



Miami Association Creates Advocacy Team with Game Changer Grant – February 2013

The way Danielle Blake sees it, political engagement is a lot like college football in the South. Blake, the outgoing Vice President of Government Affairs and Housing of the Miami Association of REALTORS® (MIAMI,) explains, “Football’s like a religion down here. We’re passionate about our teams. We’re all fans, but we’re in it together: You know when to dish it out, and when to keep your mouth shut!” Likewise, whether you’re a Democrat or Republican, she says, the REALTOR® Party serves the whole industry, but it works best when everyone comes to the game.

The problem was getting members to come to the political ‘game.’ With 26,000 members, MIAMI is the largest local association in the country. Yet, the year before last, it had only ten Major Investors in RPAC, and it wasn’t having an easy time mustering members to participate in candidate screenings. Blake points out that while small associations are so good at meeting their RPAC goals, in larger ones there’s a certain disconnect, and endless distractions, and the easy assumption that someone else is doing the job. She knew they needed a game-changing plan.

In March, 2012, MIAMI was awarded a \$25,000 Game Changer grant from NAR to create a “Market Solutions through Political Advocacy” team. The team serves as a clearing house for member solutions to market issues; recommends local races to screen based on community and market issues; and meets, educates and advocates for candidates during elections. Since its first meeting last April, MIAMI has seen increased involvement in RPAC, political campaigns and market issues. It is also helping to elect more REALTOR® Champions to public office.

“The program works because it helps get people involved,” says Blake. The simple application seeks team members who are willing to advocate for the association and its REALTOR® members; who have expertise in a specialized area such as affordable housing, commercial, legal affairs, short sales, etc.; who are motivated and responsive; ready to think outside the box; and open and respectful toward diverse opinions.

The periodic issues meetings consistently draw about 20 members for lively discussion. Members may vote on taking action on a given issue. They are encouraged to partner with and “sponsor” candidates for local political office and introduce them to the group.

“We’ve learned, in doing this, that many new candidates aren’t aware of many of our REALTOR® issues, and raising awareness at that level benefits all of us,”



notes Blake. She also points out that catching candidates early in their careers helps form long-term relationships with future office holders.

When MIAMI RPAC determined which candidates it would support in the 2012 elections, funding from the grant was used to throw a big party. About 15 candidates collected their checks in person, taking the opportunity to make brief speeches and meet members.

The grant also supported a full-time paid intern to help administer the program, and paid for a magnet board to trumpet members who have joined the ranks of MIAMI RPAC's Major Investors. Given prominent exposure at all MIAMI events, the association now boasts nearly 60 Major Investors. The club that's been created for this elite crowd offers not only candidate screening benefits and VIP Investor Events, but expedited drink lines at MIAMI events ("We have a lot of fun down here!" laughs Blake.)

On a more serious note, she emphasizes that the funding from NAR truly did change the game for MIAMI's level of political engagement. "NAR has such great programs, and this one helped us to spur members to become involved with political issues, and candidates, and each other. It's been awesome."

Danielle Blake's role at the Miami Association of REALTORS® is in transition as she moves to California, but to learn more about how the association is using its Game Changer grant to increase member engagement through political advocacy, contact its new Vice President of Government Affairs and Housing, Bruno Lopes, at bruno@miamire.com or 305.468.7015.