

Going Big Selections Announcement

Minnesota Housing

Communications: Special Event Marketing

HFA Staff Contact

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NCSHA Submission:**Category: Communications****Subcategory: Special Event Marketing****Submission from:** Minnesota Housing**Title:** Going Big Selections Announcement

"2020 Funding Selections & Advancements: Going Big So More Minnesotans Can Go Home!"

Overview:

Every year prior to 2020, Minnesota Housing announced its funding selections for multifamily and single-family housing investments with an in-person event and printed 32-page reports. With in-person events off the table in 2020, and printing no longer a go-to medium, the Agency had to find new ways to share the news. We took the challenge, dropped the formal report and embraced fresh new video and web formats to reach a much broader audience.

Is innovative:

A typical year at a housing finance agency has its rhythm with the regular issuance of strategic plans and program reports, requests for proposals and funding announcements sprinkled throughout the year. With lean staffs and recurring events, it can be easy to slip into the habit of issuing revised yet rather familiar materials; after all, why fix what's not broken? Sticking with a style serves the agency brand and is efficient.

But 2020 was the curve ball no one saw coming. We quickly recognized that our usual in-person launch event – at which the Governor and Housing Commissioner stood before the press to announce the total dollar investment in competitive Tax Credit and Housing Infrastructure Bond funding awards – was not to be. And there was no point in printing a bound report with no audience on hand to receive it. Besides, the report had always seemed to consume more pages than necessary to state the facts of dollars and units while missing the story about people and impact.

Plus, we had an important story to share, with a need to demonstrate the impact of what turned out to be the largest influx of state support for housing. The legislature passing \$100 million in Housing Infrastructure Bonds and \$16 million in Publicly Owned Housing Program in a surprise vote in October, just in time to help the agency announce a larger set of affordable housing developments than had been possible in years past. We needed to demonstrate the agency's accountability for this expanded state investment.

Is replicable:

We discovered that Adobe Spark provides a streamlined web presence that is easy to navigate, yet is user-friendly and easy to create. Without advanced graphic design, the communications team was able to create a dynamic, scrolling web presence that incorporated the video features, photos and key content about the announcement. You can access Minnesota Housing's [web presentation online](#) to experience its inviting nature and many opportunities to interact.

The Adobe Spark presentation provided us with a modern upgrade to what had been a 20th century tool, the printed report. Still, we recognized that some of our constituents would need a printable PDF so we created a brief executive summary for those stakeholders.

Next we needed to replace the in-person event with an online one. We have an agency storyteller on our communications team who is a videographer, and he went out to capture footage in the communities highlighted and he screen-recorded our Commissioner talking with our people with lived experience. We [launched our video](#) via YouTube Premiere an hour after our board of director officially approved them on December 17, at a time we heavily promoted ahead of time.

We consider this a replicable project because communications team skills often already include the skillsets needed to move in the direction we did: light graphic design, videography and writing skills. These all came together in our materials.

Engage targeted audiences:

The primary audience for our selections announcement has been affordable housing developers, and we know we captured their attention due to the level of viewership and engagement. We also sought to reach media, state legislators and housing advocates who helped lobby for the funds the agency ultimately received. Anecdotal evidence of followup calls and emails tells us we hit our mark.

Internally, the website was a huge hit among the Minnesota Housing staff who work so hard to review and advance the developments that will become signature investments for the agency. They expressed feeling great pride when they watched the video event premiere and scrolled through all of the assets made available on our web presence.

Achieve measurable results:

Typically we would have between 90 and 150 people in attendance at our announcement events. But more than 400 people logged on to watch the YouTube Premiere of our video launch event., 2.5 to 4 times more people than we typically reach in person. To date we've reached 1,250 views of our half hour announcement.

We teed up clips from Governor Tim Walz, Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan, Commissioner Jennifer Ho, a young new homeowner and a resident of supportive housing. Each of the separate elements are available for viewing via our website, but additionally they were packaged together for an effective half hour presentation.

On Facebook our post we achieved an organic reach of 8,000 and over 600 engagements (reactions, comments and shares).

Provide benefits that outweigh costs:

We created something far more attractive than we'd had before, found new ways to engage people, and did a better job of expressing who we are, what we do and the impact our investments make.

The costs were minimal given that we did not need to hire any consultants to create the materials. Even if we had, the hourly cost would not have been significant.

Demonstrate effective use of resources:

Because we did not have to hire outside consultants, we were pleased to put the many skills of our team to work to good effect in elevating the message along with the presentation, look and feel of the agency's news of its investments. We deployed many staff hours in service of this presentation and online event but we consider them time well spent.

Achieve strategic objectives:

Our goal is to cast a wider net so as to reach emerging developers of affordable housing, particularly Black, Indigenous and developers of color. Streaming our funding selections event online for the first time meant we were able to reach a far wider audience than we ever managed in person. We reached agency stakeholders deep into Greater Minnesota communities where housing advocates and other allies reside and work, putting them hours away from an event in Minneapolis or St. Paul.

Our social media presence, video reach and Spark website meant our message went further than ever before, carrying our message of impact for low- and moderate-income Minnesotans to the state legislature.

JOSH:

- Visual aids can include photos, publications, **web links**, etc:

<https://spark.adobe.com/page/xDji9SJgQiTC/>

<https://youtu.be/pk0HCgBvvAc>

Please also attach the Exec Summary, attached to my email