

How to Organize a Film Screening

Synopsis

Film screenings and film festivals are a valuable tool for raising community awareness about energy, environmental and other issues related to Transition.

Film screening and festivals are especially effective if participants are given the opportunity to discuss the film after the showing. These types of events are a great opportunity to increase community knowledge and advocacy and to raise funds for sponsoring groups. They can also be valuable opportunities to spur discussion about local issues, announce and promote local projects and organizations, and even raise fund for sponsoring groups.

Roles

If your community does not already have an organization involved in Transition, you can conduct a community inventory by forming an ad hoc committee:

Project Coordinator(s)

Convene and facilitate the project; ensure that all necessary tasks are being done

(Co)-Sponsor(s)

Provide financial or in-kind support; may also provide name-recognition to help attract attendees or a ready audience and/or access to a venue and video projector.

Publicity

Develop and distribute promotional materials; get event(s) listed in local newspapers; makes posters, places advertisement, and contacts the participant list.

Event Staff

People at the event who promote your group and answer question/start discussions around the issues of the film. Depending on the location of your event, you may need greeters, ticket sellers, ushers, emcees, cleaners, and other support people.

Time Frame:

2 weeks to 2 months; total 6 to 20 hours of work. (2 weeks for a neighborhood open house, 2-6 months for a screening at a public venue)

Tools:

DVD or VHS player and projector, copy of film, Internet, clipboard, pen, donation container and change.

Project Outline

Process:

- 1. Choose the film and type of screening**, as small as an immediate family watching the living room television and as large as conferences and local independent theaters using a DVD projector.
- 2. Identify possible co-sponsors**, such as local environmental groups and appropriate departments at local colleges. Look for groups that have an audience, projector and/or venue.
- 3. Contact local organizations** to see whether they would like to be involved in screening the film.
- 4. Find some helpers** and delegate the remaining tasks as appropriate, endeavoring to match helpers to activities that they enjoy. Possibilities include local neighborhood group and online local community sites such as craigslist.org and indymedia.org.
- 5. Locate a venue:** homes, churches, grange halls, colleges, universities, libraries, organizations or even local theaters. Make sure that someone visits the venue with sufficient advance time that you can resolve any issues that arise.
- 6. Develop a donation/door policy** such as "Suggested donation: \$5 to \$15, nobody turned away for lack of funds." Donations after any expenses from the screening are allocated to the sponsoring organizations.

Project Outline (continued)

- 7. Promote the screening** with an e-mail and a printed flyer. Invite friends, neighbors, co-workers, acquaintances from organizations and thought leaders in your community.
- 8. Design and print handouts** about your group and/or the subject, as well as a sign-up sheet
- 9. Arrive at least 45 minutes before** the event to setup chairs, TV/projector, refreshments and the information table. When someone is available to staff the information table, put out items for sale, the donations' box, and the sign-up list. We recommend having a person actively collecting donations or entrance fees in a designated container at a table where people enter the venue.
- 10. Welcome the audience.** Before starting the film, thank people for coming and tell them the schedule for the evening (e.g., watch the film, then Q&A for 30 minutes), remind them to turn off cell phones and tell them where the rest rooms are. Pass around the sign-up list, preferably on a clipboard with a string attached.
- 11. Have a discussion after the screening.** If you are not having a presenter or question and answer session after the film, invite people to discuss the film in small groups. After the discussion or Q&A, thank everybody for coming.
- 12. Follow up.** E-mail the people that sign up on the list, thanking them for coming to the screening and indicate what local groups are doing and how to get involved.

General Guidelines

Screening a film can be as simple as a hosting a neighborhood potluck and movie night, or as big as organizing an advertised run at a local movie theater. No matter what the size, however, a screening is a valuable opportunity to expose people to ideas and get them engaged in future Transition projects.

These tips apply to screenings of any size:

- **Choosing the best film:** Especially if you are screening a film publicly, do a little research about recent and upcoming films, issues and events in your community. You may want to favor a film that relates to a related issue or event in your community, and avoid a film that has already been shown or will be shown soon.
- **Setting up the film the best way:** Who do you want to attend the film? Who else would be interested in it? It takes a lot more than an email or a newspaper listing to get people to see a film they've never heard of before. For a small screening, announce your screening through flyers at local stores, through the neighborhood newsletter, and through local organizations. If you're holding a public screening, purchase advertising in local media outlets, ask your local newspaper to run a review, and get co-sponsors on board to promote the screening to their constituencies.
- **Finding Co-sponsors:** When contacting other local groups and organizations, let them know that it can be a fundraiser for their organization, as well as an opportunity to discuss their cause in the context of building community resilience. Ask them whether they could help promote, setup, provide a venue and audio-video equipment and participate during the screening and the cleanup.
- **Advertising the screening a lot, and well in advance:** You really can't over-promote a local film screening. Remind people about the screening via advertising, flyers and mailing list announcements for weeks ahead of the event. If you're screening the film at movie theater, you may need to act months in advance to get listed on a published schedule.

General Guidelines (continued)

You can also post announcements on online sites such as craigslist.org, tribe.net, indymedia.org, and <http://oilawareness.meetup.com>.

- **Using the screening to its full advantage:** Before and after the screening you can tell attendees about a local issue or organization, collect contact information and donations, and even host a discussion about the issues in the film. The more structured your event will be, the more important it is to have an engaging emcee so attendees know what's going on and want to stick around.

Creating an opportunity for discussion

After the film, ask people to separate into small groups by neighborhood, community or geography (or just by grouping those nearest) such that each group has from 3 to 8 people; help bashful people by separating them into natural groups. Ask them to talk about their reactions to the film using the following questions as a guide:

- To what extent will our community be affected?
- What Transition Initiatives are already working on related issues (e.g., local food, local energy, local money, water, transport, and green building)?
- What more could be done in our community and by municipal government to prepare for a energy constrained future?

They should use 5 to 7 minutes for each question, and one person from the group should be prepared to report to the larger group after about 30 minutes discussion. The facilitator can comment and lead the discussion. Alternatively, the groups can report after each question.

These logistical tips will vary depending on the size of your event:

- **Smaller venue:** For a smaller screening, you should be able to find a serviceable venue for cheap or even for free: schools, libraries, community centers, community organizations, places of worship, and even some restaurants, bars and cafes may have large meeting spaces available to the public. Be sure to visit the venue in person and determine logistical details like accessibility, availability of screen and chairs, permission to sell tickets and merchandise, and even the location of electrical outlets before deciding.
- **Larger venue:** Local independent theaters are often interested in screening issue-oriented films if they think there's an audience for them. Plus, simply holding your screening at a movie theatre automatically gives your event some legitimacy and publicity. With a larger venue you will have to deal with higher venue costs, higher advertising costs, possible permission issues, so plan ahead and start contacting theaters as early possible. You may also need to have a registered co-sponsor for insurance purposes.
- **Tickets/Donations:** Many community film screenings suggest a donation at the door but do not turn people away for lack of funds; this will depend on the needs of your budget and any co-sponsors.

Resources

The End of Suburbia: Oil Depletion and the Collapse of the American Dream - www.endofsuburbia.com

Escape from Suburbia: Beyond the American Dream - www.escapefromsuburbia.com

The Power of Community: How Cuba Survived Peak Oil - www.communitysolution.org/cuba.html

Independent America: The Two-Lane Search for Mom & Pop - www.independentamerica.net

The Future of Food: www.thefutureoffood.com

For more film screening suggestions, browse resources at www.transitionus.org.

TRANSITION UNITED STATES **www.transitionus.org**

Tackling Climate Change and Peak Oil. Bringing the Head, Heart and Hands of Communities together to make the transition to life beyond oil.

Transition United States is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization whose mission is to catalyze, inspire, encourage, network, support and train communities throughout the U.S. as they consider, adopt, adapt and implement Transition Initiatives.

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