

WHO KNOWS BEST?

Snapshot

The California Housing Finance Agency's "State of the Agency" is an annual event for all staff, held at a neighborhood theater, to review the Agency's accomplishments, division projects and goals. An entire fiscal year of information is a lot for most employees to absorb, especially when it's delivered in a lecture format. Even though most staff members are interested in what is going on at the Agency, and enjoy gathering with fellow employees from different divisions, an event filled with speeches, PowerPoint presentations and statistics is not very effective, and certainly not very fun. In fact, historically, too many employees either didn't attend or didn't participate while they were there. The bottom line: intentions were good, but the execution left a lot to be desired.

Challenge

The challenge facing us was how to deliver this information in an interesting and memorable format and use the event as a learning opportunity, not a lecture. A secondary goal was to make the event as inclusive as possible so that many, if not most CalHFA employees were able to participate.

Solution

Playing off of popular television shows, CalHFA Marketing staff brainstormed several possible themes for the 2008 State of the Agency from "American Idol" to "Survivor" before settling on a winning blend of game shows. Combining a little bit of "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?" with "Deal or No Deal" and just a sprinkle of "Jeopardy", CalHFA created a special fun fusion and called it "Who Knows Best?".

The first step was finding ten CalHFA contestants to compete during the first round of "Who Knows Best?". Here's how it worked: approximately eight weeks prior to the State of the Agency event (on July 10, 2008), all CalHFA employees received a series of multiple-choice quiz questions via email. These questions were based on various aspects of the Agency including specific division programs, personnel, statistics, Agency business plan, etc. Employees were asked to complete and submit their answers to the quiz by the end of the week. CalHFA Marketing staff evaluated the submissions based on the number of correct answers and speed in which they were returned.

The top ten employees with the most correct answers and the quickest response times were to move on to Round Two of "Who Knows Best?".

Meanwhile, enthusiasm was generated among CalHFA staff with "Who Knows Best?" posters lining the walls of our buildings (Attachment A). A special web page was also created to post quiz dates, official rules and quiz results (Attachment B) and invitations were sent to all staff, encouraging them to attend the main event on July 10 (Attachment C).

Round Two was videotaped in a nearby studio and reflected a "Millionaire" look and feel, complete with lights, camera and a full game show set. The ten Round Two contestants

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were each quizzed on a set of 12 questions. During the questioning, each contestant was offered an opportunity to use two separate “Lifeline Options.”

The “Phone a Friend” Lifeline involved contestants calling a pre-selected CalHFA employee for assistance. This “friend” could attempt to answer the question which was read to them by the contestant.

The “50-50” Life Line allowed contestants to ask for two of the four possible answers to be eliminated, enabling the contestant to choose one of the two remaining multiple-choice answers.

If a contestant answered one question incorrectly, their score was recorded and their participation in Round Two ended. The four contestants with the highest number of correct answers would move on to the final round of “Who Knows Best?” to be played live on stage at the State of the Agency event.

When the event date of July 10, 2008 finally arrived, the theater was filled with excitement. When employees entered the lobby, they were given a small premium item as well as a card that outlined all Agency accomplishments over the previous year (Attachment D).

On the stage, the game took on a “Deal or No Deal” element with our game host, also a CalHFA employee, looking remarkably similar to Howie Mandell with a shaved head and soul patch on his chin.

The four finalists now had 24 questions to answer (20 plus four bonus questions). The questions along with their set of multiple-choice answers were projected on the large movie screen behind the stage (Attachment E).

To accomplish our goal of including a large group of CalHFA employees in the event, we brought up 24 employees on stage who served as “Case Holders.” This group, dressed in matching “Who Knows Best?” t-shirts, held the point value in their case for each question that was to be asked of the contestants.

Prior to taking their turn at a question, contestants selected a case. Tougher questions were awarded higher point values with a range from 125 to 175. If a contestant answered their question correctly, they were awarded the point value assigned to that particular question. If they answered incorrectly, their score remained unchanged.

A “Poll the Audience” Lifeline was offered as a one-time opportunity to each contestant. If a contestant was stumped by one of their questions, they were able to ask the audience for assistance. The audience of employees (who each had cards with either an “A”, “B”, “C” or “D” on them) held up a card corresponding to the multiple-choice answer they felt was the correct option.

Throughout the 20-minute game (see 5-minute show clip DVD, Attachment F), it was clear that the audience and case holders were enjoying the show as much as the contestants. The “Poll the Audience” Lifeline was especially popular and gave every attendee an opportunity to participate and demonstrate their knowledge. The game was hard-fought and exciting until the very end, and without much effort at all, employees

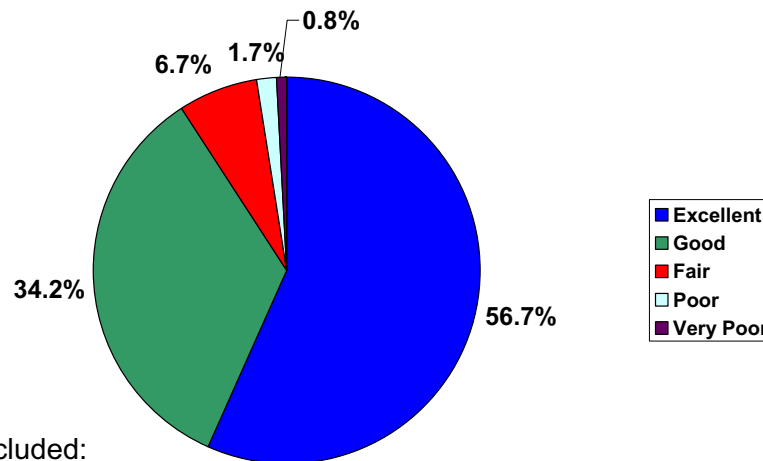
learned a great deal. Once a winner was declared, CalHFA's Executive Director, Terri Parker awarded plaques to the Grand Champion and the three Runner's Up.

Measurable Results

The end result was everything we had hoped it would be. Information was shared, new knowledge was absorbed, Agency goals were mapped out and employees had fun. Plus, our objective of involving CalHFA staff was met beyond expectations. Between the quiz responses, game contestants and audience participation at the actual event, nearly 80% of CalHFA staff took part in our 2008 State of the Agency.

An electronic survey was immediately conducted back at the office. Rarely have we seen such positive results.

How would you rate this State of the Agency overall?



Survey comments included:

"Informative but so much fun, really enjoyed the audience participation!"

"It's great to come together as an Agency and celebrate our accomplishments in such a fun way."

"I've been in state service for 22 years (but I'm new to CalHFA) and I'm thoroughly impressed that the agency takes the time and puts forth the effort to have the SOTA [State of the Agency]. Good job!!"

CalHFA's "Who Knows Best?" version of the State of the Agency was a creative, whimsical alternative to long speeches, spreadsheets and charts. Information was presented and retained, and all of this was achieved with a lot of bang for the buck (Attachment G).

More than just a game, our 2008 State of the Agency proved that when it comes to innovative education, *CalHFA Knows Best!*