

ACTIVE
voice

Putting a human face on public policy

An Introduction to Film-Based Engagement

Introduction

About this Resource: This resource is intended as a basic introduction to film-based community engagement. It is neither comprehensive nor exhaustive, but does provide basic pointers for how filmmakers can start thinking about their film's community engagement and outreach potential.

About Active Voice: Active Voice tackles social issues through the creative use of film. We believe that real progress requires real connection, and that film has a unique power to bring people together in meaningful ways. Every day Active Voice helps filmmakers, funders and communities start the conversations and relationships that lead to lasting, measurable change. Since our inception in 2001, Active Voice has influenced local, regional and national dialogue on issues including immigration, criminal justice, healthcare and education.

The Power of Film



One of Active Voice's guiding philosophies is that film and story-based media exist within a broader system of social change, playing a significant role in conjunction with civic participation, community organizing, philanthropy, policy analysis, political leadership and more. Film can be a critical tool in bringing these players together, sparking conversations and collaborations that can pave the way for long-term change.

The CHECK List

A quick way to think about what character-driven film can do to help you advance your goals:

COMMON TEXT: Film can serve as a catalyst for more open conversations about specific issues. Film provides a common experience for viewers with varied perspectives to begin a conversation.

HUMAN FACE: By tapping into the intimacy of real people's stories, film can reveal the human implications of policy decisions on the lives of individuals, families and communities.

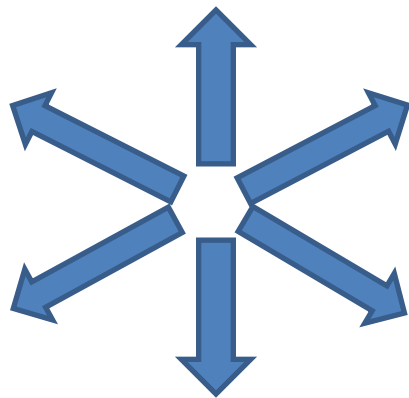
EMPATHY: People have values that transcend "right and left," "red and blue," "urban and rural." A character-driven film can help viewers identify with the struggles and triumphs of others, and walk in their shoes.

CHANGE OVER TIME: Filmmakers often stay with a story long enough to capture personal and institutional transformation in the making, helping viewers understand that change is possible.

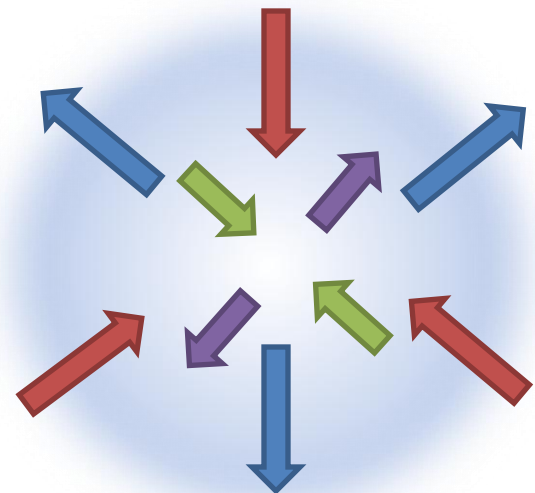
KNOWLEDGE AND DIALOGUE: Vivid, character-driven stories can inspire others to tell their own stories, to share ideas, and to take action.

Outreach vs. Engagement

Outreach: Promotion of a project or an activity, such as inviting people to attend a community screening. Typically, “outreach” suggests that the information is only going one way.



Engagement: Refers to multidirectional, mutually beneficial relationships between filmmakers, thought leaders, organizations and audiences. This concept underscores the importance of all these players collaborating in a way that the film becomes integrated into ongoing work, ultimately giving it longer “legs.”



Developing an Engagement Strategy

A successful film engagement campaign takes time, capacity and a good sense of what outcomes are possible.

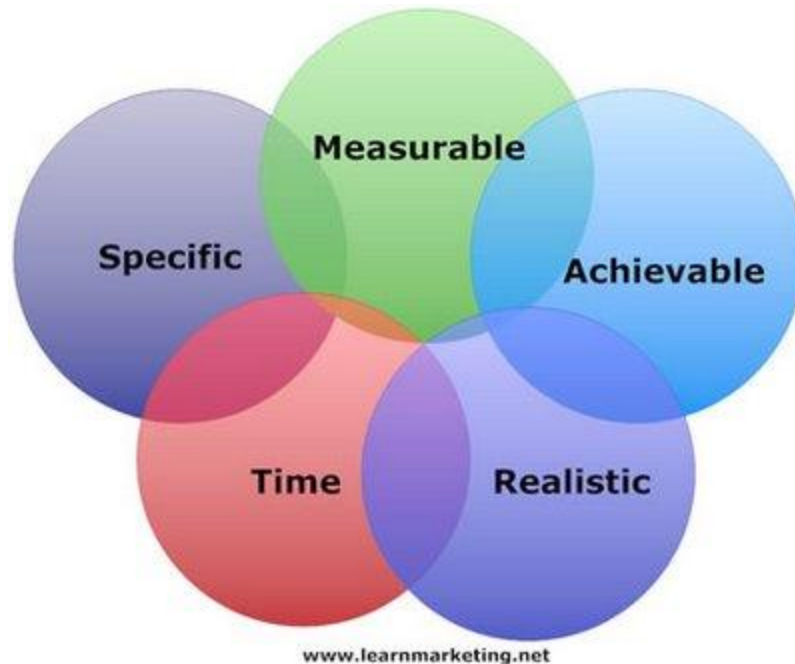


Before digging in, consider the following questions:

- 1) Identify **themes**: what issues does your film raise?
- 2) Target your **audience**: who can most benefit from your film?
- 3) Determine desired **outcomes**: realistically what would you like to accomplish with your film?

Determining Your Goals

Make sure they're SMART



Why do people need to see your film?

What is it that you want to achieve, realistically?

Are your goals purely distribution-related or do you also want to advance social change?

Can those goals be achieved in a manageable timeframe?

Good Partnerships Can Help You Meet Your Goals

Identify organizations that have an interest in the issues highlighted in your film

WHY: The right organizational partners will help you get your film to audiences who care deeply about the issues, and even help you reach audiences that are *beyond the choir*. Partners are also great for connecting your film's message with a tangible action. Partners that are particularly well-known or well-respected are good for adding credibility to your project.



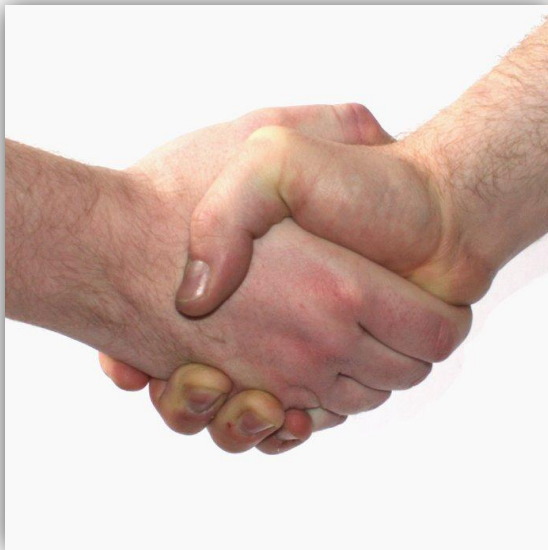
WHAT: Partners will get involved in different ways depending on their capacity and their media savvy. Partner involvement can range from lending their name to your project (to add credibility), to promoting your film to their networks, to hosting film screenings, to developing resource materials.

WHO: In general, pick partners that have some kind of alignment with your film's subject matter. Make sure they're credible, have a good reach, and are well-respected in the field.

WHEN: Develop your partnerships as early as possible! The earlier you get partners involved the more invested they'll be in the success of your project.

Best Practices in Partner Development

Good partnerships are mutually beneficial. Make sure to convey this to potential partners, and build their trust by:



- Spending time on their websites
- Talking to them and listening to their needs
- Brainstorming with them how the film can fit into their work
- Developing an overview of what they give and what they get

When You Reach Out to Partners:

- **Establish current day significance.** Why is this story important now? Be able to articulate why you made this film and why people should see it.
- **Make content available and accessible.** It helps to be mindful of financial restraints for partners, but also of the value of your film.
- **Caveat:** Make sure you really understand the organization and its motives before reaching out. Do your research and don't pick just anyone because they sound good on the surface.

Social Media Engagement

We know you can't do it all. Here's a brief overview of the basic platforms and what they're good for:



Facebook is an easy way to keep fans updated on what's happening with your film, build a base of supporters and spark a conversation about the issues in your film.



Twitter is good for connecting with other individuals and organizations, as well as a good way to share news and updates about your project.



YouTube is the 2nd most searched search engine (after Google) so it can be a great way to attract new fans. Create a channel to house short clips, teasers and bonus footage.

Social Media Tips

Facebook:

- Share interesting videos, pictures, articles and news that your fans will want to share
- Invite discussion on your wall
- Make your page more about the issues in your film rather than just the film itself
- Connect with partners by “Liking” their pages
- Post at least 3 times a week
- Use Facebook Insights to take note of your most popular posts, and tailor new posts accordingly

Twitter:

- Make your point quickly
- Don’t auto-sync your Facebook posts with Twitter, customize accordingly
- Try to stay well under the character limit to facilitate easy re-tweeting and commenting
- Follow your partners and tag them in tweets
- Retweet posts that are relevant to your film
- Tweet at least once a day
- Be responsive to engaged users within 24 hours

Ancillary Materials

Consider what you need in order to meet your goals:

Website: Even if you're short on funds, it's important to have a landing page where all the information about your film (and community engagement campaign) lives. There are user-friendly content management systems like Wordpress and Blogspot that can allow you to create a basic site for free.

Discussion Guide: Definitely consider creating a guide if your film deals with nuanced and/or complex issues that require some “unpacking.” See www.activevoice.net/publications.html for sample discussion guides from Active Voice.

Web series, mobile apps and other “transmedia” tools: These are good to consider if you have specific target audiences you'd like to engage. Don't create bells and whistles for the sake of having something flashy. Think about who you want to engage and whether they will need different modes of connecting with your story.

Measuring Impact: Traditional Metrics

- Number of screenings and screening requests
- Attendance numbers at screenings
- Number of people taking action (if there is a call to action) such as signing petitions or volunteering for a partner
- Increased funder interest



Measuring Impact: Attitude Change



Attitude change is harder to measure. With limited time for follow up, **audience surveys** can be a good gauge of reactions and/or change – but pick your questions carefully and don't be too leading.

Measuring Impact: Underrated Measures

These outcomes are more nuanced, but greatly add to the qualitative evidence of your film's impact:

1. Number of nontraditional partners, i.e., unlikely allies, that sign on
2. New coalitions built
3. Increased visibility for partner organizations
4. Increased capacity for partner organizations
5. Partner organizations successfully meeting their goals using your film

How do you know if #2-5 are happening? Ask your partners! In some cases, it's a good idea to build a six month window in your engagement timeline specifically for follow up with partners. Funders also want to know if you plan on doing this, so make sure to write it into your proposals.

TIP: Capture quotes and testimonials from your partners. This can serve as strong support for the value and potential of your film.

Measuring Impact: Digital Metrics

- Website visits
- Social media metrics
- Video views and comments
- Blog mentions

TIP: Sparkwise is a great tool that can help you gather and track digital metrics and more. Check it out at www.sparkwi.se.

Questions?

These are very preliminary guidelines toward planning your film's engagement. If you have any questions regarding the tips on these pages, please contact us at www.activevoice.net/contact

