



Effectively Using Video for Outreach and Dissemination, Multiplex monthly theme, February 2020 Synthesis

Video has become a key tool for communication, outreach, and dissemination both within the researcher community and with the general public. This month four panelists (Danielle Espino, Sponsored Research Project Manager at Pepperdine University, Barbara Rogoff, UCSC Foundation Distinguished Professor of Psychology, Nikolay Hristov, Associate Professor, Design Researcher and Co-PI on iSWOOP, and Kate Meredith, President and Director of Education at Geneva Lake Astrophysics and STEAM at GLAS Education Inc.,) share their strategies for creating and then disseminating their short video featured in the STEM for All Video Showcase in 2019. The expert panel was moderated by Joni Falk, Principal Investigator for the STEM for All Multiplex project.

Key points about creating the video

The creation of a short video for the STEM for All Videohall can seem a daunting task. The team is confronted by questions about what equipment to use or other technical concerns. Yet, all four panelists emphasized that the core task in the creation of these videos is not technical. They stressed that this is story-telling, and so the most important thing to do is to get clear what story you want to tell. The writing of the script helps you figure out what message or messages you want a visitor to take away — and that in turn will shape what you put in the story, and what you leave out. This seems elementary, but it's not easy to do within the constraints of a 3-minute video, and panelists talked about how challenging this was — and also how useful — for their teams to agree on what "the point" should be, and how best to show it. As Barbara Rogoff said, "It's not long, but it takes a lot of revision!" Remember that this is a chance to make a few important ideas more public.

Nikolay Hristov raised up 5 points to consider as part of the design work, and his recommendations (echoed by other panelists) reflect the realization that making a video like this is not about a one-time effort. It points to the value of documenting and reflecting on your project throughout the year.

1. Once you've got a story worth telling, find a charismatic or evocative setting in which to tell it — something that underlines the good story.
2. In a sense, do more than “the necessary” — try something, critique it for effectiveness — in relation to the story you want to tell — and expect to revise and try it over again.
3. Your team may not have all the skills necessary to tell your story effectively — or you may be so immersed in the work that you are not in a good position to see the unfolding stories. Consider whether you can identify a dedicated person not directly involved in the project work to document, photograph, video, etc., to capture key ideas, events, and “aha” moments.
4. Don't plan to stage scenes just for the video. Another way to say this is, don't be waiting for the perfect moment to video, but rather be taking lots of footage (along with other documentation), so that you have authentic resources to draw from when you make your video.
5. Remember that it takes time to distill your materials to suit the story you choose to present.

Create a clear, compelling story

Nick shares: "Beauty buys you a lot, but authenticity buys more than beauty" — don't focus on production values until you've got a clear, compelling story, and have authentic materials to use in the telling. The actual equipment you use is less important, and more than one of the panelists mentioned that they have made very effective use of iPhones to capture material that was later incorporated into the video they presented. Danielle adds: "One of the values in doing the showcase is developing the 3-minute elevator pitch. Going through that process of determining the key points to convey about the project/research with your team can be a rewarding experience in itself. "

Another key point which was emphasized by several of the panelists is, that your choice of story and "take-home" message, as well as choices about how to convey the message, is essentially related to your intended audience. So once you've chosen the main ideas you want to convey, you have to be clear about who you want to reach – and this in turn will shape the choices you make in terms of images, audio, or other resources that you incorporate into the video presentation.

You don't need professional gear!

Danielle Espino wrote in the Discussion: "...don't be discouraged by not having professional gear. Our video is usually more DIY with mainly footage and photos from mobile devices, but we focus on including diverse clips and voices, which we then leverage when inviting people to view the finished product. If you're on the fence about whether or not to participate in the Showcase, don't get too caught up on the visual quality." Kate Meredith added: "I have used an iPhone to great effect. I do recommend investing in a little tabletop tripod for your phone and a decent microphone. A wireless mic is worth the expense. We invest about \$60 with good results."

Nikolay Hritsov provided some details about the making of their ISWOOP video, which provides insight into the coordination of whatever resources you may have available: "There has been an interesting discussion in the background about the place of professional gear and that pro-look-and-feel for these short film production and how discouraging such expectations might be for new projects and teams. Good story and visual narrative need not rely on these, even if occasionally they can be helpful. In our short film, we used the camera gimbal at 01:17-01:25 because we couldn't find a better way to hold and pass the camera from one person to the next, safely and without shaking, but we used a student's smartphone to capture the defining shot about transitioning from front of the camera to the back at 00:30-00:40. Also note at 02:32 the inverted GoPro on a branch(!) to capture the fascinating footage of the alewives at the spawning ladder in Maine. Filmmakers are inevitably DIY-ers, which is how scientists and designers happen to be as well. Design-Art-Science anyone? See if you can capture any other blooper moments in the film and I and the rest of the ever growing iSWOOP Team are happy to discuss further. "

Finally, both Rogoff and Hristov recommended making videos for the Videohall more than once. Each year brings fresh understanding about their own projects, and the importance of the work they're doing, as well as insights into how to tell the stories, and how to integrate the story-telling into the continuing work of the project.

How do you bring people to view and discuss your presentation?

How did our panelists achieve extensive outreach and participation? They all emphasized the importance of their story — as Barbara Rogoff said, "Have a story that people want to tell others." Like the other panelists, though, Rogoff did not "build it and wait for them to come." She let people know well ahead of time that her team was presenting, and got the word out not only to her own professional network, but also to the networks of all the team members, and their friends and colleagues. "Don't be shy!" She posted notes before and during the event on professional list-servs that she had access to,

issued press releases, and even included the event as part of her signature line in emails she was sending. She also used her professional Facebook page, noting that this then propagated the news through her "friends" networks as well. She used the idea that there was competition for the "awards" on the site as an added way to motivate friends and colleagues to participate actively.

Kate Meredith told us that she and her team also sent out "heads-up" notices to their networks, and made use of the press-release template that the Videohall project provided (included among the Resources for this monthly Theme). "Tell everyone that it's happening, and how they can participate." Twitter can be useful both in advance and during the event as well. Panelists also made clear that a successful presentation doesn't just depend on the video. The live event is an additional opportunity. Kate's team found that it was important to participate in the discussions of other videos — not only was it a learning opportunity, but it also made other attendees aware of the team and its interests and activities — showcased at their presentation.

Barbara Rogoff made it a point to take an active role in the discussion, and to encourage her co-presenters to do so as well. This kind of intentional presence is an important part of the outreach, and indeed the success of the discussion is one evidence of impact. She and her colleagues made a point of asking people to elaborate on their questions or comments, so that they were encouraged to bring in their own ideas — which in turn enriched the conversation for the presenters as well.

Kate Meredith's team, as part of their "campaign," made a plan, in which everyone on their team signed up for particular timeslots — roughly 2 hours per day while the competition was running — during which they would attend and participate in the conference. This included visiting other videos and posting comments there.

All our panelists could testify that rich discussion on the Video Showcase site engendered rich discussion within the project team. It was valuable, therefore, to take advantage of the many learning opportunities offered by documenting their projects, working on their story, making their videos, and presenting and participating in the STEM for All Video Showcase. As Nick said, "This is a campaign," and projects need to work at it deliberately and strategically to get the best results for their presentation.



Written by:
Brian Drayton,
Co-Director for the Center
for School Reform at
TERC.



Copyright 2020 TERC; Funded by NSF #1922641
Opinions expressed on this site are those of the contributors
and not necessarily those of the National Science
Foundation.

OUR PARTNERS

