leadership.
- **Faculty and student affairs teams**, for modeling civility and respect in both academic and co-curricular settings.

Reflections

The district's experiences this year affirm that education, not discipline, is the most effective tool for sustaining a culture of expression. Instances of misunderstanding were opportunities to clarify expectations, reinforce rights, and build stronger relationships across campuses.

Recommendations

1. Continue to integrate free expression training modules into faculty and student orientation programs.
2. Strengthen cross-college communication protocols to share best practices in managing expression-related events.
3. Expand CEID's Free Speech Road Show, empowering individuals to serve as campus ambassadors for dialogue and civic engagement.
4. Develop digital engagement guidelines to extend the district's commitment to respectful discourse into online and hybrid environments.

A background image showing a group of students in a classroom or meeting setting. A young man with a beard is looking towards a woman with glasses who is holding a laptop. Another student with a backpack is standing nearby. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark blue filter.

LOOKING AHEAD: A DISTRICT OF CIVIC BELONGING

As the Maricopa County Community College District looks to the future, its commitment to freedom of expression remains grounded in a transformative yet straightforward belief: **education thrives where ideas are free to be shared, challenged, and understood.**

The work accomplished across the ten colleges demonstrates that free expression is not only an institutional value but also a living practice that shapes how students, employees, and communities interact daily. Dialogue has become a defining feature of the Maricopa experience. Whether through a classroom debate, a community forum, or a student-led initiative, engaging with differing perspectives strengthens both the individual and the collective.



Civic Learning as a Pathway to Belonging

The district's civic engagement framework, guided by the Center for Excellence in Inclusive Democracy (CEID), ensures that every Maricopa student has the opportunity to explore their role in a pluralistic society. Through initiatives like the Civics Council, Student Public Policy Forum, and Arizona Town Hall collaborations, students learn how public discourse, civic responsibility, and empathy intersect to sustain democracy.

These programs embody what the Truman Commission envisioned for community colleges in 1947—institutions that cultivate citizens equipped to contribute thoughtfully to the common good. By providing education that fosters awareness, participation, and dialogue, MCCCDC fulfills its national promise within local communities.

Advancing Institutional Trust and Integrity

MCCCD's continued success in maintaining a culture of free expression is the result of collaboration, transparency, and a shared sense of purpose. Each college serves as both an educational institution and a civic hub—a place where ideas converge, leadership is nurtured, and trust is built through accountability.

Moving forward, the district will deepen its work in several key areas:

- **Training and professional learning:** Expanding faculty and staff engagement in free expression, dialogue facilitation, and civic leadership development.
- **Digital dialogue literacy:** Integrating online communication strategies into curricula to prepare students for civic participation in virtual spaces.
- **Partnership expansion:** Strengthening ties with civic organizations and local municipalities to broaden opportunities for real-world engagement.
- **Continuous assessment:** Using data and feedback from college-level events to refine district policies and share best practices systemwide.

A Community of Shared Responsibility

At Maricopa, free expression is not merely protected, but it is also cultivated through mutual respect and shared governance. The district's commitment to deliberation, reflection, and civic belonging transforms education into an act of community-building. Every student, employee, and partner contributes to this vision by engaging with curiosity, empathy, and a sense of accountability.

The path forward for MCCCD is one of continued leadership and innovation.

By fostering environments where dialogue replaces division and learning overcomes isolation, the district ensures that free expression remains both a constitutional right and a civic responsibility.

Through its colleges, councils, and community partnerships, the Maricopa County Community College District continues to embody the spirit of democratic education that is open, inclusive, and unwavering in its dedication to truth, understanding, and the collective pursuit of knowledge.

Conclusion

The Maricopa County Community College District remains steadfast in its mission to prepare students not only for careers but for citizenship. The 2025 Free Expression Annual Report demonstrates that when colleges embrace dialogue, understanding, and collaboration, they create more than learning institutions; they build communities of trust and civic vitality.

Free expression at MCCCD is not simply a constitutional value; **it is a lived practice.**

It is found in conversations between students and faculty, in partnerships with local organizations, and in the ongoing commitment to serve as a model of how democracy thrives in everyday life.

As required by A.R.S. §15-1868, this report will be posted on MCCCD's website and submitted to:

- The Governor of Arizona
- The speaker of the Arizona House of Representatives
- The president of the Arizona Senate
- The Arizona Secretary of State

FREE EXPRESSION

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