



Documentary Impact: Social Change Through Storytelling

Lead Partner



Panicaro Foundation

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Author's note: This article focuses specifically on feature-length independent documentary films released in the US and Canada in recent years. The opinions reflected are those of the author, Story Matters, and have been written independently of the institutional positions of Hot Docs, Inspirit Foundation and Panicaro Foundation. This report was underwritten by the generous support of Inspirit Foundation and Panicaro Foundation, which sponsored the project, and Harmony Institute, which contributed data analysis.

I. GLOSSARY¹

Impact. Creating a marked effect or influence on someone or something.

Impact Space. The emerging sector of the film industry engaging in the practice of creating social impact and social change with film.

Impact producer. Devises and executes a strategic campaign, including distribution, communications, outreach, engagement and marketing to maximize the impact of a film.

Social change. Significant alteration over time in behaviour patterns, cultural values and social norms.

Social impact film. Films which seek to create social change on a particular issue.

II. DOCUMENTARY IMPACT: SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH STORYTELLING

"I think it's inevitable that people will come to find the documentary a more compelling and more important kind of film than fiction. Just as in literature, as the taste has moved from fiction to nonfiction, I think it's going to happen in film as well. In a way you're on a serendipitous journey, a journey which is much more akin to the life experience. When you see somebody on the screen in a documentary, you're really engaged with a person going through real life experiences. So for that period of time, as you watch the film, you are, in effect, in the shoes of another individual. What a privilege to have that experience."

—Albert Maysles, US documentary filmmaker (Grey Gardens, Met the Beatles, Salesman)

Watching a documentary can feel like a serendipitous journey, on which the real lives of strangers unfold before an audience's eyes. What pioneering filmmaker Maysles is describing is the identification that exists in that special sense of discovery and feeling of close connection to the subject of a film. This awakening of empathy within audiences' hearts is part of the intangible magic of documentary film.

If documentary films generate empathy in audiences, illuminating new perspectives and activating powerful emotions, then what happens next? Audiences often walk out of documentaries saying, *"I want to do something about the way I feel and what I just saw!"* Empathy created by great storytelling can be great fuel for action. Coordinated, organized and strategic actions can facilitate major changes in a society's viewpoint, lexicons, values and practices. Coherent actions can shift this post-viewing inspiration into action, which can drive societal and legislative change, truly altering societal practice. As witnessed by films such as *The Invisible War* and *Gasland*, documentary films, combined with savvy campaigns, can have deep and lasting impact².

1 Social Impact Documentary, Churchill Fellowship Report, Alex Kelly, 2013:
<http://echotango.org/portfolio/churchill-fellowship/>

2 BRITDOC Impact reports.

The notion of "impact" is suddenly everywhere, trending across many fields, not just documentary filmmaking. In the past few years the terms "impact space" and "impact producing" have been coined by a leading organization in this space, the UK's BRITDOC, and taken up across the field to name the burgeoning practice of coupling social issue documentary films with outreach, impact and engagement strategies designed to have specific social change outcomes. Impact can achieve social change, but impact is hardly serendipitous; it requires strategy.

When it comes to social action emerging from a documentary, who defines this strategy? Who articulates clear goals? How are audiences identified? Where are partnerships fostered? What is the action to take? Who organizes the action? How do we measure whether these efforts and energies have paid off?

This report examines five contemporary independently produced and widely distributed feature films from Canadian and US filmmakers that have each achieved a significant level of what we identify as *impact*. The documentaries examined here capture moments of pure drama and real-life surprise, and tell stories that generate strong emotions in audiences and generate what can be seen as contagious empathy. Each was accompanied by what is increasingly known as a "social impact strategy." Some strategies were clearly defined and planned from the outset; others were prompted in response to audiences' reactions.

We aim to examine the efforts and actions of these films in relation to measurable impact and societal change.

III. DEFINING IMPACT

What do we mean by *impact*?

In this context, we mean social and cultural change that has been driven by a documentary film and its associated campaign strategy. This can include a perceivable shift in behaviours, beliefs and values within a group, system or community, as well as legislative or policy shifts in a government, organization or institution.

In their joint impact guide, *The Impact Playbook*³, the Bay Area Video Coalition and Harmony Institute define impact as follows:

The simplest synonym for impact is "change."

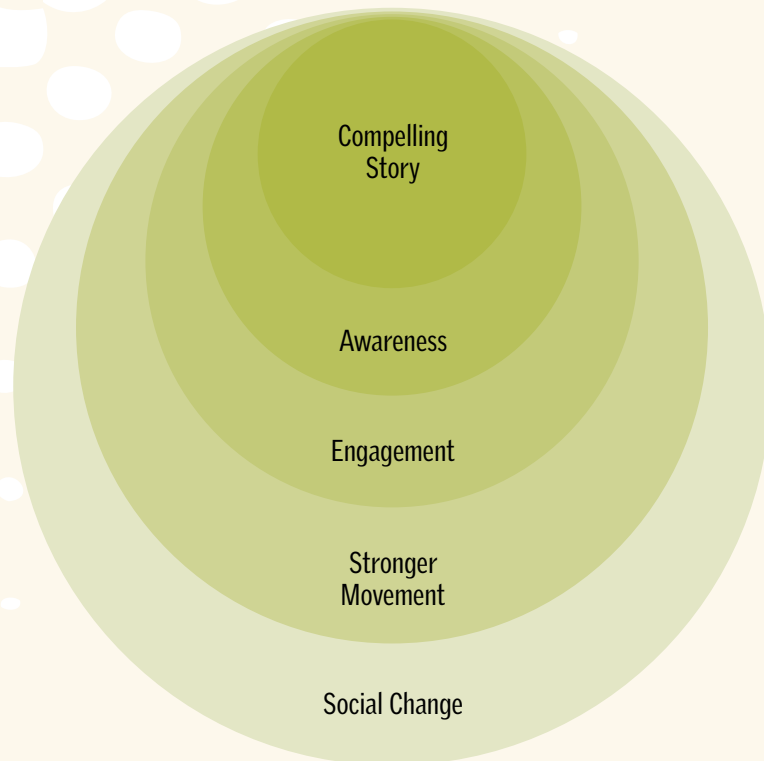
Every media project or story changes some aspect of the world. Impact is the sum of these changes. Underlying this abstract definition is a set of more complex questions: Who or what changes? How can media makers distinguish between change in individuals, groups, organizations, governments, societies and other possible actors? Over what time frame does impact occur? Is it possible to untangle the role of media from all the other complex factors that contribute to social change?

The Fledgling Fund created this diagram on the dimensions of impact in their paper "Assessing Creative Media's Social Impact"⁴:

3 <http://harmony-institute.org/blog/cases/impact-playbook/>

4 The Fledgling Fund, Creative Media Dimensions of Impact: <http://www.thefledglingfund.org/resources/impact>

Creative Media Dimensions of Impact



Although in this context, social change begins with the audience “journey” at the individual empathic level, impact as we define it, emphasizes a transformation generated at a broader institutional, political or community level.

“Margaret Mead taught me that we should ‘Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.’” —Peter Wintonick, filmmaker

Societal change can often be nuanced and difficult to quantify. Even with hindsight, understandings of what created change is always contested by movements, theorists, media, government and communities. We tell stories about our stories.

Many efforts, studies and institutes dedicated to measuring media impact are attempting to wrestle with this complexity. Some of these include The Norman Lear Center’s Media Impact Institute, the Video4Change project and the MIT Open Doc Lab.

These institutes are committed to understanding the full spectrum of challenges of measuring impact, from campaign goals such as the establishment of a new law or public policy initiative, scaling to widespread transformative cultural change wherein certain behaviours (or social conditions) are aimed at being shifted by the outreach strategy.

Documentaries can help fuel change or can be incorporated into larger established campaigns to drive impact. Each film examined in this report had a number of specific goals, which related to the type of social change the film campaign sought to inspire.

Each campaign and strategy draws on a different approach to change, or different "types" of change as illustrated by this slide from BRITDOC⁵:

Types of Change

Bottom Up

Public Awareness

Bring new facts to light, tackle prejudices, create discussion.

Public Engagement

Petitions, voting, letter writing, buying and boycotting, volunteering, donating etc.

Top Down

Political Change

Think tanks, elected officials, civil servants, changing attitudes & priorities, policy & legislation.

Corporate Change

Internal policies, production changes, product or marketing, investments and countries of operation.

Legal Change

Challenging governments, corporations and powerful individuals using existing laws

IV. KEY FACTORS IN DOCUMENTARY IMPACT

1. Story is everything.

A good story, well told, is critical to a successful impact strategy. If a film does not connect with its audience and generate empathy, it is very unlikely to gain the traction that an impact campaign requires to make change.

The best documentaries illuminate the human experience. Films can bring audiences inside stories and communities that they might not otherwise be familiar with, provoke dialogue and inspire people to take action.

Documentaries meet a deep human need to connect. Films allow us to do this through authentic stories, often across difference. When this need to connect is fulfilled, it can translate into deep and passionate support for the issue depicted in a film, and this emotional and engaged support from viewers is critical to a successful social impact campaign.

5 From BRITDOC Impact Distribution Lab NYC, March 2014: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1G6TfZiYzCwXKd2no1SjksJFSX-QNx3m4XpQVb3EN98s/edit>

2. Build a strategy.

In today's crowded media marketplace, film impact campaigns need smart strategy, with clear goals and a process for working with partners and engaging key audiences. It's important to note that the process of developing a successful impact campaign is completely different than the process of making a documentary film.

Many notable high-impact film campaigns have worked with impact strategists, seasoned PR teams or were mentored by leaders in the fields of marketing and social change theory to develop strategic plans for outreach and engagement that synced with their film distribution plans.

Filmmaking teams have developed successful campaigns by determining early on who they want to reach, how they want to engage the audience and what influence they seek to have. They asked themselves about their change goal and how they would achieve it.

These strategies can be as diverse as lobbying government to introduce a bill about military policy such as in *The Invisible War*, pushing the public to think about their consumption, as in the case of *No Impact Man*, or encouraging a community to think differently about immigrants, as with *Welcome to Shelbyville*⁶.

Identifying the campaign end-goal for each film will enable the team to think about who needs to be reached by the film, and how they need to be moved or shifted to achieve the goals.

3. Who are the key audiences?

For a traditional distribution strategy, success is often measured by audience reach: the number of people who have seen your film. In social impact terms, reach, even reaching millions of viewers, does not immediately equate to change.

The specific goals of a social impact strategy will inform who is the most important audience for a film to be seen by, what approach to distribution will work best for reaching that audience and what it is that this audience will be encouraged to do to further the social impact aims of the project.

When audiences are directly presented with a course of action to drive impact and they are moved by the film, they are very likely to respond to calls for action.

Some ways to think about audiences and how filmmakers can work with them include:

- Connecting audiences to existing local campaigns and action groups already working on the issue that the film explores, such as the *Gasland* approach.
- Engaging audiences to become lobbyists through social media: tweeting to target politicians, organizations and corporations, such as in the #NotInvisible campaign of *The Invisible War*.
- Encouraging audiences to sign petitions and pledges and become ambassadors for the project's aims in their local community, such as the *Bully* strategy.
- Creating offline events immediately following events, such as *The Yes Men* team taking the audience directly from a cinema screening to a pre-planned action at a nearby corporate headquarters.
- Connecting audiences with each other through panels and discussions at screening events.
- Encouraging audiences to promote the film to their networks to further build the audience.

4. Filmmakers don't have to do and be everything.

As the impact space gains momentum, there is likely to be an increased expectation, driven by buzz as well as funder priorities, on filmmakers and their teams to deliver an impact strategy alongside their project. As the case studies we will explore demonstrate, fantastic outcomes can be achieved by these approaches to film-led social change, and as this sector grows it's critical to keep a protective eye on the craft of filmmaking itself.

Filmmakers don't have to become social change experts, but should they choose to create a social impact campaign, they should assemble a team and partnerships with others to deliver a strategy, including impact producers, social movements and not-for-profits already organizing around the issue explored in the film.

From a filmmaker's perspective, partners bring expertise, contacts, marketing and communications assets, and credibility. When change requires public engagement or behaviour change, large-scale collaboration and powerful partnerships are essential.

In many sectors, activists and movements have been working on the issue for many years. As well as being a key audience for a film that falls into their interest area, they are most likely to have ideas about strategy, campaign asks, who the main players in the sector are and identifying key audiences to target with the film.

5. The story beyond the film—getting the issue out there.

Most social impact strategies have a focus on bringing awareness to an issue or to shifting the languages and frames around an issue. This relies on gaining substantial media coverage for the issue and film. Filmmaking teams and their subjects can provide powerful narratives to media through interviews, op-eds, sharing ancillary content and gaining profile at public speaking events.

Media impact is demonstrated when people are talking about the issues of the film—even when they have not seen the film. It can be seen when keywords, frames or ideas in the film and decided upon by the impact strategy enter the public discourse around the issue at hand.

6. Resources (and partnerships) accelerate impact.

Funding to support strategy development, partnership building, targeted screenings, publicists, screening guides, filmmaker travel and social media is needed to realize potential and maximize impact.

As this field grows, so do the number of programs specifically focused on funding social impact filmmaking and outreach strategies, including The Fledgling Fund, BRITDOC Connect Fund and the Ford Foundation's JustFilms program.

As this sector develops, it is important to be mindful that the influence of the funders in this impact space does not impinge on the creative vision of the filmmaking teams, given that the process of telling a story through film and running an impact campaign are so different.

For potential partners and funders that are new to documentary and associated impact campaigns, additional resources may be of interest. California-based Active Voice has created a terrific guide for funders and filmmakers that is also helpful for NGOs and others interested in working with social issue documentary. Access the guide here: <http://www.theprenups.org>

Good Pitch is a forum for generating resources and partnerships for social issue documentaries. The event is presented by the BRITDOC Foundation in partnership with Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program, and is now a global program⁷.

7 http://britdoc.org/real_good/pitch

7. Tracking impact.

As the impact field grows, so does research about the social impact of entertainment and media. It is critical to building this field of practice, to honing strategy and to reporting on funding, to develop mechanisms for determining what success means, and measuring if and how it has been achieved.

In the context of measuring social change, it is important for definitions of impact to be based on much more than metrics. Impact is not necessarily about volume and reach; it is about depth of engagement and shifting of key targets to achieve social change goals.

Measuring cultural and attitudinal shifts is a great deal harder than keeping track of metrics, requiring qualitative rather than purely quantitative data.

8. The landscape is changing, and fast.

These developments in impact strategies sit alongside rapid and exciting shifts in the media landscape, in how audiences are engaging with media, how media is and can be broadcast and distributed.

Audience behaviour is rapidly evolving with new platforms, devices and technology. As the way we consume media changes, and more and more channels become available, traditional broadcasters are working to redefine themselves in this landscape.

This challenges the role of traditional distribution, and introduces new possibilities to filmmakers, including different approaches to community screenings and digital distribution. For example, the Oscar-nominated documentary *The Square* was acquired by Netflix and released simultaneously online and in cinemas, causing considerable stir in an industry that has been maintaining hold-backs on online distribution, believing that this is better for theatrical release and box office.

Some of these changes in form, production and distribution include:

- Crowd funding, such as Kickstarter and Indiegogo, to fund film production and build audience loyalty in very early in project development.
- Digital distribution platforms/Video on demand (VOD), including Netflix, Hulu, Amazon and iTunes.
- Independent video-embedding monetizing platforms for filmmakers' own websites such as Distrify.
- Crowd-demanded theatrical distribution by platforms such as Gathr and Tugg.

V. MEASURING MEDIA IMPACT

Impact evaluation is evolving incredibly quickly in step with the burgeoning impact sector. An approach to tracking the impact of film and media is drawing from strong traditions of evaluation in other sectors such as public health, international development and social welfare. Whilst there are some frameworks that can be drawn from other disciplines, documentaries and other forms of media need to develop different rubrics of impact measurement.

Some media impact evaluation tools and platforms, such as Sparkwise and Harmony Institute's *StoryPilot* (formerly ImpactSpace), pull Internet data, use sophisticated algorithms to analyze the information, then present the results in a visual approach to give context and meaning to this data. As previously noted, quantitative means, although time-efficient and capable of encompassing big data sets, are not able to capture the more nuanced and deeper aspects of impact, such as cultural and behavioural shifts.

Some of the key players in impact evaluation are:

- The Lear Center at USC's Media Impact Project, with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Knight Foundation. Led by Director Martin Kaplan and Research Director Johanna Blakely, the project "aims to develop a deeper understanding of media's influence on social trends and individual behavior." In partnership with Participant Media, the project is developing The Participant Index (TPI), a platform and approach to examining the power of storytelling to inspire social change.
- Harmony Institute (HI) is an interdisciplinary research centre that studies the impact of entertainment on individuals and society. They are developing *StoryPilot* a dynamic visual platform that illustrates how a film is connecting with audiences and offers a multi-dimensional picture of the media response for a film.
- Video4Change is a research project in collaboration with MIT's Center for Civic Media and Open Documentary Lab, established to explore the impact of Video for Change, with a focus on the approaches prevalent in the network. Those approaches are mostly short-form advocacy videos that emphasize participatory methodologies and are focused on the Global South.

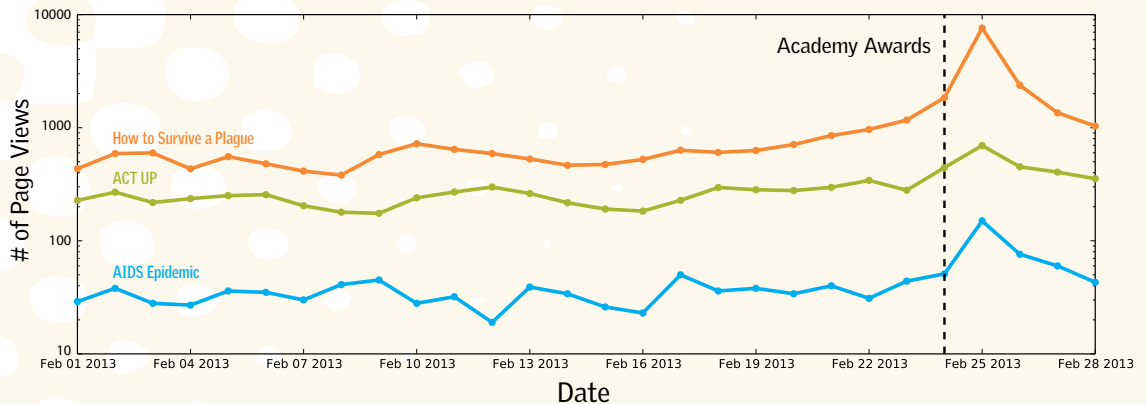
Broadly speaking, media impact evaluation looks at reach, engagement and influence:

- **Reach.** How many people saw or were exposed to the film? Who is the audience? The total reach of high-impact documentary will exceed the actual viewing audience of the feature film.
- **Engagement.** How did an audience respond to the film? There is a continuum of engagement, which ranges from liking the film on Facebook, tweeting a link to the trailer, participating in a Q&A and volunteering for or donating to a cause related to the film.
- **Influence.** Did the film alter opinion broadly, or within communities that can make a difference on the issue? How does the film relate to shifts in interest in or in opinions on a given issue?

These three areas interrelate. For example, the reach to opinion leaders is a good way to assess influence. And if a large number of people engage by signing a petition or donating to a cause, that may influence outcomes.

The following graphic from the alpha version of Harmony Institute's *StoryPilot* illustrate the types of data evaluation and visualization these platforms can provide. For an in-depth analysis of media impact, refer to the *How to Survive a Plague* case study in this report.

Wikipedia Page Views of the Film & Related Terms



IV. HISTORICAL REVIEW OF SOCIAL IMPACT IN DOCUMENTARY

Occasionally, and often to spectacular effect, a documentary lands in the public consciousness and launches a chain of events that can be seen to have changed society. Before we examine our five contemporary case studies, we should consider the positive effects achieved over the past half-century in the pursuit of social impact through documentary filmmaking.

In 1973, Barbara Kopple embedded her camera in the lives of Kentucky coal miners fighting for their right to organize and make a living. *Harlan County, USA* won the 1976 Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature, galvanized support for the miners' rights and revealed the danger of their work. In 2013, the feature documentary *Made in L.A.* captured a new epicentre of immigrant workers' rights, profiling Latina immigrants seeking basic labour protection in clothing manufacturing.

Frederick Wiseman's *Ticicut Follies* (1967), which documents abuse and neglect inside a Massachusetts mental hospital, was banned from public distribution until 1991. It may have led to the eventual closing of the institution portrayed in the film.

In the golden age of TV news, CBS' *Hunger in America* (1968) revealed a reality in which children and families were living in poverty at a time when the economy was gaining strength. At the time, CBS was one of only three major television networks, and the film reached millions of Americans and simultaneously affected policy makers. According to Joel Berg, author of *All You Can Eat Now: How Hungry Is America?* (2008), the film "coupled with the shock and anger of Members of Congress and much of the American people—directly led to the enactment of the modern nutrition assistance safety net that has done so much to reduce hunger in America."

In 2012, *A Place at the Table*⁸, a film by Participant Media, directed by Kristi Jacobson and Lori Silverbush, picked up where *Hunger in America* left off nearly half a century earlier. The film reached an audience of millions of Americans. Extending far beyond the broadcast, production company Participant Media has led a major coordinated campaign around the film and their website tracks its ongoing impact.

8 <http://www.takepart.com/placeatthetable>

Participant Media was founded by Jeff Skoll, a Canadian entrepreneur and eBay Co-Founder, who is committed to the power of storytelling in advancing social change. The company's 2012 documentary *Food, Inc.*, by director Robert Kenner, shocked with its footage of industrial manufacturing of chickens and cows, stimulating a national conversation on food and health, much as Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* did for the meatpacking industry a century ago. The accompanying campaign reached far beyond the screen, to partnerships with corporations such as Chipotle and Stonyfield Farms that supported a broad coalition of food-safety advocacy groups. Each of these films fits into our cultural history around food safety and security, poverty and government regulation. Each film generated contagious empathy for the individuals portrayed, as well as outrage at systemic injustice, encouraging the audience to think differently and to take action.

Participant Media's first major documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, the 2006 Al Gore documentary about climate change, has become a bellwether against which many subsequent social issue documentaries are measured. Its reach was substantial. The film won two Academy Awards, reached an audience of more than 4.9-million people and launched the *Climate Reality Project*⁹, training more than a thousand activists to deliver the presentation. In 2007, Al Gore was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize jointly with the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). *An Inconvenient Truth* took just over \$24 million at the US box office and became the sixth bestselling documentary of all time.¹⁰

No discussion of documentary and impact would be complete without acknowledging the influential and critical contribution of Michael Moore. His blockbuster documentaries and powerful personality have been central to the debate on national issues in the US and Canada, including *Roger and Me's* examination of jobs shifting overseas, gun control in *Bowling for Columbine* and the lead-up to the War on Terror in *Fahrenheit 9/11*. His filmmaking style is both character- and agenda-driven, where we get shock, outrage and often humour. His films are deeply entertaining. Whether or not audiences agree with his take, his perspective is clear. His influence is inarguable: *Fahrenheit 9/11* was awarded the Palme d'Or at the 2004 Cannes Film Festival, the first documentary film to win the prize since 1956. As of August 2012, *Fahrenheit 9/11* is the highest-grossing documentary of all time, taking in over US\$200 million worldwide, including United States box office revenue of almost US\$120 million¹¹. Through this vast reach, it is clear that Moore's work has had substantial impact on the framing and language around a range of social issues.

However, not all social change documentaries pursue a progressive political agenda. The most successful theatrical documentary of 2013 was *2016: Obama's America*, which ran a more conservative agenda than most other films cited. It made more than US\$34 million at the United States box office, making it among the top four documentary releases of all time. The filmmaker Dinesh D'Souza has cited Michael Moore as an influence on his own work. In an interview on Fox News (FOX411's *Pop Tarts*)¹², D'Souza noted, "When he released *Fahrenheit 9/11* in 2004 ahead of the election, it sparked intense debate. I learned some lessons from Michael Moore, and hopefully he might learn some lessons from me about handling facts." D'Souza's book *The Roots of Obama's Rage*, on which the film was based, spent four weeks on *The New York Times* bestseller list.

There is a rich and diverse history of documentary films making social impact and being used as tools by community groups and social movements to advance campaigns and raise awareness of social issues. The growth of the impact space seems a natural and exciting evolution for filmmakers and the documentary industry.

9 <http://climaterealityproject.org/>

10 http://britdoc.org/uploads/media_items/aninconvenienttruth-beyondtheboxoffice.original.pdf

11 Box Office Mojo, 2007. Retrieved April 23, 2014.

12 <http://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/2012/07/30/conservative-filmmaker-behind-2016-obamas-america-says-learned-some-lessonsfrom/?intcmp=features>

VI. FIVE SOCIAL CHANGE DOCUMENTARY CASE STUDIES

Case Study # 1 ► *Bully*

FILM

Bully was a documentary film which sought to explore and address the widespread social phenomena of bullying in America. Over 13 million young people are bullied each year, making it the most common form of violence experienced by young people in the United States.

Filmmaker Lee Hirsh explored the intimate stories of how bullying touched five kids and their families. Through these stories, the film documents the responses of teachers and administrators to aggressive behaviours that defy “kids will be kids” clichés. The film captures a growing movement among parents and youth to change how bullying is handled in schools, in communities and in society as a whole.

GOALS OF *BULLY*

- Influence public policy: Support educational programs that address the cause of bullying.
- Shift culture: No more “kids will be kids” rationale. Make bullying unacceptable. Promote a “safe schools” culture.
- Get the film in front of one million young people.
- Raise public awareness about the scale and negative effects of bullying.
- Reframe the issue, putting the “bullying crisis” on the agenda.
- Advance programs that change school climate and reduce bullying.

STRATEGY

- Leverage media to lift profile of the project.
- Wide reach with the 1 Child Matters, 1 Million Kids Make a Difference (since renamed 10 Million Kids) campaign.
- Work with the existing movement, creating an authentic relationship with audiences.
- Create powerful cross-sector partnerships with public, private and third sector.
- Give voice to young people in campaign to make film more appealing to other young people.
- The 1 Million Kids campaign was launched in April 2012 when more than 6,500 Los Angeles students went to see a special screening of *Bully* at the Nokia Theater in the presence of Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and Los Angeles United School District Superintendent John Deasy¹³.

The film’s impact campaign team knew that in order for the film to make a difference, kids needed to see it.

This became more difficult when the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) initially gave *Bully* an R rating due to language in the film, as the “F” word is heard numerous times as a verbal assault targeting the most vulnerable. In Canada, where the film rating system takes place within the provinces, it was rated PG-13.

This rating controversy became a powerful rallying opportunity for the film. A young woman who had experienced bullying, Katy, had heard about the film, and was excited to see a feature film that would speak to her personal experience. A highly articulate and personable young woman with supportive parents, she was upset by the MPAA rating and started a petition which went on to gather over 523,465 signatures¹⁴.

The film's distributor, The Weinstein Company, and the impact team reached out to Katy to build support and a campaign around her efforts. Within days, she and her mom were in New York for a screening of the film, then L.A. and Washington, D.C. They became the focal point of the film's effort to allow access to youth viewers. *Bully*, and the restricted access that would result from its MPAA rating, was soon part of a "media moment" in which stories about the film became national news, with appearances on *Ellen*, the *Today Show*, CNN and MSNBC, among many others.

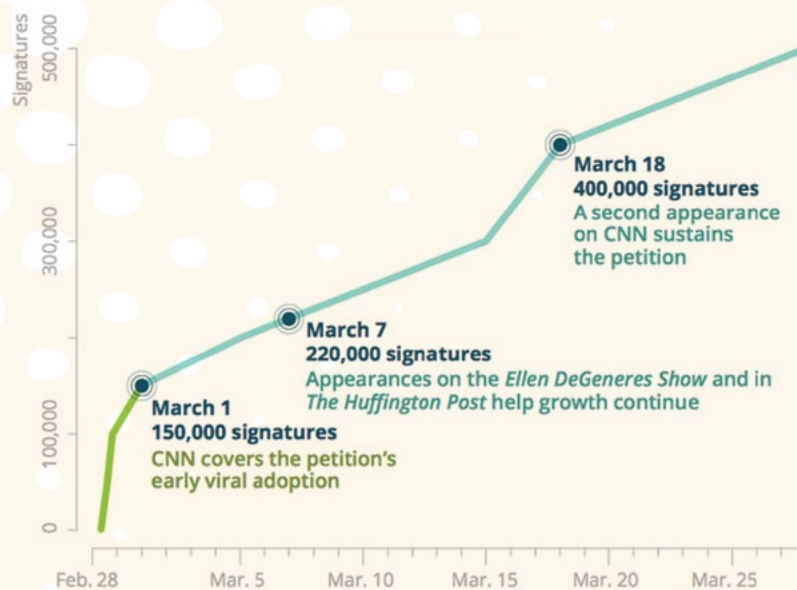
Shifting support to the youth leaders in the community and aligning efforts of a social media strategy and promotional push raised unprecedented awareness for the film. The visibility peaked on a day of social media strategy known as "Twitter Tuesday," March 27, 2012¹⁵, when the film beat out *The Hunger Games*, the most popular movie in America at that moment.

Eventually The Weinstein Company, which used the controversy to generate fantastic publicity, reached a compromise with the MPAA and the R rating was rescinded.

The Harmony Institute has produced an in-depth report focusing on the social media aspects of the film's campaign, showing the relationship between the petition, mainstream media coverage and strategic use of social media.

This graph illustrates how the petition signatures respond to media events.

Change.org Petition to Change *Bully's* Rating to PG-13: Signatures Over Time



14 Katy's Change.org petition: <http://www.change.org/petitions/mpaa-don-t-let-the-bullies-win-give-bully-a-pg-13-instead-of-an-r-rating>

15 <http://mashable.com/2012/04/11/bully-twitter-campaign/>

Reaching Millions

Very few documentaries are seen by more than several hundred thousand in movie theatres. A limited theatrical release drives press attention, but the majority of viewers eventually will see documentaries on broadcast TV or via digital platforms.

Following the petition and ensuing media attention, and emboldened by support of hundreds of thousands of young people, director Lee Hirsch wanted to do something big in response. Getting kids, teachers and administrators into movie theatres to see the film together would emphasize the extreme importance and relevance of the issue. Lee announced: "I want a millions kids to see this film in that way. This is about more than a movie. It's about building a movement."

Notably at Hot Docs, *Bully* was selected for the Docs For Schools programs, reaching tens of thousands of students in the Ontario secondary school system.

The 1 Million Kids campaign, building on the idea that "every child matters, a million will make a difference," was imagined and delivered in less than six weeks while the movie was still in US theatres.

OUTCOMES

- Generated huge public awareness around the film's release.
- Film seen by 3.2 million kids.
- Generated philanthropic support for bullying prevention programs.
- Fueled a movement: The Bully Project is now part of curriculum at thousands of schools.
- Screened at 35 film festivals.
- Online trailer watched by 5.8 million people.
- The field was built; partners were connected with each other to build a stronger movement against bullying.

The film's impact strategy team built a coalition of extended partnerships that became known as The Bully Project, which included:

- **Facing History and Ourselves**¹⁶, which created the Screening Guide for educators and produced training webinars for 1,500 teachers;
- **Donors Choose**, a crowd-funding platform exclusively for US public school programs, who reached thousands of classroom teachers with the *1 Million Kids* project;
- The **JP Morgan Chase Foundation**, which took a chance on the project, and made a six-figure grant that launched the program via *Donors Choose*;
- The national teachers unions, the **National Education Association** and the **American Federation of Teachers**, the largest unions in the US, supported the launch of the program.

CONCLUSION

The Bully Project used a movie to launch a movement by inviting others to be a part of it, and by working closely with existing leaders in the education and youth empowerment space. With *Bully*, the initial media story could have been just about a film-rating controversy; however, the filmmakers and partners consciously made it a story about millions of young people engaging to change the culture in their schools and communities and of cross-sector partnerships supporting positive social change.

The media impact for the film depended on its theatrical release and the extra media gained through the campaign to lift the R rating. Feedback indicates that *Bully* feels authentic to kids: it speaks to the everyday experience of more than 13 million kids who get bullied each year. Seeing their stories on the big screen legitimized their experiences, and opened audiences to discussing how to advance empathy, awareness and change in their communities.

The online audience of young people built a peer-to-peer movement, and the filmmakers and their partners in the campaign provided a powerful framework to support the needs of this movement.

The long-term impact was enhanced by foundations that funded a substantive public school anti-bullying program, building a movement in partnership with hundreds of thousands of teens. The campaign called Safe Schools creates places where bystanders become “up-standers,” and bullying is interrupted and treated as unacceptable.

Filmmaker Lee Hirsch met his goal: The film reached one-million kids in its initial campaign and has gone on to reach more than 3.2 million. Furthermore, The Bully Project is now embedded in school curricula across the US and globally.

Bully Summary

Director: Lee Hirsch

Producers: Cynthia Lowen and Lee Hirsch

Campaign Strategy/Support: Patricia Finneran, Houston King, Sarah Foudy and Christie Marchese

Country: USA

Distribution: Canada: Alliance Films;
US: The Weinstein Company

Leading Philanthropic Supporters: Einhorn Family Charitable Trust, The Fledgling Fund, BeCause Foundation, Waitt Institute for Violence Prevention, National Center for Learning Disabilities, JPMorgan Chase, Sears and Good Pitch

Website:

The Bully Project: www.thebullyproject.com

The BRITDOC Foundation created a short film about the *Bully* campaign for their annual Puma Impact Award.

View it here: http://britdoc.org/real_good/puma-creative-impact-award/2013-award

See the Harmony Institute report on *Bully* here: <http://harmony-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/bullysocialmedia.pdf>

*Tales From the Organ Trade*¹⁷

FILM

Tales From the Organ Trade is a “gritty and unflinching descent into the world of black-market organ trafficking: the street level brokers, the rogue surgeons, the impoverished men and women who are willing to sacrifice a slice of their own bodies for a quick payday, and the desperate patients who face the agonizing choice of obeying the law or saving their lives.”

Every year thousands of organs are bought and sold on a black market that flourishes in dozens of countries. It is illegal to sell human organs and both the medical community and the World Health Organization are opposed to incentivized organ donation. Yet there is a significant international market; at least \$500 million is spent annually on illegal kidney transplants.

With unprecedented access to all the players, the film explores the legal, moral and ethical issues involved in this complex life and death drama.

Tales From the Organ Trade depicts a market in which both sides, the buyers, those in need of a life-saving organ transplant, and the sellers, individuals living in dire poverty, are reluctant participants.

GOALS OF *TALES FROM THE ORGAN TRADE*

- Increase awareness around black-market kidney trade.
- Advance high-level discourse on incentivized donation.
- Change the narrative: While the dominant narrative in pop culture is about kidnap victims, the film sought to generate recognition that the issue is more complex than this.
- Encourage people to sign their organ donor cards.
- Advocate for an opt-out rather than an opt-in organ donation policy in Canada and the United States.

As an investigative journalist, director Ric Esther Bienstock’s objective was to uncover the truth about the kidney trade by capturing the authentic stories of individuals facing moral and ethical dilemmas. She sought to go beyond the numbers and the shadowy stories we see in movies of victims kidnapped and humans harvested for their organs in order to find the reality on the ground.

What emerged was a much more nuanced film, in which heart-wrenching stories were intertwined, building a complicated empathy in audiences with players on all sides of the market, while providing crucial facts and research.

STRATEGY

Whereas the *Bully* case study is an example of grassroots activism, *Tales From the Organ Trade* represents a “grass-tops” effort. The film brought attention to an unknown story and introduced audiences to unexpected perspectives on the illegal organ trade. Mainstream media coverage generated buzz, which influenced and amplified the efforts of thought leaders and change makers in the medical and public health and policy-making communities.

The filmmakers sought to influence policy makers internationally; for example, director Ric Esther Bienstock spoke before the Danish Parliament following a screening for the Danish Council on Bio-Ethics, and presented at a conference on the organ trade at The Hague, Netherlands.

The film has been shown at dozens of major international conferences and universities, ranging from the Global Bioethics Initiative to the UCLA Medical School, Princeton. The film has become an entry point for a once taboo discussion amongst leaders in bio-ethics and public health.

The film managed to generate substantial coverage of the issue of illegal and ethical organ trade, bringing to light the debate in primetime media. Quebec's Radio-Canada and Arte, the French-German channel, respectively aired one-hour shows about the film and a one-hour debate post-broadcast, while eight major newspapers published op-eds in response to the film. *Forbes*, CNN International and *US News* have featured the film and discussed the growing response of global audiences.

The film premiered on production partner channels HBO in the US, and Shaw Media and Canal D in Canada, and had a short theatrical run in select cities across North America. Although the film did not reach an audience in the millions, the media response and the health community's critical acceptance are the stand-out factors for *Tales From the Organ Trade*. In April, 2014, the film won the Amnesty International Award for best feature.

Given the controversial and taboo nature of the topic, the team sought to track audience response to the film, as well as assess public opinion on incentivized organ donation.

A questionnaire was developed to gauge the impact of the film on audiences and was deployed at nearly 100 public screenings, notably at Hot Docs 2013.

In response to the question "Would you consider paying someone for their kidney if your life, or the life of a loved one, depended on it?" a minimum of 75 per cent of respondents answered "Yes." The team has continued the survey online and gathered over 1,000 responses; the average positive response rate has been between 70 and 80 per cent. This survey was another way to ensure that audiences were continuing the discussion about the issues after viewing the film.

A striking aspect of this case study is that the remarkable media attention, the embrace in which the bioethical, medical and public health community took on this film, as well as the powerful impact it had at the highest form of national governments, was done without any specific funding for an outreach and engagement campaign on behalf of the filmmakers.

Imagine the impact, had the team of *Tales From the Organ Trade* partnered with a coalition of organizations in the space with funding support for a multi-year campaign to align existing strategies.

OUTCOMES

- Awareness: Two million trailer views and 231,000 online searches for film title.
- Director Ric Esther Bienstock is now a sought-after speaker on the issue.
- Media coverage: Eight op-eds published, with stories on MSNBC, CNN International, Arte, etc.
- Screening at European governments and in policy communities.
- Ongoing use of the film as a tool by media and public health communities.

CONCLUSION

Tales From the Organ Trade raised awareness around the global black-market trade in human organs via issue-focused press coverage and targeted screenings. Screenings and lectures at bio-ethics conferences and high level government events and conferences have raised the issue amongst the specific community influential on the topic. We can project that with additional funding, strategic development and coalition-building, the issues exposed in the film could further advance discussion and legislation on this deeply challenging issue.

Tales From the Organ Trade Summary

Director: Ric Esther Bienstock

Producers: Ric Esther Bienesstock, Felix Golubey and Simcha Jacobovici

Narrator: David Cronenberg

Country: Canada

Distribution: Canada: Shaw Media and Canal D; US: HBO Documentary Films

Leading Film Fund Supporters: Rogers Documentary Fund, Ontario Media Development Corporation, The Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit

Website:
www.talesfromtheorgantrade.com

Case Study # 3 ► *Herman's House*

FILM

Herman Wallace may be the longest-serving prisoner in solitary confinement in the United States; he spent more than 40 years in a 6-by-9-foot cell in Louisiana.

Imprisoned in 1967 for a robbery he admits he performed, he was subsequently sentenced to life for a killing he vehemently denies. *Herman's House* is a moving account of the remarkable expression his struggle found in an unusual project proposed by artist Jackie Sumell.

Imagining Wallace's "dream home" began as a game and became an interrogation of justice and punishment in America. The film takes us inside the duo's unlikely 12-year friendship, revealing the transformative power of art.

Herman's House sought to connect the transformative potential of art to a criminal justice story; it humanizes a faceless prisoner who becomes an unseen hero in a story of unfathomable resilience and the power of the human imagination.

GOALS OF *HERMAN'S HOUSE*

- Raise awareness around conditions and injustice of solitary confinement.
- Eliminate extended solitary confinement in US prisons.
- Designate extended solitary confinement as torture and therefore a violation of the US Constitution.
- Show link between human imagination and resilience: Art can feed the human spirit in the most dire of circumstances.
- Celebrate the power of art and the imagination to generate hope.

STRATEGY

- Celebration of art and empathy: The film itself is about the power of art and story against a backdrop of gross injustice.
- National distribution on public television: *POV* re-broadcast and streamed the film in October 2013 following Herman's death.
- Social media by broadcaster and engagement team, plus partners such as Amnesty International and campaign team, drove online engagement.

The theatrical release of *Herman's House* in the US, by distributor First Run Features, was followed by broadcast on PBS's *POV*. This broadcasting program has a social engagement mandate which meant that *POV* supported the campaign. In response to the convergence of events around the issues, including other stories in the media about solitary confinement and the mounting pressure of the campaign for Herman's release, the broadcaster brought forward the transmission date to best align with the buzz and movement on the issue.

Simultaneously, there was a flurry of events—some strategic, others happenstance—that gave the filmmakers opportunities to respond strategically to bring more people to the film. Supported by Amnesty International, the film became a tool for advocacy against solitary confinement prison conditions and, individually, for Herman Wallace's compassionate release since, as the film neared release, he was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Film strategist team Picture Motion¹⁸ joined the project and responded to a completely independent but directly aligned California prison strike on solidarity confinement. All these elements coordinated with the broadcaster to sync strategy and increase rapid response on social media.

OUTCOMES

- Increased awareness through film viewership, mass media coverage and social media reach.
- Herman was released, though not pardoned, and died a free man.
- Prison reform activists are continuing to use the film to advance their work.

CONCLUSION

Herman's story stands as an example for the more than 80,000 individuals in solitary confinement in US prisons.

Herman's House became a powerful tool for prison activists and supporters of Herman in the campaign to free Herman, as well as the ongoing campaigns against solitary confinement and against inhumane prison conditions more broadly.

Herman's House Summary

Director: Anghad Singg Bhalla

Producers: Lisa Valencia-Svensson and Angad Singh Bhalla

Campaign Strategy/Support: Outreach team at POV

Country: Canada

Distribution: US: POV

(<http://www.pbs.org/pov/hermanshouse/>)

Leading Philanthropic and Film Fund

Supporters: Ford Foundation, Sundance Institute, Jerome Foundation, Ontario Arts Council, Hot Docs Forum and Good Pitch

Website: www.hermanshousethefilm.com

Case Study # 4 ► *The Invisible War*¹⁹

FILM

The Invisible War is a groundbreaking investigative documentary about one of America's most shameful and best-kept secrets: the epidemic of rape within the US military. The film paints a startling picture of the extent of the problem: one in four women will be sexually assaulted during military service. Focusing on the powerful and emotional stories of rape victims, *The Invisible War* is a moving indictment of the systemic cover-up of military sex crimes, chronicling the women's struggles to rebuild their lives and fight for justice.

GOALS OF *THE INVISIBLE WAR*

- Raise awareness about the epidemic of rape in the US military in the public and in the media.
- Change policy: Take rape cases outside the Chain of Command in the military.
- Support survivors of military sexual assault.

The Invisible War combines investigative journalism, the power of a big festival premiere by a well-known filmmaker and a campaign that included both grassroots organizing and powerful high-level strategy to influence policy at a government and military level, and to encourage a cultural shift within the military itself.

According to producer Amy Ziering, when she and director Kirby Dick started production on the film, no one in US Congress would speak to them. Not a single Senator or Congressman agreed to be interviewed for the film. Following their 2013 Academy Award nomination, the filmmakers were able to walk the halls of Congress and be recognized by name. More importantly, at least 20 different items on the legislative agenda were introduced to address the issue. For example, US Senator Kirsten Gillibrand introduced the Military Justice Improvement Act.

STRATEGY

- Frame the issue, introducing the notion of a "serial predator" to sound alarm, but not vilifying the entire military culture.
- Target influencers, working every possible angle to get the film in front of Pentagon brass and President Barack Obama.
- Target military bases and recruitment bases at colleges with grassroots screenings.
- Work with military assault survivor support organizations and grassroots campaigners.

Immersive and empathetic storytelling was essential to achieve the desired impact of *The Invisible War*. The filmmakers took months to build trust with survivors. They undertook in-depth and detailed research to track down the "serial predators," sexual assault offenders who repeatedly rape, and the unique internal system of military justice that fails to prosecute. While pointing out the explicit injustice undergone by the victims, the filmmakers were careful and strategic in their choice to not vilify the entire US military, and instead pointed out the tragic flaws in the system. The storytelling was all the more challenging, for it first had to pierce through the culture of perseverance—"good marines suck it up"—in order for victims and military personnel to candidly express their individual experiences.

The filmmakers worked with PR firms²⁰ in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. to design a precise media strategy directed at relevant military and government leaders. Fortunately, they could use the momentum of their Academy Award nomination to capture broader national attention. This propelled the impressive results of the #NotInvisible campaign, which included an action website featuring a petition, signed by 100,000 people, to remove military sexual assault from within the Chain of Command.

¹⁹ <http://www.invisiblewarmovie.com>

²⁰ <http://www.fitzgibbonmedia.com/casestudies/the-invisible-war/>

Nearly one million members of the US military have seen the film after more than 1,400 screenings of the film on military bases, college campuses and community events. Since 2013, there have been 63 screenings on US military bases abroad. The filmmakers also orchestrated a screening for military chiefs of staff that led to the military adopting the film as a training tool and screening the film for Congress and staff. Reaching the mass interested audience, while targeting key change agents on this issue, was critical to gaining momentum for the #NotInvisible campaign, which put pressure on elected officials to make policy change on the issue.

OUTCOMES

- The Pentagon, high-level military officials and top staff in the Obama administration have seen the film.
- The film is now used as a training tool for military personnel.
- Nearly one million members of the US armed services have seen the film.
- Mass media coverage: The filmmakers have appeared on dozens of media outlets, including a special hour with Katie Couric.
- Mainstream television series, including *House of Cards* and *Law & Order: SVU*, have adopted storylines influenced by the film, as has the comic strip *Doonesbury*.
- Policy/legal: More than 20 pieces of legislation have been introduced in US Congress, with major legislation still pending.

The results of the filmmakers' efforts illustrated a shift in dialogue and of perception on the issue of sexual abuse. When the *Army Times* reported on a new sexual assault prevention chief, the article included a quote from the film²¹. PBS's *NewsHour* also documented the film's impact: "Two days after he screened the film, outgoing US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta changed the reporting structure so that a service member's immediate supervisor no longer is the only person to whom a victim can report an abuse. 'Clearly this film has changed the conversation,' former federal prosecutor and US Senator Richard Blumenthal told [*NewsHour* senior correspondent Judy] Woodruff, adding that at his request, the military is expected to release more reliable data on sexual assault in the military this spring²²."

The film and its core issue has also influenced the cultural context. The principal story arc of a lead character in the second season of the Netflix series *House of Cards* focused on military sexual assault legislation and was directly inspired by *The Invisible War*. Similarly, a 2013 storyline on *Law & Order: SVU* is also linked to *The Invisible War*.

CONCLUSION

The Invisible War is one of the most celebrated social impact documentaries of the past few years.

The success of *The Invisible War* lies in how the film made the once invisible "war" of military sexual assault visible to all levels of society, from those directly affected to the broader military through expanding to general pop culture. It then used that visibility to encourage both cultural change within the military and policy change.

21 <http://www.armytimes.com/article/20130119/OFFDUTY02/301190307/-8216-Invisible-War-director-has-message-DoD>

22 <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/invisible-war-has-changed-the-conversation-on-rape-in-the-military/>

The Invisible War Summary

Director: Kirby Dick

Producer: Amy Ziering

Campaign Strategy/Support: Fitzgibbon Media. Publicity team included Nancy Willen, Susan Norget, Sunshine Sachs and PR Collaborative

Country: USA

Distribution:

Canada: ro*co films; US: Docurama/Cinedigm

Educational: ro*co films

Leading Philanthropic and Film Fund Supporters: The Fledgling Fund, The David Lynch Fund, Women Donors Network, Bertha BRITDOC Connect Fund and Good Pitch

Website: www.invisiblewar.com

The BRITDOC Foundation's Puma Impact Award case study on the film provides an in-depth analysis of the film campaign: http://britdoc.org/real_good/puma-creative-impact-award/2013-award

Case Study # 5 ► *How to Survive a Plague*²³

FILM

How to Survive a Plague tells the story of a small group of young AIDS activists who worked together for over a decade to lead the fight for the creation and distribution of drugs that would save 10 million lives, including, in some cases, their own.

It is the story of two coalitions, ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) and TAG (Treatment Action Group), whose activism and innovation turned AIDS from a death sentence into a manageable condition. Despite having no scientific training, they infiltrated the pharmaceutical industry and helped identify promising new drugs, moving them from experimental trials to patients in record time.

It is not the first documentary to address HIV/AIDS, and a significant portion of the film is found footage shot on 1980s video cameras. From a film marketing perspective, it represented a challenge to determine how to draw new audiences to a story that already felt familiar.

David France was a journalist in New York in the 1980s. In the film's footage of the first ACT UP meetings in a Greenwich Village church basement, France can be glimpsed in the back of the room with his notebook, capturing the story as it unfolded. It is the story of a generation, told by a storyteller who was present. France's in-depth knowledge of both the players and complexities of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and their treatment trajectory, combined with extraordinary filmmaking, elevated the film to critical acclaim, which drove media coverage and awareness.

23 <http://www.surviveaplague.com>

GOALS OF *HOW TO SURVIVE A PLAGUE*

- Raise awareness around the story of ACT UP and TAG.
- Share the movement story of activist-driven public policy change.
- Strengthen the movement and engage new activists.

Reframe history to include this story, targeting educators and youth who were not around in the 1980s and may not know this story.

One of the filmmakers' core goals was to ensure that the story became part of American cultural history. They wanted to reach audiences born after 1975, people who had no idea of the early days of AIDS and how, in a fight to save their own lives, young gay men and women laid the groundwork for the present-day LGBTIQ rights movement in the US.

STRATEGY

- Work with issue-aligned funders to provide the film free to grantees in the US (Elton John AIDS Foundation) and internationally (Open Society Foundations).
- Directly support advocacy groups in using the film.
- Provide a teaching tool (viewers guide) for social change and current health-care justice issues.
- Host Q&As and post-screening meet-ups, engaging audiences in the spirit of social activism.
- Work with campus groups such as Student Global AIDS Campaign to get the film in front of young people.
- Reach out to every national HIV/AIDS organization.

When the film opened in New York, every single weekend screening included the participation of a filmmaker, a subject or an activist leader. Wherever possible across the country, a Q&A followed the film, providing the audience with an opportunity to collectively and immediately process the story they had witnessed on screen, and also to connect with the movement today.

On World AIDS Day 2012, there were more than 100 special screenings on college campuses and/or hosted by organizations such as amfAR, ACT UP, Health GAP, RESULTS, TAG and dozens more, each with a Google Hangout with the filmmakers and HIV/AIDS activist leaders. The US Department of State hosted a screening which led to their acquisition of 70 copies of the film to be shown through US embassies as part of programs to advance democratic practice and build support for LGBTIQ rights.

Finally, the success of the film and the grassroots activism inspired issue-aligned foundations to support specific aspects of the campaign:

Open Society Foundation's Public Media Health Initiative supports public health activists in some of the most challenging locations, such as HIV/AIDS activists in Russia, Eastern Europe and several African countries. They supported partnerships, filmmaker travel, the creation of a custom viewers' guide and free distribution to grantees.

The **Elton John AIDS Foundation**, which focuses on AIDS Service Organizations and healthcare, gave a grant to support similar work in the US.

Their grant, which followed generous support from the **Ford Foundation** to both the production and the campaign, illustrates how funders new to media impact can work strategically with a film to advance their mission.

OUTCOMES

- New funding support to provide the film to educators and organizations to use it in their work.
- Increased media coverage and awareness on HIV/AIDS.
- Film used internationally as teaching tool around HIV/AIDS and democratic practice of activism linked to public policy change.
- Story of ACT UP and TAG shared with new audiences.
- Increased movement building in the LGBTIQ space.

CONCLUSION

How to Survive a Plague is a remarkably celebrated documentary. The film made a dozen top-ten lists of 2012 and was nominated for an Academy Award. Director David France was nominated for a DGA award, won the IDA Emerging Filmmaker Award and the New York Film Critics' Best First Feature Award.

The success and profile of the film, alongside a well-coordinated national strategy with a huge number of partners, allowed the filmmakers to achieve their outreach goals.

The media impact trajectory of *How to Survive a Plague* relied on leveraging media attention around the release to increase awareness, while simultaneously working with partners on the ground in both national leadership and at local events to ensure that the stories were getting in front of the key audiences they needed to reach to make the impact the filmmakers desired.

How to Survive a Plague Summary

Director: David France

Producer: Howard Gertler

Country: USA

Campaign Strategy/Support: Patricia Finneran

Distribution: US: IFC Films, Independent Lens

Educational: ro*co Films

Leading Campaign Supporters: Ford Foundation, Elton John AIDS Foundation, Open Society Foundations, The Fledgling Fund, Bertha BRITDOC Connect Fund, Impact Partners, Hot Docs Forum, Hot Docs, Hamptons PitchIN and Good Pitch

Website: www.surviveaplague.com

VII. CONCLUSION

Documentary film, coupled with a well-executed social impact strategy, can have substantial impact on social change as demonstrated by the five film-driven impact campaigns explored in this report.

The social impact documentary film sector—or “impact space”—is growing incredibly quickly, as witnessed by the buzz around it, the number of films being produced which have social impact campaigns attached to them, the number of firms and freelancers offering impact-producing skills, new funding streams for this work and increased programming of sessions and workshops on this approach at media conferences and film festivals internationally.

It is likely that we will continue to see this approach to social impact filmmaking accelerate and mature well into the future.

To support the field as it grows, as well as the craft of the documentary filmmaking tradition itself, there are a few important cautions to keep in mind when reflecting on this practice.

Impact won't work if the films don't demonstrate high-quality storytelling; audiences will not building empathy or feel compelled to act by films that do not capture their imagination. It is critical to continue to encourage creative risk and filmmaking artistry alongside the development of a savvy approach to building outreach strategies and companion campaigns for film projects.

As impact evaluation and funding for this work increase, it is important that choices around film content—the poetry and art of filmmaking, as well as the kinds of films that are funded and commissioned—are not driven by simplistic ideas of “what kind of film has the most impact.”

Art and its impact on an audience is not something that can be foreseen or created according to a formula. Documentary films as different as *The Act of Killing*, *Cutie and the Boxer* and *The Stories We Tell* can find great success and wide audiences despite radically different styles, subject matter and intentions.

The field also needs to ensure it does not become seduced by metrics alone when trying to understand what works and how. What is easiest to count is often the least important. Social media and web analytics, box office figures and broadcaster ratings tell us about reach, but can't necessarily tell us about emotional impact or compulsion to act. Data alone does not tell the whole story of the way in which story works in the hearts of audiences and how ideas are taken up and transferred between people in communities and society.

Even the best strategy, combined with a beautiful, compelling film, cannot guarantee impact and change. Social change involves good luck, good timing, traction of ideas in the broader culture and more than a little magic and zeitgeist.

Campaigners should experiment with approaches and partnerships to develop strategies that are tailored to the issue and the sector they are working with, and the mood and tone of the film they have made, rather expecting that there is a one-size-fits-all approach to outreach and engagement tactics. In fact, it is more likely that unusual and innovative approaches and calls to action will inspire audiences, rather than familiar or repeated tactics.

Story and culture operate in poetic and unpredictable ways. This is where filmmakers, teamed with sharp strategists and activists, can use film to encourage us to think differently, act differently and make the world anew.

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APPENDIX

Hot Docs

Hot Docs, North America's largest documentary festival, conference and market, will present its 22nd annual edition from April 23 to May 3, 2015. An outstanding selection of documentaries from Canada and around the world will be presented to Toronto audiences and international delegates. Hot Docs also mounts a full roster of conference sessions and market events and services for documentary practitioners, including the renowned Hot Docs Forum, Hot Docs Deal Maker and The Doc Shop. In partnership with Blue Ice Group, Hot Docs operates the Bloor Hot Docs Cinema, a century-old landmark located in Toronto's Annex neighbourhood.

The Harmony Institute

The Harmony Institute (HI) is an interdisciplinary research centre that studies the impact of entertainment on individuals and society. HI was founded by John S. Johnson (BuzzFeed, EYEBEAM and the Screenwriters Colony) in 2008. After years in the film industry, Johnson recognized the need to better understand entertainment's impact on audiences. HI was formed out of a desire to see entertainment meet the pressing needs of society and to build a bridge between the worlds of entertainment, science and technology. HI's original research has looked beyond marketing and box office metrics for indicators of how, why and when media messages trigger individual and social change. They see their approach as fundamentally interdisciplinary, drawing on emerging research in fields such as neuroscience and data science to build their understanding of impact.

Story Matters

Story Matters is a strategic consulting firm working at the intersection of storytelling and social change. Founded by Patricia Finneran, the organization advances the use of film and video as a powerful tool to reach, engage and influence audiences, working with filmmakers to help shape stories, provide production and distribution advice and create strategies for outreach and engagement. Story Matters works with non-profit organizations, funders and social entrepreneurs on projects that see storytelling as an integral element in advancing their mission. Recent projects include outreach and engagement campaigns for documentaries including *Bully*, *How to Survive a Plague* and *The Revolutionary Optimists*. Consulting clients include BRITDOC Foundation's Good Pitch, a forum for filmmakers to forge cross-sectors campaign partners; Harmony Institute's Impact Space, a dynamic data platform visualizing media impact; and Hot Docs in Toronto. Finneran has previously served in both programming and management capacities at three of the leading film arts organizations in the US. At IFP New York, she served as Artistic Director of IFP Market, now known as Independent Film Week. She led the growth of the SILVERDOCS: AFI/Discovery Channel Documentary Festival from 2003 to 2008 to become the largest US documentary festival. At Sundance Institute until late 2012, she represented the Documentary Film Program at forums globally and managed creative partnerships and related content, and co-launched Sundance Film Forward, a global cross-cultural exchange project.