

How to Organize A Film Screening

Thanks to Whispered Media for compiling this screening planner. For more useful media

activism resources, visit the Video Activist Network (VAN) website. (<http://www.videoactivism.org/>)

BEFORE YOU SCHEDULE THE EVENT

Try to allow a minimum of three weeks to schedule and organize a screening. Determine the event name and write a one-paragraph description of it. This will focus your thoughts.

Consider the following: Who will your audience be - the general public or a specific community? Will there be other entertainment (music, poetry, dance, etc.) or speakers? What group(s) will present material at this show? (Establish a contact person for each group involved.) Who gets the money? Is this a benefit for another group? Many venues will take half the door receipts. What will you do with the money you raise?

Contact all groups involved and establish a minimum of commitment required for everyone involved to be able to pull off the show. Don't plan too much. Always allow at least an hour for set-up and an hour for clean-up.

Who will be the Host or Master of Ceremonies (MC)? What can she ask people to support or do after they leave your show? Get flyers and fact sheets for upcoming events and related issues to hand out to people as they come in, to pass around during the MC's intros, or to simply have available at a literature table. Do you want to do a fundraising pitch or hand out donation envelopes? Be careful about scheduling too many announcements for other events- those can go on forever.

SCHEDULING THE SHOW

Where will you have the screening? Think about the number of seats you want to fill or can realistically fill. Is there a screen and a video projector and sound system? If a film is only available on video, theaters with film projectors only may not be able to accommodate a screening. Does the venue provide people to help with video projection, set-up, and clean up, or will it all be DIY? Will the venue charge for use of the space or let you have the space for free? Is the venue in a convenient location for the audiences you want to attract? Schedule the venue for a realistic period of time- if the event itself is two hours, book the venue with enough time on either side of the event for set-up and clean-up, and don't expect to start right on time.

Talk with the Artistic Director or some other point person at the venue who is in charge of scheduling. It may take months in advance to get a slot and to be included on the venue's calendar, their advertising, and other outreach. Or you might not care so much about that (although good advertising greatly improves attendance) and can negotiate for a show on an off-night when they have nothing scheduled.

Determine the due date for submitting a description of the show for use in the venue's calendar and/or on their website, if they have these resources. Include at least one compelling graphic that describes the show or issues involved.

3 WEEKS BEFORE SCREENING

Write a Press Release.

Design your own, or download the press kit from www.corrugate.org.

Send the press release to local media. Be sure to include your suggested donation amount for admission, show times, and location. (we always say "No one turned away for lack of funds," and we mean it). You can also say something like "Sliding Scale, \$5-50." Some calendars want to know if the venue is Handicapped Accessible, or other details. You might also want to suggest to the local media that your screening might qualify for coverage by linking it to recent or upcoming political actions or events.

Get Reviews. Find out who in the local media would be likely to write a favorable review of the video. Make sure you give them plenty of time, by sending them a copy of the video at least three weeks ahead of time.

Get on the radio. Contact public, community, and university radio stations to get an interview on the radio about the video and the screening event.

Make Internet and e-mail postings: Build an email list of interested people and organizations if you do regular screenings. Send notices to as many like-minded local organizations and email lists as you can find. Email publicity is easy and cheap. But think about the audiences you want to reach and whether or not they are likely to be using email as a regular form of communication.

Discuss serving refreshments. Solicit local vendors for food and drink donations. Make invitations to groups who might have appropriate tabling material available. Find out if you need to have a table or space made available for them.

2 WEEKS BEFORE THE SCREENING

Design a flyer and posters. Or download publicity materials from www.corrugate.org.

Fax or post flyers at local organizations and non-profits that would support the event and begin postering the town or neighborhood the event will screen in.

ONE WEEK BEFORE THE SCREENING

Finalize the show. Check tapes / DVDs for audio and video problems. Make sure the video projector and sound system are working and that you know how to operate them. Write notes for the MC, including list of who is speaking and who produced the videos.

Confirm times and responsibilities with people involved in the screening. Who runs the projector? Who collects admission? Who will keep track of the money and make sure it is in a safe place at all times? Who will sell videos? Give them the basic schedule of the night and remind them to show up 45-60 minutes before the show to help set up (depending on how much they are involved). Determine who will stay to help clean up and gather your materials.

Begin saturation flyering. Focus on coffee shops, cafes, bookstores, community centers and health food stores. Telephone poles and walls are okay, but get pulled down or covered up quickly. You should check them daily for replacement.

Phone calls: call your friends, activists, everyone you know to remind them about the show. This works. Make a follow up call to your local media contact if this is truly a newsworthy event.

SHOW TIME

Set up one hour (minimum) before show. Check that all video and audio equipment is set up. Cue tapes. Set up tabling materials and/or refreshments. Make sure you have a sign-up sheet for people attending the event, so you can contact them for future events.

Audience usually begins arriving 15 -30 minutes before show time and often for 30 minutes after. Figure on starting show about 10 - 20 minutes after scheduled time.