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HARNESSING DOCUMENTARIES FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

A GUIDE FOR ADVOCATES



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HARNESSING DOCUMENTARIES FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

JUST FILMS  Social Change and
Documentary Workshop

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The Opportunity

Last year, something remarkable happened with SeaWorld. Elementary school students protested field trips to the aquatic theme park. Investors pulled their financing. Bands cancelled performances. SeaWorld attendance dropped by 13 percent in the span of just a few months. Meanwhile, legislators across multiple states proposed bills to stop the use of whales in theme parks.

The trigger? A documentary film called *Blackfish*, which tells the story of orca whales suffering in captivity. This impact is directly linked to both the film's storytelling power and how nonprofits and activists connected audiences to the film and mobilized people to action.

Social change organizations are increasingly embracing a variety of visual storytelling strategies to help advance their causes. Organizations know that quality narrative and creative storytelling can push issues and values into the larger public consciousness—and that communities are often hungry for opportunities to share their personal stories. Consider the DREAMers movement to win legal status and citizenship for undocumented youth. Storytelling was at its heart; when youth began sharing their stories via YouTube and other platforms, the movement caught

fire. Storytelling de-stigmatized the status of undocumented youth and built their sense of political agency.

The act of storytelling is a powerful tool that can spark communities to self-organize and call for change. Visual storytelling, in particular, provides a valuable opportunity to generate deep empathy that can lead to social action. A photo series, an online video, or a long-form documentary can inspire, capture attention, and move people to act. By producing high quality, emotionally fulfilling, and thought provoking content, visual storytellers and documentary filmmakers play an important cultural role. Many documentary producers address social justice issues—human rights, racial justice, gender equity, economic justice, immigrant rights, the environment, and more. But too often these storytellers struggle to reach and engage targeted audiences with their films.

There are natural alignments between organizers and storytellers that play to each other's strengths. But right now, both groups lack the deep understanding of each other's work that's necessary to effectively move the needle on social issues. By forming solid cross-sector partnerships, visual storytellers and activists can significantly amplify their impact. These partnerships begin with conversations that strengthen understanding of each other's values, strategies, and goals.

This research guide is designed to help steer those conversations. It's meant to serve as a starting point for social change organizations on the whys and how's of engaging with visual storytelling—with a particular emphasis on long-form documentaries. The guide synthesizes research from existing case studies, articles, web sites, and published reports from filmmakers and organizers (see Appendix for a complete list), with the aim of providing social change groups and leaders the most important lessons and insights on using documentaries to advance their issues and values.

Key components of the guide include:

- Understanding the power and psychological impact of visual stories
- Developing a clearly defined relationship with the filmmaking team and/or visual storyteller
- Matching the appropriate set of strategies and tactics to your goals

A companion FAQ details:

- Roles and responsibilities of a filmmaking team
- Documentary production and distribution timelines
- Resources needed for organizations to maximize investment in visual storytelling
- A strategic planning worksheet template

“Documentary makers rock at storytelling, and storytelling inspires change.”

BRITDOC's *Impact Field Guide and Toolkit*



The Power of Visual Storytelling

Research has shown that powerful human stories move us in a way that facts and numbers simply do not. In fact, when presented with simple statistics, people can feel like they are powerless to make a difference. However, a story has the opposite effect: [inspiring empathy](#).

“Stories are powerful because they transport us into other people’s worlds but, in doing that, they change the way our brains work and potentially change our brain chemistry — and that’s what it means to be a social creature.” – Neuroscientist Paul Zak

If we can harness the power of stories to inspire empathy, we can inspire action as well—and documentaries are one of the most effective storytelling tools around. The Rockefeller Foundation-funded strategy guide [Digital Storytelling for Social Impact](#) found that effective stories:

- Inspire people for social causes by creating human connection and emotional resonance
- Communicate abstract and complex ideas in ways that encourage understanding and value connections
- Introduce a new topic into the public dialogue, contribute to an ongoing conversation and engage people as active participants

Storytelling can also influence people to change their behavior. In [“The Power of Story,”](#) Elizabeth Svoboda writes:

Using modern technology like functional MRI (fMRI) scanning, scientists are tackling age-old questions: What kind of effect do powerful narratives really have on our brains? And how might a story-inspired perspective translate into behavioural change?...The Ohio State University psychologist Lisa Libby studied a group of people who engaged in ‘experience-taking’, or putting themselves in a character’s place while reading. High levels of experience-taking predicted observable changes in behaviour, Libby and her colleagues found in 2012. When people identified with a protagonist who voted in the face of challenges, for instance, they were more likely themselves to vote later on.

Working with Filmmakers

Building relationships with storytellers and integrating documentaries and other visual storytelling media can lead to new, creative campaign opportunities that have the potential to reach large audiences and/or target influencers directly.

Most recently, “impact producers” have played a key role in developing campaign and communications strategies for filmmakers. They often reach out to organizations to help shape and implement that strategy. Sometimes such working relationships are beneficial to all partners involved, and other times change makers feel they have been asked to commit resources and time but do not end up with satisfying results.

To maximize the potential benefits and results, social change groups and storytelling teams need to learn how to partner effectively. Change makers can also become more sophisticated in crafting, resourcing, and implementing their own strategies for visual content.

Partnerships can take a variety of forms and span a range of commitment levels: from hosting screenings, to developing tools and resources, to actually co-creating films. (See [Strategies and Tactics for Visual Storytelling](#) section for more partnership examples.) Overall, the trend is moving away from one-off engagement strategies, and towards connecting with audiences in multiple ways both before and after a screening or advocacy event, in order to immerse them more deeply into the film’s topic and encourage more meaningful action.

Distribution timelines, differing goals, and the lack of a shared vocabulary present challenges to effective collaboration, so it is imperative to take the time to seek out ideal partnership opportunities around documentary campaigns and work together to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes—whether they are transactional or transformative.

BRITDOC’s Impact Field Guide and Toolkit offers a five-point summary for developing effective partnerships:

- Figure out what role is right for partners to play
- Define needs and expectations on both sides at the outset
- Ask whether goals overlap, differ, or conflict
- Identify the risks of partnering — there will be some
- Make it explicit — sign something

[Our FAQ \(see page 18\) details common filmmaking terms and practices](#)

In addition to developing and defining the relationship with the film team or content producer, advocacy organizations can build relationships with documentary filmmakers to drive social change through a variety of strategies. These strategies can then be turned into action through a range of tactics requiring varying degrees of commitment and collaboration.

Strategies and Tactics

For changemakers, integrating visual storytelling into social change work can mean much more than posting a random video on Facebook or being called on to fill seats for a one-off screening. Working in a sustained way with storytelling—over weeks, months, or even years—offers opportunities to:

- Create spaces for deep conversations among existing and new community members
- Help those community members take action on a local, national, or international level
- Identify pivot points to launch a policy demand or a public investigation
- Introduce a diverse range of perspectives
- Focus attention on a particular issue or set of powerbrokers.

Weaving a strategy around storytelling content is not altogether different than crafting a strategy around an organizing campaign or a policy fight. But it does require a commitment to investing in a new set of skills, relationships, and resources. Topline strategies for organizations to build around documentaries and other visual story content include:

- Demand accountability and/or change policy
- Shift a narrative
- Engage communities and mobilize audiences

Topline tactics for advocates working with filmmakers and other visual storytellers range from simple to highly complex, including:

- Screen
- Distribute
- Build coalitions

- Call for personal stories
- Develop tools and resources
- Organize protests/public events
- Advise and co-create

It is important to match the correct strategy (or combination of strategies) and tactics to a campaign's goals, objectives, and target audience(s)—with an understanding of the resources that are available or can be accessed.

From a much longer list of case studies and impact reports, we have selected a few key documentary films and campaigns to use as examples, including:

American Promise: The stories of two middle class Black families navigating the American education system

Blackfish: The story of Tilikum, a captive performing killer whale that killed several people and exemplifies the cruel treatment whales suffer in the sea-park industry

Bully: An intimate portrait of bullying that has touched five children and their families

Chasing Ice: A multi-year record of the world's changing glaciers in the Arctic using time-lapse photography

Coal Ash Stories: A series of four short documentary films created in response to a toxic coal ash spill in North Carolina in 2014

Documented: The story of Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Jose Antonio Vargas' journey to America as a child; his work as an immigration reform activist; and his personal journey as he reunites with his mother

Gasland/Gasland II: In-depth looks at the dangers of hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, the controversial method of extracting natural gas and oil

Herman's House: The story of Herman Wallace, who spent more than 40 years in solitary confinement, and his unlikely friendship with artist Jackie Sumell

The House I Live In: A close look at how political and economic corruption have fueled the failing war on drugs for over 40 years

How to Survive A Plague: The story of two AIDS activist coalitions (ACT UP and TAG) who led the fight against AIDS in the '80s and '90s

Terms and Conditions May Apply: A look at how corporations and government invade user privacy through complicated online user agreements

Sandy Storyline: A participatory documentary that collects and shares stories about the impact of Hurricane Sandy on local communities

Very Young Girls: An exposé of the commercial sexual exploitation of girls in New York City that also focuses on the organization GEMS, which provides support and mentorship for survivors

A Year at Mission Hill: A 10-part video series set in a year in the life of one of America's most successful public schools

STRATEGY: EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

1) Demand accountability

Use a documentary or visual story content as a leverage point to launch or renew campaigns that have specific targets, drive conversations that hold those in power responsible for their actions, and/or call for specific regulation.

The team behind the climate change documentary *Chasing Ice* put specific pressure on one Ohio legislator, climate change denier Congressman Pat Tiberi. In the spring of 2014, they launched their *Chasing Ice* Ohio Tour, which led to nearly 10,000 people learning about *Chasing Ice*, 80 collaborating organizations joining the movement, and hundreds of citizens directly urging Congressman Tiberi to change his mind. In response to this campaign, Congressman Tiberi went from denying climate change to saying it was an open question—a big shift.

In another example, Amnesty International launched a coordinated effort to free the Louisiana solitary confinement inmates depicted in the film *Herman's House*. While Amnesty International had already been deeply involved in solitary confinement issues, the film helped link new audiences to the issue, which in turn allowed Amnesty to mobilize them to hold legislators accountable for inhumane treatment of prisoners. Amnesty's efforts were successful: Herman Wallace, who was suffering from terminal cancer, was released from prison and died three days later a free man.



2) Shift a narrative

Introduce a new idea or alter an existing storyline around an issue or value in order to plant seeds for change.

When the film *Documented* by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist José Antonio Vargas aired on CNN in June 2014, it elevated the issue of undocumented immigrants in America. It also advanced the work organizers had been doing to shift the language—and the narrative—around immigration. In conjunction with the film's release, the organization Define American launched a slew of tactics, including watch parties and social media coordination, to spark conversation about the film. One outcome was that viewers, and at least one news outlet (NY1) committed to using the term “undocumented immigrant” rather than “illegal immigrant.”

Another example is the release of the films *Gasland* and *Gasland II*, which examine hydraulic fracturing—or “fracking”—a controversial method of drilling for natural gas that can have devastating environmental and health consequences. Before *Gasland* was released, most people didn't know much about natural gas drilling, and a prevailing narrative was that it was a clean fuel and a good alternative to coal. At that time, “fracking” wasn't a common term.

Thanks to the films, people began to understand the enormous public health risks connected with natural gas. The popularization of a simple term for the hydraulic fracturing process—“fracking”—helped drive the narrative shift. According to a Media Impact Funders case study, “searches for *Gasland* tend to precede rising search activity for ‘fracking.’” Director Josh Fox noted: “In 2012 the word ‘fracking’ was Googled more than climate change. Data shows that the release of *Gasland* and my many media appearances was one of the causes in rise of awareness” and the rise of this term in the broader cultural conversation.

Finally, in response to Duke Energy's coal ash spill in February 2014, in which 39,000 pounds of toxic coal ash polluted North Carolina's Dan River, *Working*



Films, a nonprofit that connects community organizations with films and visual storytelling content, created *Coal Ash Stories*. The four short films helped shift the narrative about the coal industry—from a local job creator to a threat to public health and safety. Working Films initiated partnerships with leading state and national organizations to develop a program that could educate residents by pairing the films with talks from issue and policy experts. They took the program across North Carolina, co-hosting with local organizations and chapters of national organizations like Greenpeace to educate residents about the toxic impact of the disaster. Local groups were able to tailor events to the needs of their respective organizations and communities.

3) Engage communities and mobilize audiences

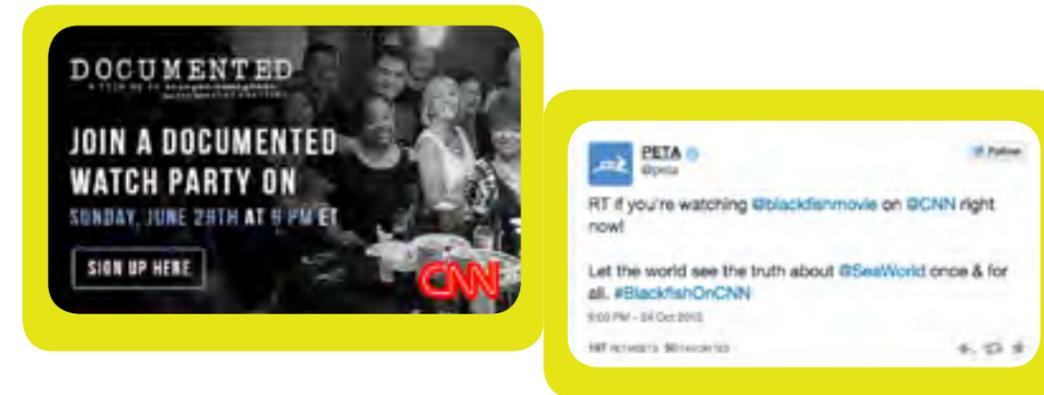
Develop action, story sharing, interactive events, and/or conversation opportunities for individuals and communities via online platforms, and/or in person.



In 2013, the online organization Demand Progress, which works on civil liberties, civil rights, and government reform, linked up with the producers of *Terms and Conditions May Apply*, a documentary about online privacy. Together they hosted online screenings of the film, coupled with question-and-answer sessions and simple action steps like online petitions

on privacy and net neutrality. More recently, Demand Progress followed up on the theme by hosting screenings of the net neutrality mockumentary *The Internet Must Go*, coupled with an online conversation with leaders like filmmaker Gena Konstantinacos, Internet activist Larry Lessig, and Reddit cofounder Alexis Ohanian. During the screening, Demand Progress ran a live Twitter feed so viewers could discuss the film—and link to petitions and action items in real time.

In the lead up to the June 2014 premiere of *Documented* on CNN, Define American teamed up with 35 organizations to become “watch partners” who then recruited their members as watch party hosts. They supplied hosts with a tool kit containing check lists on everything from party ambience, set up logistics and invites, how to digitally spread the word pre- and post-premiere, and a discussion guide for watch party guests. On premiere night, there were over 200 non-profit



organizations, community groups and local leaders registered to host watch parties with a combined total of over 3,500 guests in 36 different states. In addition, the *Documented* hashtag trended on Twitter that night, with 23,220 individual posts by 9,741 unique users.

In another case, PETA created a campaign in conjunction with *Blackfish*, working independently from film team. It leveraged its existing online networks and promoted *Blackfish* through social media, leading to a record number of re-tweets and a spike in the hashtags #blackfish and #blackfishonCNN.

TACTICS: FROM THE FIELD

1) Screen

Work with producers/distributors to host screenings in theaters or online.

Hosting screenings is the most common way that organizations—large and small—link up with documentary films. One of the many organizations to host screenings of *American Promise*—which profiles two African American boys’ experiences with the American educational system—was Mocha Moms, a support group for mothers of color. As a national organization with thousands of members, Mocha Moms was able to coordinate screenings through their regional chapters, as well as



a screening at their 2013 conference and discussions about the film through social media. The partnership with American Promise was a natural fit with Mocha Mom’s *Occupy Schools* movement, which was “was born out of a deep desire and relentless passion to improve the educational outcomes of our children.”

2) Distribute

Work with documentary film distributors to provide copies of the film to constituencies for free or at a discount.

The team behind *How to Survive A Plague*, a documentary focusing on the history of AIDS activist organizations ACT UP and TAG, used innovative distribution methods to spread the word among nonprofit organizations with similar missions. After receiving support from the Ford Foundation, the team behind the film connected with the Elton Johns AIDS Foundation, which supports AIDS healthcare and service organizations, and with Open Society Foundations' Public Media Health Initiative, which supports public health activists internationally, to distribute DVD copies of the film to their grantees for free. The grantees in turn were able to use the film to advance their own related work.

The Internet provides new avenues for creative distribution as well. *A Year at Mission Hill*, a 10-part documentary that chronicles one year at one of America's most successful public schools, was released one chapter at a time through partner organization websites, which aired content simultaneously every two weeks. Nearly 60 organizations representing a wide range of educational interests shared content and resources related to the film, producing an echo effect across the web and demonstrating a new model for distribution and collaboration.

3) Organize coalitions and networks to increase issue reach and accountability

Use a documentary film as a catalyst to organize individual and organizational coalitions to work together on short or long-term campaigns.

The outreach campaign connected to the documentary film *Bully* turned into a national movement with dozens of state chapters of the Bully Project organized around ending bullying in schools. The original goal of reaching one million kids was set in 2012 when over 6,500 Los Angeles students attended a screening with Los Angeles' mayor and School District Superintendent.

The "1 Million Kids Campaign" was executed within six weeks (while the film was still in theaters). Thanks to national partnerships with organizations like Facing History and Ourselves, Donors Choose, J.P. Morgan Chase Foundation, and teachers' unions, the campaign surrounding *Bully* (The Bully Project) now has a goal of reaching 10 million kids (so far it has reached 3.6 million.) The Bully Project provides resources to dozens of existing chapters throughout the United States and internationally, as well as tools and resources for creating new chapters.



4) Call for stories: Invite communities to share stories online and/or in person, using the documentary film as a catalyst.

The team behind *The House I Live In*, which focuses on the drug war in the United States, invites users to submit their own stories about their personal experiences with the drug war. User stories are published on the website alongside stories from experts and celebrities. This helps to both de-stigmatize the issue and encourage greater conversation.

Another film, *Sandy Storyline*, is an immersive and interactive online documentary featuring text, audio, video, and photography contributed by professional producers and community members whose lives and businesses were affected by Hurricane Sandy. Participatory documentaries such as *Sandy Storyline* take this tactic to the next level by incorporating user stories throughout the entire production process, rather than calling for them in response to a particular film. According to the *Sandy Storyline* website, "By engaging people in sharing their own experiences and visions, *Sandy Storyline* is building a community-generated narrative of the storm and its aftermath that seeks to build a more just and sustainable future."

5) Develop tools and resources

Design tools for audiences to learn more or take further action on an issue depicted in a particular documentary.

Educational and professional development organization Facing History and Ourselves teamed up with the group that produced *Bully* to create educational materials. These materials include background information about bullying, testimony and research from experts, and a toolbox of discussion strategies designed to facilitate open and honest dialogue among adults and students alike. The study guide was paired with an online workshop and face-to-face trainings, which were made freely available to educators. According to a Media Impact Funders [case study](#), *Bully* content on [Facinghistory.org](#) had accumulated nearly 450,000 unique page views. The Facing History and Ourselves' *Bully* screenings and anti-bullying summits had drawn over 25,000 participants.

6) Advise and co-create

Work with documentarians before or during production to advise on issues and/or recruit subjects.

A growing number of organizations are experimenting with partnerships with documentary filmmakers—including co-producing visual content for short-digital documentaries and long-form films. Rachel Lloyd, Executive Director of Girls Education and Mentoring Services (GEMS), was Co-Executive Producer of the documentary *Very Young Girls*, “an exposé of the commercial sexual exploitation of girls in New York City” which featured the stories of GEMS’ members. In an interview, Lloyd noted that if GEMS had created the documentary on its own, the result would have been a cleaned up film that offered a less compelling narrative. At the same time, Lloyd had to push the filmmaker to reflect the narrative that GEMS was committed to around this issue as well as the women featured in the film. After premiering on Showtime in 2008 and running on Netflix, the film has had at least four million viewers. Today, GEMS still uses the film as a tool for everything from outreach and education of new members to law enforcement trainings.

It is important to be careful of the distinction between hiring a filmmaker to create a documentary that serves as an advertisement for your organization and working with a filmmaker to help produce the best possible storytelling about a pressing issue.

Future opportunities

The strategies and tactics outlined above have been successfully employed in a range of situations. However, there is untapped potential to use new platforms to push boundaries and advance change. Some documentary film campaigns involve comprehensive standalone apps. For example, *When I Walk*, which focuses on filmmaker Jason DaSilva’s experience with multiple sclerosis, led to the development of AXS Map, an app that rates the accessibility of public spaces. DaSilva is now working on a follow-up documentary, *Stopgapped*, which examines the inaccessibility of cities around the world for those facing mobility challenges—and what it will take to build a movement to change the urban environment for the better.

In addition, digital-first and multiplatform documentaries are providing new and different opportunities for participatory production and meaningful mobilization. For example, rather than embarking on engagement campaigns that are separate from the film, participatory documentaries such as *Sandy Storyline*, noted above, allow community organizations to participate in the process from the very beginning, combining film and narrative-driven experiences that support their own strategic goals with opportunities for users to take action.

Interactive documentaries also provide users with a way to experience the documentary and related campaign goals simultaneously, as action tactics can be embedded directly into the interactive experiences.

Documentary films and the emerging fields of digital content are some of the most powerful forms of storytelling—and storytelling can ignite social change faster and more effectively than just about anything else. Tapping into the full potential of long-form and digital docs—to demand accountability, shift narratives, or mobilize activists—will help change makers achieve their vision of a better world.

Frequently Asked Questions

WHAT ARE THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE FILMMAKING TEAM?

To determine the best type of partnership and orientation when engaging with a documentary film, you need to understand some key roles on the production team. This can help you determine who your core partner(s) are.

Filmmaker/Director: The director makes the film on the ground, oversees artistic elements, and directs the technical crew. The filmmaker also serves as the overarching storyteller and conducts research with individuals and organizations to inform the story. Filmmakers may have very different motivations, goals, and processes—for example, some filmmakers may be focused on journalistic methods, while others are driven by artistic vision, while still others are motivated by social change goals. (See a handy breakdown of documentary filmmaker archetypes in [The Pre-Nups](#).)

Producer: Producers oversee various aspects of the production process (including creative, financial, technological,

and administrative). In some cases, documentary filmmakers simultaneously serve as the director and the producer.

Executive Producer: Executive producers often are not involved in the technical elements of production, but maintain responsibility over various aspects of the production process, usually including financial, business, and legal issues. Sometimes, executive producers are primary donors to the film.

Impact Producer: The impact producer (or impact producing organization) oversees engagement campaigns related to documentary films. As impact production is a burgeoning field, this role can include a **range of responsibilities**, such as: developing the campaign strategy, budgeting and fundraising, overseeing the impact distribution strategy, managing partnerships, overseeing publicity and social media management, spearheading grassroots community organizing, lobbying officials, and conducting impact evaluation assessment. Unless the documentary film is very small, generally you will work with an impact producer in setting up partnerships.

WHAT'S THE GENERAL PRODUCTION TIMELINE?

There is no standard timeline, but documentary film production can take two to five years, and can extend over decades as the projects and partnerships evolve. Here are **some case studies** of production and engagement timelines so you can see how much this varies.

Issue campaigns related to documentary films may take place for a specific period of time, or they may be ongoing. In general, organizations looking to create campaigns around films get involved once the film has been completed and is available for screenings. However, interactive documentaries—projects that combine traditional documentary elements with digital interactive technology, such as *Sandy Storyline* or *Hollow*—have more fluid timelines, and allow for more opportunities for advocates to jump in at an earlier stage of the process.

HOW DOES DISTRIBUTION FOR DOCUMENTARIES GENERALLY WORK?

Documentary film distribution opportunities vary tremendously

depending on a variety of factors, including geographical and financial differences. Film distribution is changing rapidly, and in the United States filmmakers are exploring different options—including working with traditional distribution networks such as screenings on PBS, releasing the films themselves through online self-distribution platforms, and constructing hybrid models that allow for different multi-platform (e.g. television and online) distribution models. They are employing a variety of other channels including film festivals, theatrical releases, televised broadcasts, online screenings, streaming media (such as Netflix) and physical options (such as DVDs).

In addition, it's important to note that the documentary form is changing quickly, with many different types of filmmakers and digital producers experimenting with new formats. While documentaries are commonly thought of as feature length (i.e., 60–90 minute productions, generally released in theaters and on television), makers are now frequently creating shorter documentaries for

DISTRIBUTION: WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?



online distribution or as part of news magazines and interactive documentaries, which span various platforms, including websites, social media, mobile, games and more (see [MIT's Docubase](#) for examples).

There are many reasons why filmmakers may choose one distribution route over another. For example, certain awards are only available to films that screen at specific festivals, and certain festivals prohibit screening films

that have already been broadcast. There are different factors to consider when working with distributors, including:

Timing: The time when the film is released commercially may not align with your specific campaign timelines, such as those based on pending legislation.

Screening costs: Sometimes distributors prohibit free screenings, which can interfere with campaign opportunities, such as hosting a screening at an important conference or arranging

a screening for influencers before a key vote.

Social media and public relations: Some distributors may want to retain control over who speaks about the film in public or which portions of the film can be distributed.

Distribution channels: Distributors may have their own ideas about the best platform for the film.

This is a process of negotiation. Filmmakers want to share their stories and are often

struggling to find the best ways to support themselves through their work, so it pays to be both patient and creative when thinking through the best options for everyone involved.

WHICH RESOURCES DO ORGANIZATIONS NEED TO INVEST IN TO MAXIMIZE RESULTS?

Before initiating work with a documentary or visual storytelling producer, organizations also need to be clear on the resources they

have on hand, including:

- Community outreach and engagement capacities (digital, mobile and/or in person)
- Staff competencies with visual media and storytelling—and potential ways to increase these skills
- Staff member(s) or consultants dedicated to creating and/or implementing a campaign plan
- Communications capacity to promote campaign to media, funders, allies, and audiences.
- Budget allocated to documen-

tary campaign creation and implementation

While not required, these additional resources are important:

- Funding opportunities to support and build work
- Impact measurement guidelines

HOW DO I EVALUATE MY CAMPAIGN?

Every collaborative project benefits from evaluation—both for the funders to be able to gauge

whether or not their money was well spent, and for the partners in the collaboration to be able to measure successes, document challenges, and improve upon the project in the future. Effective impact evaluations—which combine both qualitative and quantitative metrics—document the successes and challenges and lessons learned, what goals were met, what unexpected goals were achieved, and how the work advances the organization’s overall vision and strategy.



The world of impact evaluation for media projects is bursting with resources. To craft your own evaluation plan, see the following resources:

- Active Voice: Case Studies
- Active Voice: Horticulture
- Are We There Yet? A Roadmap for Creating High Impact Documentary
- Assessing Creative Media’s Social Impact
- Assessing the Social Impact of Issues-Focused Documentaries: Research Methods & Future Considerations
- BRITDOC Impact Field Guide & Toolkit
- Digital Storytelling for Social Impact
- Hatch for Good
- Media Impact Funders: Assessing the Impact of Media
- Narrative Design Canvas
- Social Justice Documentary: Designing for Impact
- Sparkwise
- TFI Sandbox
- The Participant Index
- Video for Change: Impact Research, Community and Toolkit
- Working Films: Impact

WORKSHEET

Guiding questions for non-profits to develop a documentary campaign.

Additional Resources and Case Studies

Active Voice Case Studies

American Documentary Case Studies

Barrett, Diana and Sheila Leddy. *Assessing Creative Media's Social Impact*, The Fledgling Fund, December 2008.

BRITDOC Impact Field Guide & Toolkit, July 2014

BRITDOC Impact Reports, 2013

BRITDOC Impact Awards, 2014

Clark, Jessica and Barbara Abrash. *Social Justice Documentary: Designing for Impact*, Center for Social Media, September 2011.

Docubase, MIT's interactive curated database of innovation in documentary filmmaking.

Finneran, Patricia. *Documentary Impact: Social Change Through Storytelling*

Kelly, Alex. *Exploring Social Change Documentary Film Outreach, Engagement and Impact Campaigns*, November 2013.

Media Impact Funders Case Studies

Picture Motion Case Studies

Van Slyke, Tracy. *Spoiler Alert: How Progressives Will Break Through With Pop Culture*, 2014.

Verellen, Emily. *From Distribution to Audience Engagement: Social Change Through Film*, 2010.

Working Films' IMPACT Series

A Year At Mission Hill Case Study



Visual Content Details

Documentary/Visual Content Name:

Type of content:

- Long-form documentary
- Online, short digital video
- Other

Additional Documentary/Content Information:

Filmmaker/Media Maker Information:

(name, bio, web site, additional information)

Where is content in production cycle:

- In development
- Finished and ready for distribution
- Already distributed

Timeline and key dates:



Organizational Overview

Campaign goals:

- Demand accountability
- Shift a narrative
- Engage communities and mobilize audiences
- Other

Campaign Goal specifics:

(e.g. what/who are we demanding accountability for, what is the narrative shift you are trying to make, what audiences are you trying to engage/what do you want them to do.)

Internal Organizational Goals:

(e.g. increase staff skills, add 1,000 names to e-list, build out press list)

How closely does the film/content match our social change goals?

Which Tactics Can Feasibly Support Your Goals?

- Screen:** *Work with producers/distributors to host screenings in theaters or online along with community conversations*
- Distribute:** *Work with documentary film distributors to provide copies of the film to constituencies for free or at a discount. And/or distribute portions or full movie online.*
- Organize coalitions and networks to increase issue and story reach:** *Bring together individual and organizational coalitions to work together on short or long-term campaigns.*
- Call for stories:** *Invite communities to share stories online and/or in person*
- Develop tools and resources** *Design tools for audiences to learn more or take further action.*
- Advise and co-create:** *Work with documentarians before or during production to advise on issues and/or recruit subjects.*
- Other**



Building Partnership

Target Audiences:

(i.e. demographic, geographic, interests, connection to issue)

What do we know of the filmmaker/content producer's goals?

What are the terms of the collaboration and how do we understand the shared goals?

Potential Campaign Partners:

What challenges potentially stand in your way?



Budget

Potential Line item costs

Staffing:

Tools/Technology:

Travel:

Distribution:

Events:

Media production:

Materials:

Other:

Potential Funders/Sources of Income:

Resources available:

(i.e. staffing, communications tools, funding, etc..)

