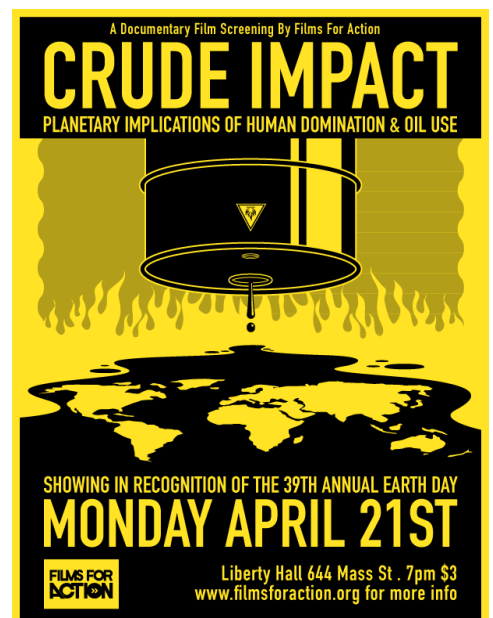


FILMS FOR ACTION'S GUIDE TO HOSTING A PUBLIC FILM SCREENING

BEFORE YOU PLAN THE EVENT

Decide on an outcome. What do you want to accomplish with the event? Do you simply want to raise awareness about a subject that has been ignored by the mainstream press? Do you want to foster a lively discussion that will strengthen community ties? Do you want people to take a specific action or set of actions? All of the above? After you've decided on the outcome, then start brainstorming what film you should screen to best meet that goal.



Case Study:

The first film our Lawrence chapter screened was [Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price](#) in June of 2006. We chose this film because developers were in the process of getting a second Wal-Mart approved for the west side of town. The local paper at the time was presenting it as a "done deal," and that this would be great for the city, when in fact the store plans still had to be approved by our city commission. Our goals were two-fold: we wanted the public to know the other side of the story: that Wal-Mart actually hurts small cities like ours more than it benefits them, and two; we wanted to stop Wal-Mart from building at a second location. So, we identified the decision makers. The city commission would be making the final call, and to get them to vote it down we would need a large turnout from the public.

Here, the choice of film was easy. It was also a current local issue, which made it easy to get news [coverage by two of the main papers](#) in town. Thanks to the good media coverage, 320 people came to our first screening, and we had prepared a program handout that encouraged everyone to go to City Hall on the day the commission would be voting on the issue (as well as sending emails and making phone calls). And, in this case, the campaign was a success. We helped pack City Hall with over 100 people, 99 percent opposed, and the commission vetoed Wal-Mart's plans.

Decide on the scale and frequency of the events you want to organize. Here are a few different approaches you could take:

- 6-8 larger, more focused events per year, with 100 to 200+ person crowds, good for action oriented campaigns and Q&A's with guest speakers.
- 12 medium sized events (30 to 50 people) good for discussions and forming post-screening project teams that will focus on different campaigns
- 40+ smaller weekly events ideal for sustained community building
- A mix of larger events and smaller discussion-oriented events

As the membership of your chapter grows, you'll have the option to start hosting multiple screenings at different venues around the city. You can have the group split into teams that focus on hosting events at different venues, aiming to create several smaller satellite screenings across the city, or a mix of the above, using a larger venue for a few big special events, and smaller venues for more community building and discussions.

This creates some creative possibilities. For example, if you decided to screen the same film across three different venues three days in a row, this would easily make the event news worthy and create positive rippling effects.



PLAN THE EVENT

Once you've got an outcome in mind, pick a film that everyone in the group is excited about, and which will make a good spring-board to launch into further discussion and action.

Consider Collaboration Possibilities

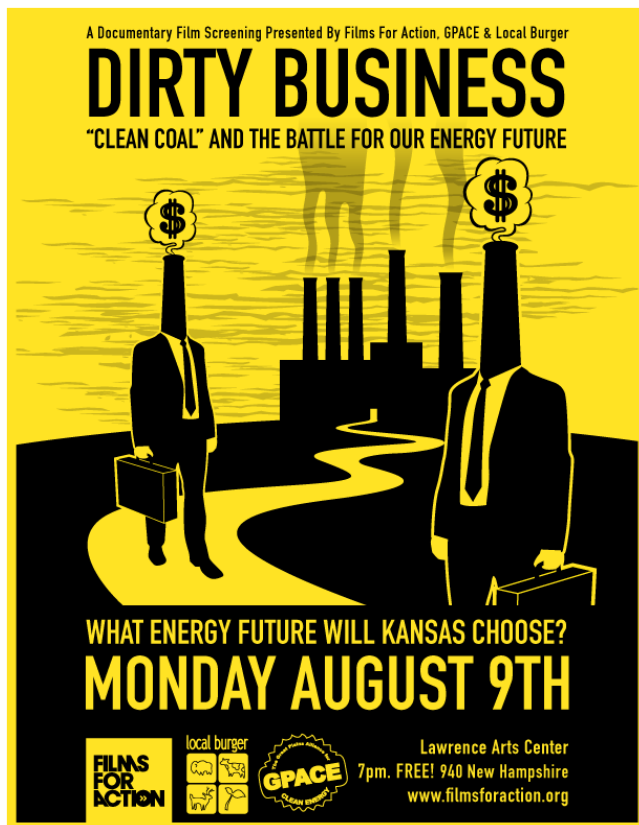
Brainstorm possible collaborators to work with (related activist groups, college groups, and non-profits) that will compliment the subject of the film. Co-sponsors can help reduce the work for your team by providing additional promotional and volunteer support, and can create synergies in terms of event visibility and impact.

Also, consider possible financial sponsors to offset some of the costs of the screening if you're choosing a venue that charges a fee (ex. contact local organic food businesses for a food film, or small independent businesses that are in competition with corporate chains for a film about corporations, or generally, any business that shares similar values). If you're incurring both a cost for the film and the cost of the venue, we find it's helpful to ask if they'd be willing to cover one of those specific costs (\$100 or \$150 for example).

Obtain Permission from the Film Makers and Buy the DVD

Getting permission is also called getting the Public Performance Rights for the film, or PPR's. This is something we get asked about a lot but it's actually pretty easy. You can do this by going to the film's official website. There may be a "Host a Film Screening" option where you can go through a process they've set up, or you can find a contact email address and send them an email asking for permission and explaining your situation.

Here is a sample email:



Hello. I'm the main organizer for a small non-profit group which screens progressive documentaries at our local theater in Lawrence, KS, and we'd be interested in getting permission to screen the DVD of the film at an up-coming (one time) screening. We charge a low \$3 admission to cover the \$150 cost of renting the theater and other related costs. Any proceeds that are left over after go towards building a better independent media in our local town (see more at www.filmsforaction.org).

If this is possible let us know. Because the last several screenings we've done have brought in an average of 50 to 70 people (just enough to cover our expenses) we have very meager funds, but we'd love to show the film! :)

Thanks so much for your time. We've already purchased a copy of the DVD. Though we are low on funds we are happy to work on promoting the film through our website and newsletter, facebook page etc.

*Thanks again,
Tim Hjersted
Films For Action
Lawrence, KS*

The cost of the PPR's will be different for each film. Just released, larger budget or studio pictures will often charge a fee, often in the \$100 - 150 range, so be prepared. This fee may be reduced if your event is free, but usually it will be the same. Indie film-makers will sometimes let you screen the film for free (besides the cost of the DVD) but to find out you'll always want to get permission first.

If the cost is an issue early on, there are plenty of excellent "low-hanging" films to choose from. For many older films, or less known documentaries, the film makers will often waive the PPR fee for you simply because they'd like to see the film shown and are no longer concerned about recouping their costs. Also many film makers openly encourage screening their films without seeking permission at all. This can almost always be determined from going to the film's website.

Where to Find and Buy Films

Aside from doing a Google search to find the film's official website, you can also often buy these films from larger distribution sites. Here are the main sites we use:

[Green Planet Films](#) (Probably the best source for the films we show)

[Media Education Foundation](#) (You will need to email them to get a discount)

[Bull Frog Films](#) (You will need to email them to get a discount)

[California Newsreel](#)

[Education Revolution](#)

[Icarus Films](#)

[Paper Tiger TV](#)

[Progressive DVDs](#)

[Video Project](#)

[Amazon](#)

Choose a Location

An independent theater, library, church, personal residence, school, campus theater, or art center can all provide good options. Consider the pros and cons of each venue choice, including differences in capacity, cost, location accessibility, parking availability, equipment provided or not provided, and how welcoming the venue will be perceived to the audience you hope to attract. An independent theater, library, or art center that has a theater setup or equipment available is an ideal choice, leaving you only needing to bring the DVD. Otherwise, you'll need to find out what equipment you'll need to bring, such as a projector and screen, laptop, cords, speakers, chairs and potentially a microphone for the speaker.

Decide on a Date and Time

You'll want to pick a date that's about **1 month** away. Confirm the date you'd like is available with the person who manages the location. Think of possible tie-ins to make the event more news worthy. For example, doing an anti-war film on the anniversary of a war, before a controversial decision is up for vote, or while a subject is already getting a lot of media coverage, i.e. the economy. Also consider avoiding over-lap with other big events or events being planned by allied groups. If you're wanting to attract college crowds, watch out for mid-terms, finals and breaks.

Write a Press Release

Writing a good press release is the key to getting a large turnout, and the best way to reach a wide audience. To be thorough, and to save time in the future, do an inventory of all of your local media outlets (newspapers, weeklies, radio, and TV stations). You'll then want to go to these outlet's websites and look for their contact page where you can either submit your press release via a form, or an email address which they've set up to receive press releases. You can also email the release to the editor of the most relevant department. Once you've found the right email addresses for all of the

local media, you can send out your release via a single email. Remember to always put the email addresses in the BCC line. Then keep this list handy for next time.

When writing the release, think of the best way to frame the issue and film event so that the media will want to cover the story. You can usually get started by using the press release provided by the film makers. Often on their official website they'll have a media section or a film screening kit that will have a press release ready for you to tailor to your event. There are also a couple guides to writing press releases inside the Resources folder of this kit.

Send out your press release **one month** in advance of the screening (This means you will need to have the Public Performance Rights and all of the event details confirmed by this time). Send a follow up email to news outlets 2 weeks before the event if you haven't gotten a response yet.

If all goes well, you'll get a call from a reporter sometime before the event who will want to interview you. If you miss their call, be sure to call them back immediately, as they are often working on deadline.

GET THE FLYER READY

Contact us 4 weeks in advance with the film you've chosen so that our graphic designer can begin making the flyer art. We have flyer artwork for 22 films currently available, which you can edit yourself if you're choosing a film we've screened before. To do this, you'll need someone in your group that can use Adobe Illustrator.



When you email us, include:

- *film name and sub-title
- *date and time (ie Monday July 23rd - 7pm)
- *location and address
- *admission cost (free or however much). If it's free but you're asking for donations, "\$2 Suggested Donation" or "Free! \$2 Suggested Donation" both work well.
- *The names of any co-sponsors, if any
- *Your city chapter URL, ie: <http://KC.FilmsForAction.org>
- *attach any logos of collaborating or sponsoring groups if requested

A flyer's purpose should be to grab a person's attention within the first instant and be read in roughly just a few seconds to get the most important details. They can be directed to your chapter website for more info and to view the trailer.

Once the flyer is ready, print the flyer as an 8.5x11 using an available printer. Take the master copy to a place like Kinkos or CopyCo. Ask an attendant there to show you how to print the flyer 4 per page, with even margins. Then you can cut the flyers up or ask an employee to do it, sometimes for a small fee (but it's usually worth it if you've printed more than 200 copies). A stack of 800 to 1000 flyers is ideal (200-250 copies). You

should also make a few dozen full-size 8.5x11 posters for putting up on community bulletin boards around town and on college campuses.

PROMOTE THE EVENT

You should have a few group members to help distribute flyers with you, as well as a larger group of online supporters that will repost info about the event online.

Good places to put up posters:

- Downtown shopping districts that have many community bulletin boards you can post to
- Campus bulletin boards
- Group mailboxes in suburban neighborhoods
- Libraries
- Churches
- College dorm floors
- High Schools (always sign in and get permission first)

You'll want to get at least one run of flyers up at least 1.5 to 2 weeks before the screening. Three weeks is ideal. The full worth of having flyers up accrues the longer they stay up before the screening. Putting up flyers less than a week away probably isn't worth the time investment versus the return. All the more reason to make sure this gets done as soon as possible. Flyering is also a crucial way we're able to reach the general public, rather than just our existing base of supporters, or those already considered the "choir."

Make sure whoever volunteers to do flyering knows when this needs to be completed (no later than three to two weeks before), or to let someone in the group know if they'll be unable to for some reason. It's an important job, so make sure volunteers knows this task has a deadline.

General Flyering Etiquette:

- Look for posters (8.5x11 sheets) that have expired that you can take down to put yours up. Take the old posters with you until you can find a place to throw them away.
- Don't cover up or tear down posters whose events haven't happened yet.
- Respect the rules requested by the businesses if noted (such as letting them put the posters up, or asking first)
- If you see a posters that's been crumpled from rain, overly damaged, is no longer readable, or is about to fall off, take the poster down to throw away when you find a trash can (don't litter!).
- If someone's poster is still in good condition but the wind has knocked a corner loose, I usually will tape it back up. Visually your poster will be more attractive to read if the posters around it are neat and not falling off or looking disorganized, which can keep people from reading any of the posters.
- Position your poster so that it maximizes the available space for other posters to be put up.
- Don't put up more than one poster at one location (Unless there is a lot of space free; Ordinarily, other flyer people will usually take down the one that has a better spot if there's not a lot of space.)

Good places to hand out quarter-sized flyers to people directly:

- Similar events (before, after or during, whatever seems appropriate)
- After any big kind of event
- Fairs
- College campuses, in between classes
- Farmers Markets
- Outside busy shopping malls or grocery stores
- Sports arenas
- Anywhere where there will be a high volume of traffic, making it easy to hand out a lot of flyers in a short amount of time

When handing a person the flyer as they walk by, smile, and say something like: "You might like this..." or "Film screening coming up next Tuesday.." and if they stop to listen further you can tell them more. Don't worry about folks that ignore you or decline. There will always be a few. Just smile and keep at it.

Bad places to hand out or leave flyers:

- Car windows
- After music shows (very few people care, but it may be worth a shot if you're there anyway)

Side Walk Chalking

This can be a fun activity to do with a couple people. Buy some colored chalk and go downtown or on to a college campus (where this is usually already a popular tactic) and write FilmsForAction.org on the sidewalks with various tag lines such as "Watch Over 900 Films," "Independent News & Film," or "Get the whole story at..". At a few places you can write out the date and name of the film with your chapter url for more info.

Texts

Send out a text to all of the contacts in your phone that would be interested either 1 day before or early in the morning on the day of.

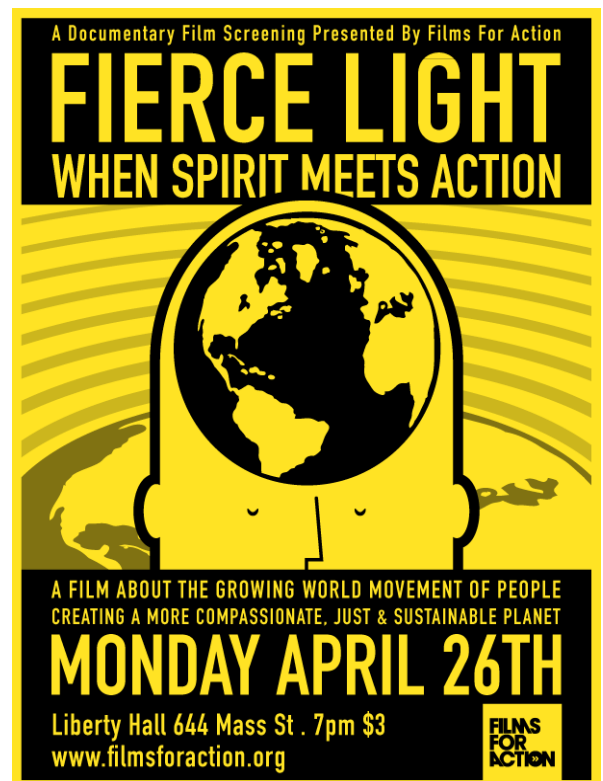
Sample Text Message:

Film screening of The Future of Food today at Liberty Hall, 7pm! \$4 See Lawrence.FilmsForAction.org for info. Spread the word and bring your friends. Cheers!

Internet Promotion:

eNewsletter:

You'll want to start a eNewsletter for your local chapter, beginning with your first screening. At the event you can have a clipboard on a table with space for people to write their name and email address. Our Lawrence chapter uses Google



Groups, set to "Announcements Only," but you're free to use whatever solution works best. Once you have over 500 members, a solution like this, which auto-manages some functionality, will be very helpful.

Your Chapter Website:

Post the film screening to your event calendar and share the link with the group and your friends on Facebook and Twitter.

(In time, it's possible that your newsletter and chapter website will be able to provide the primary means to get the word out about your screenings and community actions. Eventually we hope our chapters will have thousands of people plugged in to these grassroots information networks, so that we can reduce the need to promote through traditional mainstream news outlets as well as the need for extensive flyering (which will cut down on volunteer time, expenses, and paper usage). Creating a robust grassroots internet infrastructure to communicate en mass is one of our long-term goals.)

Your Chapter Facebook Group

You'll want to create a "Group" on Facebook for your city chapter early on. Once created, you can "Create a New Event" that is tied to the group, and all of the group members can be automatically invited. Growing this group will also be another critical area to grow your support base. Aim to make this group quite large, a mix of general supporters, people that just want to stay in the loop on future events, and your active team.

Official City Website

Go to the contacts page to email your city commissioners to invite them to the screening, as well as any other people working in various related departments or boards.

Local Yahoo Groups, Facebook Groups or Forums

If you're a member, make a post about the event on these groups 1 month and a few days before the event, or just once if twice seems like too much.

Other Group eNewsletters

Are there other similar sustainability/justice groups that send out a newsletter to their supporters? What about church or neighborhood newsletters? Email them with a convenient summary of the event (ideally in the style that they present other events) and see if they'll include yours.

Other Local Calendars:

Most daily and weekly news publications will also likely be your city's most active all-purpose calendar which you can post your event to. Also don't forget local radio.

College Professors

Email or call college faculty and related departments to see if they'd be willing to announce the film event to their students. If any members are in college they could also ask and speak with their professors directly, encouraging them to consider using the documentary screening as an extra-credit opportunity.



BEFORE THE EVENT

Have the best writer in the group write up an action guide to give people that attend the screening. You can use a group meeting to brainstorm action ideas. Or have people think of ideas on their own and then email them to a group email thread, and have the writer synthesize these into a 1 page guide.

The program flyer should include solutions or actions that people can take after the screening to help solve the problem addressed in the film. Provide internet links to more information on the subject. Encourage people to sign up for your local Films for Action newsletter to stay informed on future screenings and community actions. Include the date and location for your next chapter meeting, if possible. See our *Action Guide Examples* folder within this kit for examples. When finished, have a couple people from the group proof-read the guide and make sure there's nothing too big needing changes, but don't worry too much about perfection here. Too much micro-managing, analyzing and tweaking requests will drive your writer insane! When it's ready, print it off and take it down to a copy machine where you can print it 2 per page, on yellow paper.

A few other notes:

- Consider including selected quotes/factoids from the film and info on the filmmakers if necessary. This helps the information sink in better afterwards (old teacher's trick). It also gives each audience member a conversation piece for people who didn't come to the screening.
- Use a strong verb to headline each action. Be specific. Don't just put a line in saying "write your congressman". Put the congressman's contact information down. Encourage letters to the editor (with contact info). Point out crucial City Commission meeting dates. Show them businesses they can support that also support the cause. Explain how the actions you've presented will make a measurable difference, if needed. Consider solutions at the personal, group, city, and national levels.
The easier and more direct you can make your action ideas, the more likely people will do it.
- Encourage people to get involved with any local groups that have dedicated themselves to working on the specific issue featured in the film. These film screenings are a great way to help connect the public with existing groups that are already working on these issues. Provide details on their next meeting date and other contact info, if possible, in addition to their website.
- Keep it well organized and easy to read.

AT THE EVENT

Hand people the program flyer you prepared as people show up.

Have clipboards with sign-up sheets and pens available so that people can write down their emails for the FFA newsletter (if the screening is small you

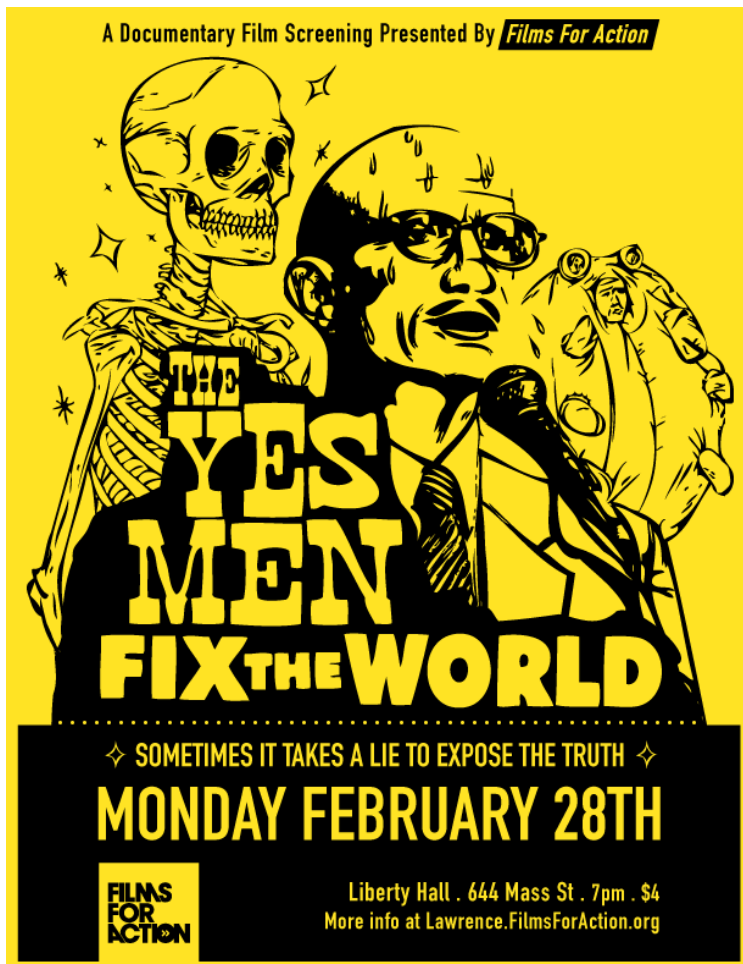


can pass it around after the film is over).

Have someone comfortable with public speaking introduce the event and the film. If no one volunteers, guess this means you! :)

A few things you'll usually want to say:

- Ask everyone how they're doing and see if you can get some early applause/shouts/response to get people loosened up.
- Say who you are.
- Thank everyone for coming.
- Why you're excited to show this particular film, tying this into our core message stressing the importance of covering issues that are under-represented by the mainstream press.
- Thank any co-sponsors or financial sponsors for their help or involvement.
- Occasionally consider giving a shout out to a member of the group that's been doing great work and thank them publicly. (Or you can mention the other people in the group that the audience doesn't typically see and just mention how their help makes what we do possible.)
- Mention that there will be a Q&A or a discussion afterwards (larger crowds lend themselves to Q&A's or where people simply take turns making comments, with potentially a brief remark from the moderator) where smaller crowds are great for discussions).
- That's all and we hope you enjoy the film!



After the film ends, come back up to the stage quickly and let people know you're going to get a Q&A going quickly. Before you start, this is a good time to mention the interactivity of the website, and encourage folks to get involved with your chapter. Have the date of your next chapter meeting planned and coming up soon so you can attract new members while enthusiasm is high.

Encourage people to join the site and to contribute great videos, headlines, original articles, or actions they've found or thought of.

You can also encourage people to continue the discussion on the website, via the local blog post for the film event.

A few other tips:

Get yourself psyched up and start off with some big enthusiastic energy. Try not to be nervous, even if it's a big crowd as they're happy to be at this community event and want you to do well. You may be surprised how easy it is to get a positive response from what you're saying if it's a big crowd. Just stay up beat overall, fluctuate from energetic to a more "in all seriousness" tone, and remember... like a surfer rides a wave.

Bring a cue card with brief 3-5 word reminders for what you want to say. We can almost guarantee you will forget some things if you just wing it!

We'd recommend not typing out an intro as these can easily come off stiff and it's best to learn a more informal speaking style over the long term anyhow.

Sample Opener:

Hello, how's everyone doing tonight! It's so great to see everyone here! (wait for any applause/response to die down).

Well, my name is Tim Hjersted. I'm one of the coordinators for the Films For Action project here in Lawrence. Thank you all for coming. We're excited to be bringing this film to town. Like all of the films we pick, we aim to provide information and perspectives on issues that are often neglected or under-represented in the mainstream press. After the film we'll be mentioning a few ways you can take action on the issues presented in the film, and ways you can get involved with our group.

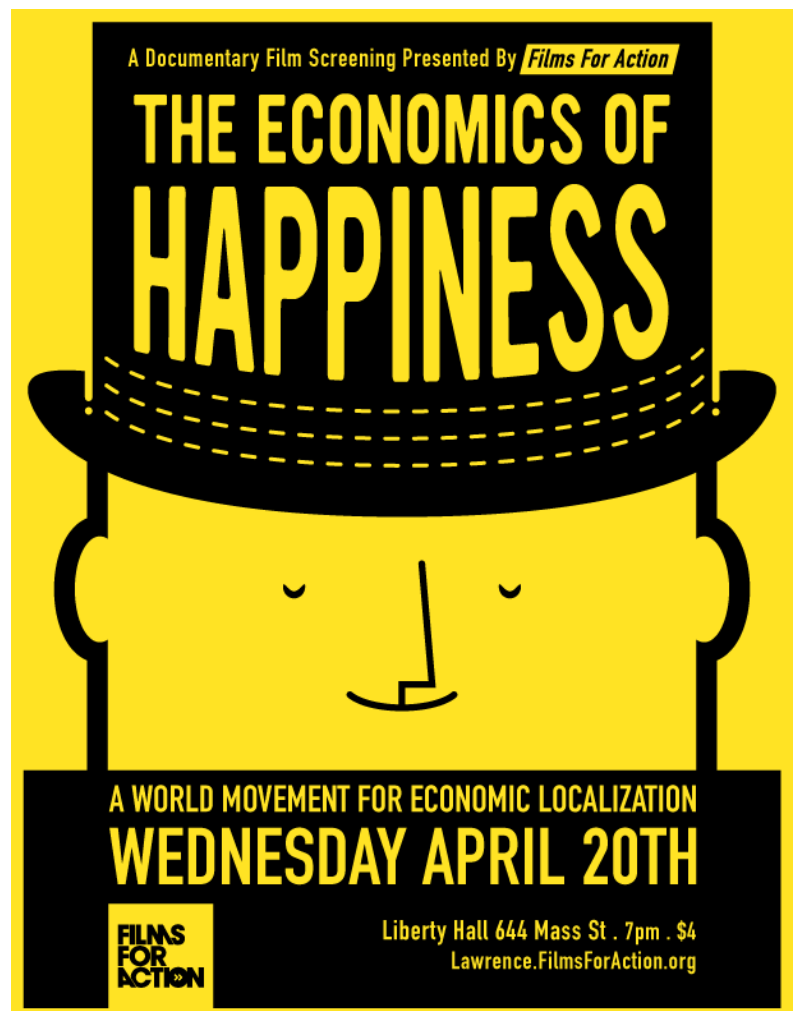
Before we get the film going, I'd just like to thank our sponsor, (local business) for helping to cover some of the expenses of the event. It's really a great help, so show'em some love if you can. We'll be hosting a discussion afterwards so keep your comments and questions in mind for after the film. With that said, thanks again for coming and we hope you enjoy the film!

AFTER THE EVENT

If the group is feeling hungry, go out to eat and celebrate with the group. Thank everyone who helped with the promotion and organizing of the screening.

Start thinking and discussing with the group what film you want to screen next. Reflect on what went well and what could be done better next time.

Add the new email contacts you got from the Newsletter sign-up sheet and email your newsletter subscribers with a digital version of the action guide, with additional links or videos and potentially details on your next event.



APPENDIX

A few more thoughts on the Films Selection Process

When you pick a film, make sure you are aware of its strengths and weaknesses. Some films have great information, but are lacking on the presentation side. Others might have a slick presentation, but might rely too heavily on questionable facts and disingenuous arguments. While you rarely get a film that's perfect, you have to remember that you are now, in some aspects, a gatekeeper of information, and your ability to keep people coming back for more relies completely on your credibility.

Of course this sounds like pretty common sense stuff, but people make the mistake of forgetting or ignoring these rules all the time and it always ends up biting them in the ass.



The whole point of showing these films is to expose people to new and valid information that both engages and provokes. So be diligent. Don't pick films that will only play to the choir. This goes for both the factual, and aesthetic parts of the film.

Often times we find ourselves mostly dealing with like-minded people when it comes to philosophies, politics, and social issues. This is especially the case for political activists. As a result-- it's easy to be so completely dedicated to a cause that any film supporting your ideas on the subject can become completely enthralling to you and your immediate friends. Remember that not everyone feels the same way yet, and many people are turned off by new ideas if they're not presented in a familiar way. So in short: Don't pick films that are boring, and don't pick films that look cheap, amateurish, or are too sensational.

Secondly, if you see a film that really moves you--be critical and play devil's advocate as much as possible. Do some heavy research and find out if the facts are correct--don't take anything for granted. Find out what you can about the filmmaker and the people interviewed and make sure they're reliable. You have to realize that sometimes, a filmmaker can have fits of slight dishonesty or bias to try to prove their overall thesis (even the

ones we ultimately agree with). If the film has major sections that aren't credible, and it's easily proved that it's not credible-- then the film's topic becomes quickly dismissible for those who are being exposed to it for the first time.

Hopefully it goes without saying that we don't want to be a part of deceiving people, so if there are a few fudged facts that you're aware of, write them down. If the list isn't too long and you decide to show the film despite the flaws, be upfront with distributing the film's mistakes with a personal note in the program you distribute at the screening.

A perfect example is the flawed, but popular Loose Change: 2nd Edition. This film had some major issues with it, but it also contained a good deal of accurate information as well. You can see how we handled this film via our Program Handout. Screening this film doubled as an exercise in media literacy, as we encouraged attendees to go to [a website that had painstakingly reviewed every point the film made, pointing out what it got right, and what it got wrong](#). Encouraging excellent media literacy skills is another thing we're personally adamant about, so the exercise provided a great way to show how a critical but open minded approach to all media is essential, whether it is from mainstream or alternative sources.

If the film passes the fact and presentation tests, ask yourself one final question: Is the film's subject matter something the audience can take action on? Political documentaries that are well produced and factual, often times leave the audience with a feeling of uneasiness or anger. If there is no channel to direct this energy, it festers and becomes cynicism. The great power of showing an action-oriented film to a large audience is that afterwards, its members feed off each other's energy and are much more willing and likely to take immediate action. Use this to your advantage by crafting excellent action guides to accompany the screening, and people will be motivated to take their post-screening energy beyond the theater. Plus, as people start to feel some tangible results from these screenings and campaigns, this will only build further positive momentum and eventually the project will be able to expand its impact city wide.

Other Thoughts

1 month:

You've already heard it, but just to reiterate... 1 month is the magic number when it comes to local marketing. We can't stress this enough. Any longer and people forget. Any shorter and the local media can't pick up on it in time. 1 month-- stick to it.

Political Affiliations

Other groups or people within the group may want to leave literature at the table during the screening. We encourage using the table space to feature literature about or for other sustainability/justice groups. However, it's important that your chapter doesn't promote literature that advocates political parties or politicians. As an independent news organization, it's crucial to our credibility that we remain non-partisan. This is also true when considering co-sponsorship of events, by only affiliating with other non-partisan groups.



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