

# 50th Anniversary, “Turning Challenges into Opportunities: A Journey of Hope”

**South Carolina State Housing Finance and Development Authority**  
Communications: Special Event Marketing

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SC State Housing Finance and Development Authority (SC Housing)  
50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, “Turning Challenges into Opportunities: A Journey of Hope”  
Communications Category, Special Events Marketing #3

In December 2021, SC Housing commemorated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a hybrid virtual/in-person event that was educational, engaging, and *modestly celebratory*. The theme of the event, “Turning Challenges into Opportunities: A Journey of Hope,” was befitting of the COVID-19 housing crisis being experienced by many families, with its focus on resiliency and triumph over trials as told through the voices of beneficiaries and stakeholders. However, be ready to pivot when navigating a pandemic!

### Background

In late 2020, as the world continued to struggle its way through the COVID-19 pandemic, SC Housing was on the brink of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We wanted to celebrate the milestone with our employees, program beneficiaries, participants, partners and all of the residents of South Carolina. But how exactly should the agency approach “celebrating” anything in the midst of the pain much of the world was facing, and the housing crisis that ensued for so many families who were at risk of losing their homes?

The agency leadership team decided the best approach to the challenge was to stage the anniversary celebration as a series of year-long milestone events over the course of 2021, strategically engaging targeted audiences each quarter and culminating with a finale event in the fourth quarter—when it was hoped that a healthier world would emerge.

Not knowing exactly what that world would look like, SC Housing needed to prepare for a number of variables that were impossible to predict, such as COVID-19 surges and mitigation of risk conditions, and plan for unknown contingencies, such as staffing, travel restrictions and other responses to the lingering public health threat. Could a celebration event be held in person by the end of the year, or would it need to be recorded, or virtual, or canceled altogether?

### The Plan and Strategy:

Early in 2020, the Communications team developed a logo and theme for the celebration: “Turning Challenges into Opportunities: A Journey of Hope.” Social media icons were changed from the agency’s typical color palate (blue and green) to a gold-and-black in honor of the celebration. A banner was added to the top of the agency’s homepage, and branded signature block developed for all staff to promote the event.

Internally, the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration was a collaborative effort between senior leadership, with SC Housing’s Communications, Procurement, and Human Resources (HR) teams leading the way. While the official 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary event was pushed back into the last quarter of 2021, the agency was able to maintain engagement with audiences and build momentum as follows:

- **Employee Appreciation (1<sup>st</sup> quarter):** Long-term employees of the agency (i.e., tenure greater than 10 years) were given the opportunity to participate in a social media recognition of their work contributions to the agency’s mission and share why each found SC Housing a rewarding place to work. This was a valuable recruitment tool as well. The HR team also provided 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary face masks as a special giveaway to employees at an employee luncheon following the debut of the executive director’s kick-off video. In collaboration with HR, the Communications team also worked to ensure that every employee (whether in the office or virtual) would be able to participate in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter anniversary virtual celebration and concurrent drop-in event at the agency to share a piece of anniversary cake during their break.

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- **Customer Appreciation (2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter):** The Communications team worked with program staff to reach out to participants who would be willing to share their stories in their own voices and own way. Through these powerful testimonials, customers were able to share their journey and the meaningful impact of program services in a very transparent, powerful, and authentic fashion. As reflected in the words of one behavioral health client advocate in our state, “Nothing about us without us” and our beneficiaries were empowered to share their own stories.
- **Partners Appreciation (3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter):** As a part of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, the agency also relaunched its annual awards program and, working alongside program staff and partners, identified and nominated several professionals and organizations who received special recognition in the following categories: Advocate of the Year, Development Partner of the Year, Loan Officer of the Year, Elected Official of the Year (Clementa Pinckney Award), and Voice of Housing (Media of the Year). Staff also reached out to dozens of other partners and requested video messages of congratulations on the milestone event for us to share.
- **Hallmark Event for all South Carolinians (4<sup>th</sup> Quarter):** We challenged each of our program managers to help craft “elevator pitches” to educate the public on our agency’s mission and vision, and how their program helps to make a difference in the lives of everyday citizens and residents. Our plan was to use these short written and video segments on social media and on our website and in materials that could be distributed widely to stakeholders. These interviews were interspersed with recorded content as described below to make for an engaging, yet interactive, hybrid experience.

#### **Get Ready to Pivot: Implementation**

A key part of our work involved working with the agency’s Procurement Officer to construct an event planner solicitation that would provide us with the flexibility to make needed adjustments based upon uncertainties introduced by the pandemic. In short, we had to take a very prescribed and predictable process and build in contingencies where possible. Planning for multiple possibilities, searching for adaptable vendors who were capable and willing to deliver scalable solutions posed a challenge in a climate where many businesses were already struggling to sustain operations. In addition, the agency had never convened a fully virtual event with a production team, so we had to quickly research opportunities and options in order to develop a viable solicitation. This effort yielded a vendor who was able to deliver either in-person or virtual events, while allowing us the flexibility to plan for a fourth-quarter special event at a time when the pandemic continued to surge and wane. Given the midyear rise in COVID-19 cases across the state, we eventually decided to forgo an in-person anniversary celebration—opting for a virtual event on December 2, 2021 instead.

That is when we launched into high-gear with our special event vendor, arranging a number of video interviews across the state. We scheduled sit-down interviews with the leaders of our agency’s major programs so that we could share the “who” behind our agency, in addition to the “what” of how our programs work to assist residents. We then worked with managers to identify beneficiaries served in these programs and traveled around the state in an aggressive 3-day interview schedule to capture their insights. We then worked with agency leadership to identify additional voices and partners to help tell our story, including Governor Henry McMaster, and Majority Whip, Congressman James Clyburn, who played an instrumental role in our agency’s history. We also knew that we wanted an inspirational message of hope to share with our attendees, so we reached out to Chris Singleton, a former pro baseball player who tragically lost his mother in the Emanuel Nine shooting in Charleston, S.C.

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Engaging with viewers over video was an expected a challenge, given that most people had already reached the “Zoom fatigue” portion of the pandemic and were not going to sit for hours and hours. Therefore, we decided that we wanted to keep the entire presentation short (between two and two-and-a-half hours). We also knew that we wanted to have as many voices as possible so we reached out to dozens of beneficiaries, partners, and elected officials and asked them to upload videos expressing their sentiments about the agency.

We had hours of content that we integrated into an engaging run of the show that included an off-site event with a small studio audience (to provide a realistic, interactive experience), which would air live, complete with an emcee and live conversations with program managers. When these items were interspersed with many of the videos previously recorded, we found we had two incredible hours of content to captivate our viewing audience, and many more hours of content that could be shared at a later date. The ability to mix in recorded video also meant the “stress” of running a high-quality live performance was lessened, and agency leadership felt more comfortable that we could successfully launch the event.

### **The Results**

The hybrid virtual/ in-person event went smoothly, engaged more than 350 viewers live, and gave us just what we needed to engage thousands more into the future with great content. The event could be viewed up to two weeks afterwards in case staff needed to address workday priorities. And perhaps just as importantly, the combination of virtual and live event support (including hours of travel and video shooting around the state) afforded substantial cost savings when compared to our previous large-scale, in-person forum hosted by the agency. At a time when so many residents in our state were hurting, we wanted to be judicious with agency resources and “celebrate” appropriately.

In the days following the event, we posted the client testimonials on our website. We have also posted the award recognitions on social media, leading to an all-time high in social media engagement for our agency. We used the customer testimonials on a printed “leave behind” pieces for LegCon 2022 and will continue to mine this investment for future marketing campaigns, including for board workshops.

We also quickly engaged with attendees by sending a survey to request feedback on the event, and mailed every attendee a copy of Chris Singleton’s children’s book, “Different.” More than 30% of attendees told us their favorite part of the program was meeting the clients we’ve helped. Another 20% said the highlight was hearing from the agency’s managers about our programs. And another 20% said it was the inspiring keynote address by Chris Singleton. The only critical piece of feedback received from the survey tool was that people wished the entire event could have been in person. We whole-heartedly agree.

One attendee summarized the potential future impact of the event as follows:

“COVID really made this challenging... but you all did a tremendous job communicating the values and conveying the inspiration towards the future within the presentation. I think it sets the tone for future events when we all get to meet in person. It is a value add that it was recorded to inspire future viewers and constituents of the programs you offer. You all did a wonderful job navigating all the challenges the pandemic offered this year and the 50th Anniversary Celebration demonstrated the success and commitment of SC Housing through it all.”

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VISUAL AIDS

50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Kickoff Messages

[Executive Director and board chairman kick-off message to employees and staff.](#)



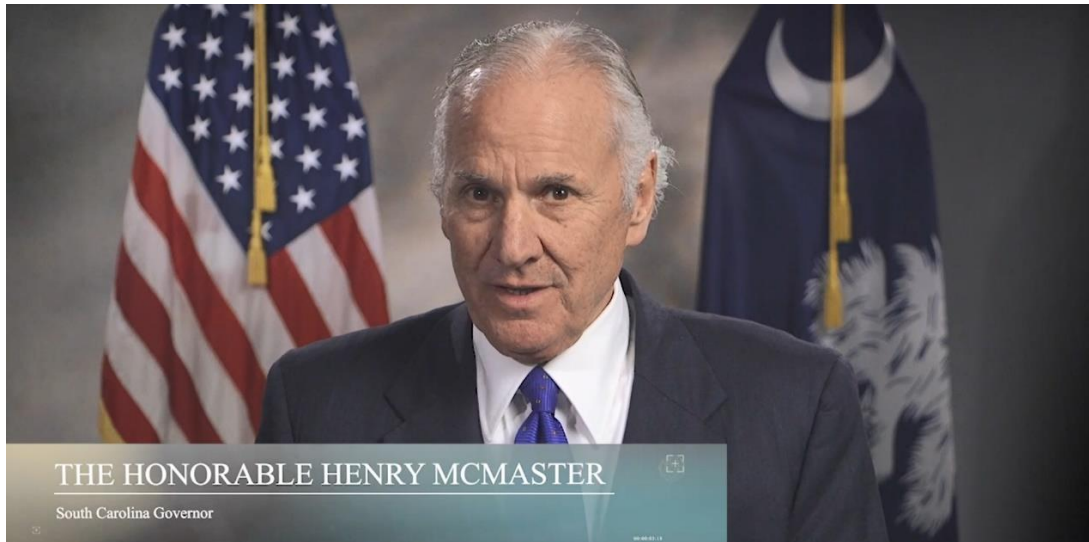
Staff Recognition/ Testimonials [on Social Media](#)



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### 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration

[Congratulatory messages from partners](#), supporters across the state, including Gov. Henry McMaster:



[Interview between SC Housing Executive Director Bonita Shropshire and U.S. Rep. James Clyburn](#), who was an instrumental figure in the launching of affordable housing initiatives across the state:



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[Inspirational message from Chris Singleton](#), a former professional athlete who lost his mother in the tragic Emanuel Nine shooting in Charleston, S.C. His children's book "Different" was given to event attendees:



During the event's intermission, a [slideshow showcasing powerful moments](#) during the agency's 50 years of service was shown:

## Substandard Housing: Thousands of SC homes become priority **1973**

**COLUMBIA - Gov. John C. West said the state should take more responsibility in meeting housing needs of its poorest families. West spoke before a Senate committee studying Nixon's housing moratorium and said "massive infusions of federal help" are necessary.**

**South Carolina has more than 300,000 substandard homes which should be replaced or improved, West said.**

**West said the housing moratorium also may cause the newly formed state housing authority to fold.**

Source: The Gamecock (April 5, 1973)



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SC Housing highlighted its major programs by interviewing program managers and leaders:



And then showcased the impact those programs have through [a number of testimonials](#) focusing on our Homeownership program, Housing Trust Fund home repair program, LIHTC programs that support development of affordable housing, emergency voucher program that helps those facing homelessness and emergency rental assistance program.

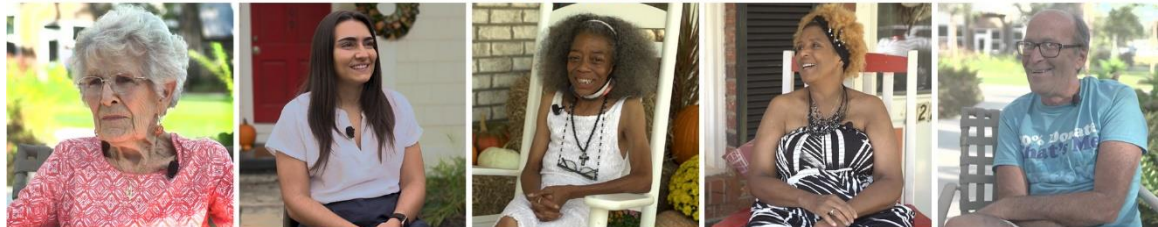


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Marketing Uses Following Anniversary Celebration:

Updated testimonials included in our [Faces of Home series](#) online:

**Faces of Home**



Joan Suda moved to the Ribaut Senior Village, a 49-unit apartment complex for older adults that received federal tax credits through SC Housing, to be closer to town and to have more opportunities for social connections.  
[Click here to learn more about Joan's story.](#)

Erica Mijon was the first of her friends to become a homeowner, after qualifying for the SC Housing's first-time homebuyer program with guidance from Guild Mortgage. "Because SC Housing had the homeowner's program, I kept my savings while covering my down payment," Erica said.  
[Click here to learn more about Erica's story.](#)

Gail Simpson was able to secure an emergency housing choice voucher through SC Housing and was quickly able to find a new home in the Villas at North Lake in Lexington.  
[Click here to learn more about Gail's story.](#)

Julia Cash was able to receive a new HVAC unit and replaced flooring and updates to her electricity with support from the SC Housing Trust Fund and Rebuild Upstate. Julia can now safely enjoy her home and her neighborhood in Pine Hill.  
[Click here to learn more about Julia's story.](#)

David Sandler moved to South Carolina to be closer to his family in Savannah. He moved into Ribaut Senior Village, a 49-unit apartment complex for older adults that received federal tax credits through SC Housing, on the first day they opened.  
[Click here to learn more about David's story.](#)

SC Housing prerecorded interviews with program managers to have videos to share about the agency's primary programs following the event. [Here's an example of one with Steve Clements:](#)

