

Saving Blackheath Fireworks Night! What a successful public fundraising campaign looks like

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Organisation: Lewisham Council

Country: United Kingdom

Level of government: Local government

Sector: Recreation, culture and religion

Type: Digital, Methods

Launched in: 2010

Overall development time: 1 year(s)

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

In the UK, fireworks events are traditional not only on New Year's Day but also on 5th November - Guy Fawkes Day. The Blackheath public fireworks display on that evening has been a long standing highlight of Lewisham's events calendar – in 2009 about 80 000 people attended. It has in the past received funding from Lewisham and Greenwich councils as well as from private sponsorship. After a loss of funding, a public fundraising campaign was launched to continue the Blackheath Fireworks Night.

Why the innovation was developed

- In October 2010, Greenwich Council decided to pull out its funding, putting the event at risk. The London Borough of Lewisham was still committed, but could not afford to fund the shortfall all by itself.
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Objectives

Improve efficiency, Increase citizen engagement

- To launch a public appeal for donations to allow the Blackheath Fireworks Night to continue.
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Main beneficiaries

General population

- Residents of Lewisham
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Results

User satisfaction

- The appeal attracted a lot of interest and comment, especially online. Local bloggers got involved with championing the cause. Here are some of the comments from their blogs:
 - "Lewisham Council has been trying to raise more cash for the event since Greenwich Council decided not to support it this year. It's good to see that the council is using a bit of imagination to try and raise the money - there's a GBP 36 000 shortfall to make up and so far it has received GBP 11 500 in public donations....from The Deptford Dame."
 - "To the Blackheath Fireworks appeal. This year, on grounds of budget constraints, Greenwich Council cancelled their support for the November 5th event, which has been co-funded by the two boroughs for many years. So-far, the public has donated GBP 10 000 of the GBP 35 000 target, with local companies like Glendale and the Clarendon Hotel chipping in...from Brockley Central."
 - Others members of the local community generously donated their time and skills. A local amateur took the photos, and local professional film makers made a film of the event.
 - The eBay auction ran for 10 days with a starting price of 99 pence. The winning bid was for GBP 1000.
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Other improvements

- The Council got several clear indications that people value the fireworks and that it would be worthwhile continuing in the future:
- There was a significant increase in traffic on the Lewisham Council website and mentions on social media channels (70% increase); over 350 donations via PayPal; and attendance was up by 20 000.

Development

Design

Through the public appeal. Lewisham Council wanted to test the popularity of the event to inform the decision for next year, and to raise money to cover the shortfall.

Implementation

Tools used:

- The Lewisham Council promoted the appeal through traditional and new media. It set up a PayPal account for donations, held a collection on the night and even auctioned off a VIP package on eBay.
- The VIP package included: Access for 10 people to an exclusive VIP viewing area for the duration of the display; A private tour of the firing zone by experts from Pains Fireworks; VIP parking for three cars in the very heart of the event; 10 meal vouchers from the Fine Food Company; 10 drink vouchers to be used at any of the mobile bar units supplied by Creative Bars; 10 hot chocolate vouchers supplied by Jaz and Jules; Glow sticks for the whole party provided by Limelight Entertainment Ltd.

Resources used:

- The campaign raised GBP 25 000 which went towards the shortfall of GBP 36 000.
- GBP 1000 was raised through eBay, GBP 2500 was donated by individuals through PayPal, GBP 4000 was raised through the collection, and the rest of the GBP 17 000 funding raised was secured from sponsors. This would not have been possible if it were not for the awareness raised by the campaign.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- Initially Lewisham Council wanted to set up a payment account using its internal systems. This was not possible in the time frame and it was a challenge to get approval for the PayPal account. The disadvantage of PayPal was losing a percentage of donations to them, as transaction payments. In future, the Council hopes to be able to deal with payments of this nature in-house.
 - The Council had to take a risk as to how the support of the community would pan out. People might generally have called for the event to be cancelled. You have to be prepared for the fact that you cannot control the message once it is out there.
 - The campaign was targeted outside the borough, as well as using channels within the borough. The event already attracted many people from across Lewisham. The Council therefore had to be aware of the fact that this campaign might increase visitors – which it did. However, attendance did not go above the levels for which it had arranged – this will have to be watched carefully in future years.
 - The Council had to be clear that it would conduct this campaign with a minimal use of resources. Word of mouth and staff time taken to contact websites, social media, and press were the main use of resource. Photos and video were donated.
 - It was difficult to predict how the collection on the night would be received by the audience. Actually, it was very successful, so an increase in the number of collectors will be needed for 2011 to ensure everyone gets a chance to donate.
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Other information

*The program described in this innovation case study has been discontinued and is no longer in operation.