



## **North Carolina and Charlotte Associations Use Game Changer Grant to Make a Splash at the Democratic National Convention**

When you have a national political convention coming to town for the first time in your state's history, it's best to know how to harness some of that attention for your cause.

More than a year ago, when Charlotte was chosen as the site of the 2012 Democratic National Convention, the government affairs teams of the more than 30,000-member North Carolina Association of REALTORS<sup>®</sup> (NCAR) and the more than 6,100-member Charlotte Regional REALTOR<sup>®</sup> Association (CRRA) began brainstorming ways to get their message in front of the more than 6,000 delegates —plus countless politicians and some 15,000 members of the media — who would descend on the city in the first week of September. They considered branding hotel key cards. They thought about producing a special website. Then they hit on their game-changing inspiration: digital billboards.

“Elizabeth Barnhardt, our government affairs director at the Charlotte Regional REALTOR<sup>®</sup> Association, had a friend at Adams Outdoor Advertising, and it didn't take us long to see how much good sense the digital billboards made,” says Cady Thomas, NCAR's government affairs director. “No one would have to seek out a website, or bother to read their hotel room key card, or do anything but drive by the big, bold, in-your-face billboards.” The placements received an estimated 700,000 daily views during the convention period.

Applying jointly for a Game Changer grant from the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS<sup>®</sup>, the two associations received \$25,000 in support of their project, which NCAR matched with \$25,000 from its Issues Mobilization Fund. The total \$50,000 bought one month of time on 10 billboards in five counties in the Greater Charlotte area — all on major thoroughfares that visitors would pass daily en route to and from the convention site. 2012 CRRA/Carolina Multiple Listing Services, Inc. President Jennifer Frontera points out, “We know Charlotte, North Carolina is a great place to live, and delegates, media and visitors from all over the U.S. found that out. Even if visitors to this area don't come back and call Charlotte home, we've made sure they remember the REALTORS<sup>®</sup> welcomed them to our great city and state.”

NCAR and CRRA worked with two of their go-to consulting firms to develop the messages and graphics for the billboards. They reached out to the Democratic National Convention and to local commercial and county boards to maximize visibility, coordinate messages, and prevent overlapping promotion. During the convention, the billboards' messages promoted homeownership in North Carolina. Soon after the convention was over, the digital format allowed for the billboards' messages to be changed out with the flip of a switch to messages



more relevant to the local resident populations. The focus became commercial real estate: “Invest in Your Future. Invest in North Carolina.”

“I believe we could have changed it out every day, for that matter — it’s such a versatile medium,” notes Thomas. That’s what makes this form of advertising a “Game-Changer,” one that Thomas sees as an approach that could be replicated by associations around the country in any number of different situations. “Digital billboards are a great, high-profile way to engage the public. They’re bright and backlit, so they have a clean, high-tech appearance. They’re relatively inexpensive — certainly compared to television advertising — and they offer this incredible flexibility. They could be used to promote the membership or programs; to educate the voting public about an upcoming referendum or an important political contest; or simply for a public awareness campaign -- or all of the above, really.”

At the convention breakfast that the two associations hosted for REALTOR®-delegates, NAR leadership, and political VIPs the billboards were a clear hit. Thomas gives the entire city high marks for its time in the political spotlight. “Charlotte did a great job; everybody got there easily, had a good time, and stayed safe. Now we’re getting back to normal — but our billboards will have had a lasting effect. ”

*To learn more about these “Game-Changing” billboards, contact Cady Thomas, government affairs director of the North Carolina Association of REALTORS®, at 919-573-0996 or [cthomas@ncrealtors.org](mailto:cthomas@ncrealtors.org); or Elizabeth Barnhardt, government affairs director of the Charlotte Regional REALTOR® Association, at 704-940-3178 or [elizabeth.barnhardt@carolinahome.com](mailto:elizabeth.barnhardt@carolinahome.com)*

