



# How You Can Make a Difference:

Using Documentaries to Inspire, Educate, and Move People to Action

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## How YOU Can Make A Difference!

Suggestions and resources for using these documentaries to focus community attention on mental, physical and spiritual issues related to social justice and human rights.

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We created this resource guide so that you will be able to use one or more of the films to inspire, energize, and organize people in your community. Whether viewers see these films on television, in their homes, in a conference room, or at a community center, it is important to maximize the potential impact.

This Resource Kit is designed to help you plan screenings, and possibly arrange activities before, during and after the films are shown. It includes suggestions for screening venues, media tips and resources, and information on how to obtain further information. It also contains information on how you can support your local Cable Access station's broadcast of these documentaries.

Whether used as organizing tools, as event fundraisers, as informational resources and/or as catalysts to activate grassroots participation, we know from thirty-five years of screenings and feedback, that the power of these documentaries is significant. This Resource Kit will help you plan and orchestrate your efforts as efficiently and effectively as possible.

### **THIS GUIDE HAS BEEN ORGANIZED**

- To help you get the films broadcast and/or screened in your community. (We provide a variety of support materials, including checklists, with which to create a screening using a DVD and TV or projector.)
- To help you get the word out by involving the community and the local press/media in the screenings.
- To ensure that your organization receives the maximum benefit from these efforts.

## I. GETTING THE FILMS SHOWN

- A. Contact Public Access Stations
  - B. Plan a Screening Event
- Summary

### A. Contact Public Access Stations

**The First Step:** Find out and check with your local Cable Access television stations.

Each Cable Access station (usually affiliated with the local Cable Channel) has its own procedure for how to submit a film for screening. This guide gives you a step-by-step procedure for how to contact your local Cable Access station, and outlines the steps for how to submit DVDs to any Access station in the country. NOTE: Most Cable Access Stations are legally bound to schedule any programs a member of the community submits.

#### Channels

- [List of public-access TV stations in the United States \(Alaska-Connecticut\)](#)
- [List of public-access TV stations in the United States \(Delaware-Kentucky\)](#)
- [List of public-access TV stations in the United States \(Louisiana-Montana\)](#)
- [List of public-access TV stations in the United States \(Nebraska-Pennsylvania\)](#)
- [List of public-access TV stations in the United States \(Rhode Island-Texas\)](#)
- [List of public-access TV stations in the United States \(Utah-Wyoming\)](#)

#### To summarize the usual procedure:

A member of the community calls, and arranges to mail or hand carry a DVD viewing copy of the program(s) to the station. Someone at the station will work with you on filling out a standard form and making sure that the tapes are in the correct format. Also, there may be an opportunity for your organization or for you as an individual to put together an on-air discussion panel to follow the broadcast of the films. You will need to discuss this with a staffer at your Cable Access channel. The on-line address for the Community Media web site is [www.alliancecm.org](http://www.alliancecm.org).

At that site, contact information is listed state by state for every (more than 1,000) Cable Access station in the U.S. (See also CABLE ACCESS CHECKLIST - PAGE 9).

## **B. Plan A Screening Event in conjunction with a broadcast**

### **• PRE-BROADCAST SCREENINGS**

If broadcasts are scheduled, your group might host a pre-broadcast screening with a DVD to bring attention to and to promote the broadcasts. You can invite reporters, local elected officials, representatives from the community and from other organizations, your organization's staff and volunteers, your funders, your Board and perhaps activists on your alert networks.

### **• VIEWING PARTIES WITH DISCUSSIONS ON THE NIGHT OF THE BROADCAST**

If broadcasts are scheduled, consider scheduling one or more events held in conjunction with the broadcasts. At these, people gather to watch the film(s), discuss their reactions and ideas, and then you might offer informational materials before they leave.

### **• COMMUNITY SCREENINGS**

If broadcasts are not scheduled, consider holding an event for your group or for the community at which one or more of the films are shown on DVD with a TV monitor, followed by a discussion.

Use the discussion guides to create an open dialogue following any screening. Consider inviting one or more reporters to this event. If they accept, it is important that all those invited to the screening are aware that the press will be present. For more information, see the attached MEDIA ADVISORY and tips on working with the press.

Community screenings and home viewings are an opportunity to encourage attendees to become more active. For example, following a screening in someone's home, you might ask who would like to:

- Organize and host a house party and show one or more of the films for a small group of their family, friends, neighbors and work colleagues.
- Take home resource information about local and national groups, reading material and other activities.
- Write letters of support about the importance of the issues in the film(s) to local community organizations.
- Write a letter to the editor of the local paper about the issue.

## **SUMMARY - REACHING OUT IN THE COMMUNITY**

All of these screenings, whether broadcast on television, or for a group gathered around a DVD player and TV, present an outstanding opportunity to raise awareness, bring people together, and extend your organization's reach in your community. The films can also be a catalyst for drawing together different organizations and community members, including local clergy, medical personnel, support staff and clients of clinics, social services workers in the community, senior citizens, high school and college faculty and students, and local government officials.

## II. GETTING THE WORD OUT

- A. Publicize
  - B. Educate
  - C. Provide Resource Contacts
- 

### A. Publicize

Ways to get the word out:

- Announce the broadcast or screening of the films in your newsletter
- Form a telephone tree
- Send bulletins, faxes, e-mails, postcards, etc. to your own and other mailing lists
- Send "pass on the word" e-mails
- Add the information to your own or another web site
- Distribute/post informational flyers (samples and masters in the Graphics kit)
- Let the local press know about the broadcasts or screenings (see MEDIA ADVISORY)
- Offer to be interviewed by the press

In order to reach young people, we suggest that you contact community colleges, universities, student groups and a range of community organizations, with special attention to those serving low-income and minority populations. To support your overall efforts, we have developed guidelines: a script to help you when talking to the press, a contact checklist, a sample letter to reporters, and a sample media advisory (all in this kit - see table of contents). All of these materials can be adapted and used in the future for any broadcast or screening event.

### B. Educate

Make sure that those attending screening are given something to take home: copies of general fact sheets and/or local information, as well as material about your organization's mission and goals. Consider developing, or collecting from other sources, fact sheets that provide information about the issues in the films. It is important for members of the community to have this information, and that it be accurate. Because new facts are always being added, we suggest going to the Internet sites to get an update on the current situation, nationally and/or locally.

### C. Provide Resource Contacts

Guest Speakers

If you are having an event, consider bringing in local people whose lives have been affected by the events portrayed in the film. Ask them to share their memories prior to a screening or broadcast of the films.

Contact organizations

Compile and distribute a resource list that describes the mission and services provided by organizations related to the subject of the film(s) in your community. Many national groups have local chapters. In addition to other local resources in your community, you might provide phone numbers and addresses for local branches of these organizations.

### III. WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

- A. Reporters:-Making personal contact.
- B. Local Stories/"Hooks"
- C. Media Advisories/Invite Reporters
- D. Letters to the Editor

In order to help you 'pitch' a story about the films and/or about your group's work to your local news media and reporters, we provide the following:

- Press checklist (PAGE 9)
- Press "hooks" (PAGES 9)
- Sample media advisory (PAGE 14)
- Sample letter to the editor (PAGE 15)

#### **A. Reporters: Show them the film(s) and make personal contact.**

The best way to 'pitch' these films to others is to first watch them yourself, and then find a way to invite the press to watch them. The strength of these documentaries lies in the interviews of with those describing their own experience(s). Many reporters will be moved by these stories.

Making personal contact: Talk to reporters, producers and news editors in your area who write about the issues in the film and/or related issues. If you don't know who they are, call your local newspaper, radio, and TV stations and ask who covers a particular subject.

Once you have the name of the reporter likely to be interested in the subject, you can call that person directly (or e-mail/U.S. mail or fax a letter. See sample letter to reporters - PAGE 15). You can use the enclosed letter, use parts of it in a more personal letter, or write your own. If the reporter wants to see a preview DVD and you do not have one, contact our staff - info@concentric.org. Be sure to follow up your letter to the reporter with a phone call.

#### **B. "Hooks"**

Whether you are using the films as the centerpiece of a group of films, or as a stand alone, the media, whether print or broadcast, always like a reason, a 'hook', to run a story. Their criteria for newsworthiness frequently include timeliness, human interest, or controversy.

THE BEST "HOOKS" are local personal stories: The most effective approach to interest reporters is to find out what is happening with individuals in your own community touched by the issues. Those stories will appeal to a press corps who are put off by the endless rhetoric.

If reporters can hear from people who live in your area, that will help residents, people who reporters are trying to reach, understand that the struggles and successes that are taking place everywhere, including in your community. Local people can also talk about what impact the films had on them personally. Look for interesting human interest angles and let reporters know what they are.

#### **C. Media Advisories/Invite Reporters**

Fax/e-mail/mail one or more Press Advisories about the broadcasts, your house party or community screening. Reporters are interested in community events and screenings that are timely. Use the MEDIA ADVISORY on PAGE 15 to craft one of your own and send

it to identified reporters, talk show producers and news editors about two weeks in advance of your event. It is crucial that you follow up a few days before the broadcast or screening with a phone call. If a reporter is coming, make sure all those participating in the event know that reporters have been invited, and make sure you identify press with special nametags. Suggest that all participants have some key messages in mind before speaking to any reporters. Provide reporters with fact sheets about relevant issues, and about your organization.

#### **D. Letters to the Editor**

Write letters to the editor of your local newspaper about the films and your organization's (see SAMPLE LETTER on PAGE -15) reasons for showing this film. Once the films are shown on television or reviewed in the paper, write and-acknowledge the publication's willingness to report about the film.—To improve the chances of your letter getting printed, look at letters that appear in that paper and tailor yours to the space restrictions. Be sure to sign your name, and include your address and phone number. Most papers will not print unsigned letters. Letters to the editor should be no more than three short paragraphs. Be specific. Focus on how the issues highlighted in the film are important in your community.



## IV. SUPPORT MATERIALS

### Checklists and other related information

#### A. Cable Access Stations checklist: How to contact local TV stations for broadcast

If your local PBS station does not plan to air the film(s), prepare to offer these programs to your local Cable Access channel.

- **How do you find your local cable access station?**

- The phone book
- Talking with the local commercial cable company
- The Internet - The on-line address for Cable Access web sites is [www.alliancecm.org](http://www.alliancecm.org), where contact information for every Access Station in the country (1,000+) is listed state by state.

- **Introduce the program(s).**

To present a program to Cable Access, call the station, and tell them that you have one or more documentaries to submit for playback.—Station guidelines for obtaining TV airtime vary (based on local franchise contracts), but be aware that in most cities, every Cable Access TV station must broadcast any program submitted by a member of that community.

- **Deliver the DVD(s).**

Mail or hand-carry a DVD to the station. You will need to ask about:

- The station's guidelines to obtain local television airtime
- Series scheduling deadlines
- Will the station accept DVD copy or require another format for broadcast?

You will usually be asked to sign a “playback request form.” If necessary, we can supply you with a letter which gives the station full permission to play the film(s).

- **Confirm the broadcasts date(s).**

Once you know dates and times, help the station publicize the upcoming broadcasts.

Call/fax other interested organizations, and let them know about this opportunity to raise awareness and build their membership bases! (Also see PRESS, PAGE 10 for more suggestions.)

- **Organize pre- and/or post-broadcast on-air discussions.**

Consider utilizing this broadcast as an opportunity for your organization or you as an individual to put together an on-air discussion in conjunction with the broadcast. You might invite historians, social workers, clergy, medical staff or volunteers who work in the clinics, etc. Discuss this possibility with a staffer at your Cable Access station.

#### B. Press checklist: How to contact the press

(for television broadcasts and other events such as community screenings)

- **REASONS YOU MIGHT WANT TO NOTIFY A REPORTER**

- To bring attention to and to promote the broadcasts
- To extend an invitation to the reporter to attend a preview screening (A preview event is held before the broadcasts to generate interest for press and community leaders)
- To publicize home viewings/discussions held the same night as the broadcasts

- To publicize an event held for the community (A community event is a gathering independent of the broadcasts, at which one or more of the films are shown on DVD and TV/monitor, followed by discussion)
- **CALL LOCAL NEWSPAPERS, MAGAZINES, and/or NEWS PROGRAMS**  
Identify reporters, producers and news editors in your area who write about these issues. If you don't know who they are, call your local newspapers, radio, and TV stations and ask who covers these issues: x, and x, and x. You might ask if anyone has been assigned to write about x, and x, and x.
- **CONTACT THE REPORTER**  
Once you have the name of the reporter most likely to be interested in the subject, you can contact the person by fax, letter or e-mail. (See SAMPLE LETTER PAGE 15). You can use this letter, or parts of it, in a more personal letter of your own. Be sure to include local 'hooks'. Follow up by calling the reporter to check if your letter and any enclosures were received.
- **IF YOU ARE HAVING AN EVENT, YOU MIGHT INVITE THE REPORTER BY PHONE**  
Suggested script: On [date and time] I [or the name of the organization] will be hosting a screening of [name film(s)]. We thought you might be interested in writing something about the personal stories of people whose lives have been and are now being affected by x and x. If you would like to join us at our event on [date] and see these documentaries, please contact me at [phone number].  
  
If you have invited guest speakers, whether local community members who have agreed to tell their stories, or a well-known celebrity, give a brief description about whoever will be speaking - without the names of local residents sharing their personal stories, if they don't wish to be identified in the press.

### **C. Press "Hooks": How to interest reporters and journalists**

"Hooks" are ideas that catch the eye of a reporter or talk show producer. For local media, the best hooks are personal stories from that community. There are also a number of "hooks" in the films, and in the stories behind the films, that might interest reporters. You may want to use one or more of the following ideas, or one may inspire you to come up with something else, which relates more directly to your community.

### **D. Small group checklist: How to organize small group screenings and home viewings**

A "home viewing" is a gathering sponsored by an organization, a small group of friends or an individual for which friends and/or neighbors assemble at someone's house or other small venue to see the film(s), whether broadcast on television or shown on a video player. Following the screening, there is time to discuss responses, exchange ideas, learn more about the subject and have a chance to select and take home printed materials.

Below is a suggested timetable for inviting people to the event and getting the word out.

#### **FOUR WEEKS BEFORE THE EVENT:**

- If there is a broadcast scheduled, confirm time, date and channel.
- If there is no broadcast, DVDs are available for purchase, Order copies of the films you would like to show by calling 650.563.4340 or emailing orders@concentric.org. Also see order information on our website.
- Notify people of the date and place of the gathering.
- Be sure they are in the mail at least three weeks before the event.

- If you plan to invite a member of the press, fax or mail a press release about the film and an invitation to your event.
- If you are showing the film in a classroom or at an organizational meeting, announce the subject ahead of time so that members/students will have a chance to talk to family members and close friends about the subject. Encourage them to ask for opinions and stories from those who may remember the times when abortion was illegal, as well as those who work or volunteer at a clinic now.

Note: If you are inviting guests by written invitation, remember to make follow-up calls to insure greater participation.

### **TWO WEEKS BEFORE:**

These next two suggestions will only be relevant if you are using a large space.

- Put up posters and/or send flyers to local grassroots groups and community services, and chapters of national organizations.
- Send several flyers to each of these departments on the campuses of your local colleges and universities. Possible classes in which some of these films may be of interest include: Women's Studies, Public Health, Social Studies, Law, Political Science, Ethics, History, Film & Video.

### **ONE WEEK BEFORE**

- Call all guests to confirm their attendance, provide directions.
- Check in with your guest speaker(s), if you have invited one or more.

### **THE DAY BEFORE**

- Call all guests you know personally to remind them of the screening. Provide directions, if necessary.
- If you have invited a member of the press, make a reminder call.
- Call and re-confirm guest speaker(s).

### **DAY OF THE EVENT**

- Set up equipment, make certain your TV/VCR is in good working order and placed at an angle with the best possible viewing for the most people.
- Make last minute calls to people you couldn't reach earlier.
- Lay out refreshments and set up literature tables, including video order forms.

### **TO THE HOST/HOSTESS (if the event is a gathering in a home)**

- Clarify the length of the broadcast or the film(s) you will show. Let your guests know how long the evening will be. In addition to the length of the film(s), allow about a half hour for group discussion, and a half hour for light refreshments and informal conversation.
- Ask each guest to sign in. Have them give their name, address, phone, fax number and email. Save this list for future event/ mailing list use.
- Welcome guests. Introduce the discussion leader before the screening.
- Provide contribution envelopes if the viewing party is a fundraiser.
- Show the film(s).
- After the films are complete, do not turn on all the lights at once. Perhaps turn on one small light first. Give people as long as they need to sit quietly or make personal comments. Gradually introduce discussion questions, which you have prepared, or chosen from the guide. Many questions will simply arise from the group.

## **E. Larger event checklist: How to organize full screenings and fund-raising events**

The following guidelines will help you plan a well-organized event. Depending on the size and type of gathering you envision, the level of publicity and program planning will vary. The most important thing to keep in mind for all situations is to have your publicity strategy and materials ready well in advance of the deadlines. We also recommend that you invite other organizations to co-sponsor the event, so that tasks can be shared and you will have access to a broader base of potential attendees. We wish you success and hope you have a wonderful response!

### **12 WEEKS BEFORE THE EVENT, OR EARLIER IF POSSIBLE**

- Theater, community center, classroom booked or rented. Check with the venue to find out what the projection format will be.—Discuss possibilities for a reception before or following the screening.
- Call and confirm special guests: a celebrity, community leaders, experts in related fields, etc. Also check if the guests are available to speak with writers from local papers in person or in phone interviews.

### **8 WEEKS BEFORE, OR EARLIER**

- Prepare publicity materials. You can ‘cut and paste’ your specific information (i.e. time, date, and location) onto the MASTER FLYER in the GRAPHICS KIT. We offer this master as a suggestion to simplify your preparations. However, you may wish to design your own.
- Send out “Save The Date” postcards (bulk mail, if possible).

### **7 WEEKS BEFORE**

- Photocopy flyers and send bulk mail to your mailing list and to lists from similar organizations and groups. If your organization has a newsletter, you can insert the flyer in addition to an announcement or article.
- Send a stack of flyers to the Women’s Studies, Public Health, Social Studies, Law, Political Science, Film & Video and other Departments on the campuses of your local colleges and universities.
  - A complete listing of like-minded organizations is included in this guide.
  - Ask groups who share your goal if you they would allow you to:
- Utilize their mailing list for your own mailing.
- If you have a list, offer to exchange with them.
- “Piggyback” your flyer with one of their mailings.
- Send them a stack of flyers to distribute and have in their offices. In exchange for their support, you might invite the group to have their organization's literature available on information tables at the event.
- Mail personal invitations by First Class, with a note to selected names from your list, such as donors, community leaders, legislators, activists who work for other causes, etc.
- Coordinate volunteers to help with the reception and screening, and to distribute flyers and posters beforehand.

### **5 WEEKS**

- Send MEDIA ADVISORY (See sample PAGE 15) and cover letter to both the Calendar and Arts editors of local publications (both traditional newspapers and alternative dailies/weeklies) to “pitch” an article about the event, the filmmakers, your other guest speakers, and your group. We recommend that you send the information via both mail and fax, and follow up with a phone call.

### **3 WEEKS**

- Send PSAs or a MEDIA ADVISORY to local radio stations.
- Re-send mailings and faxes to calendar listings in local publications.
- Make follow-up calls to all media contacts. Continue calling until coverage is definite.

## **2 WEEKS**

- Reconfirm guest speakers' schedules.
- Confirm volunteers to handle the reception, take tickets, pass out programs and order forms for the film(s).

## **1 WEEK**

- Make follow-up calls to all important invitation recipients and groups.
- Coordinate with venue management the specifics of the reception.
- Print programs and videotape order forms (order form master enclosed).

## **DAY BEFORE**

- If the event is to be a large fundraiser, arrange advance tickets alphabetically in envelopes, separating pre-paid from reservations. Keep double records of all names and phone numbers of those who attended for your future use.
- Purchase and prepare refreshments for the reception or contact caterer with last minute details.

## **DAY OF THE EVENT**

- Make certain all the equipment, in the theater or screening space and is in good working order.
- Set up tables for reservation ticket holders, guests and press.
- Lay out refreshments and set up literature tables, including order forms for the films.
- Continue distributing flyers, postcards, and posters until the event.
- Record all names, addresses and phone numbers as a resource for future events.

The information on planning events is adapted from The Empowerment Project's Guide to Theatrical and Video Self-Distribution of Issue-Oriented Films and Videos

## **F1. Sample: Media Advisory**

A media advisory, like a press release, is designed to encourage reporters to cover an event or activity. It should always be very simple, no more than one page. It should be faxed out to reporters or editors three days before your event and followed up by a phone call the day before the event to make sure that the reporter or editor received it. The following SAMPLE MEDIA ADVISORY can be used to announce any occasion or event to the press - broadcasts, gatherings in homes the night of the broadcasts, or screenings on other occasions. Simply fill in the bracketed spaces with your own information.

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For more information contact: [Name, Phone # , Fax and/or email]

Date: [when you are writing the advisory]

On [date], at [time] [name of film(s) or event] will be [broadcast/held] on [Channel xx] or at [location of event]. The film(s) shown that evening, directed by Dorothy Fadiman, xxxxxx [Mention any celebrities or VIPs who will participate in your event, any other special features...]

WHAT: name of the event or films being broadcast

WHEN: date and time of the broadcast or event

WHERE: location of the gathering, if it is an event

Reporters wanting background information on the film, or on invited guests, general information about [your organization] should call - [your own individual or the organization's or the publicist's contact information - name/phone/fax/email]

## F2. Sample: Letter to reporters/ the editor

Feel free to use this template and add your information to the space between the brackets. Or, you may also want to tailor the letter to your own community and its experiences. If you know the interests of the person to whom you are writing, include stories or issues that will catch the attention of that person.

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Dear [ ]:

On [date], xx [name one or more of the films] will be broadcast on Channel xx at [time].

OR

On [date], xx [name one or more of the films] will be featured at [describe event].  
Because we feel that this film (these films) will have an impact on the way people feel about and understand [name issue]

[name of your organization] is planning to hold [describe the event, i.e. a pre-broadcast screening/hold a series of gatherings in homes/other event that night.....or another night].

We believe your readers will be interested in and will want to see this film/these films. If you are interested in [the broadcasts or the event] (possibly add - and want to interview local community members-please contact me at [phone number].

Sincerely,

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