

# Why FUND Media

Stories from the Field



**COUNCIL ON FOUNDATIONS**

## Mission

The Council on Foundations is a membership organization that serves the public good by promoting and enhancing responsible and effective philanthropy.

## Vision

In an environment of unprecedented change and potential, the Council on Foundations in the twenty-first century supports philanthropy worldwide by serving as

**A trusted leader:** Promoting the highest values, principles and practices to ensure accountability and effectiveness in philanthropy.

**An effective advocate:** Communicating and promoting the interests, value and contributions of philanthropy.

**A valued resource:** Supporting learning, open dialog and information exchange about and for philanthropy.

**A respectful partner:** Collaborating within a network of philanthropic and other organizations working to promote responsible and effective philanthropy.

## Statement of Inclusiveness

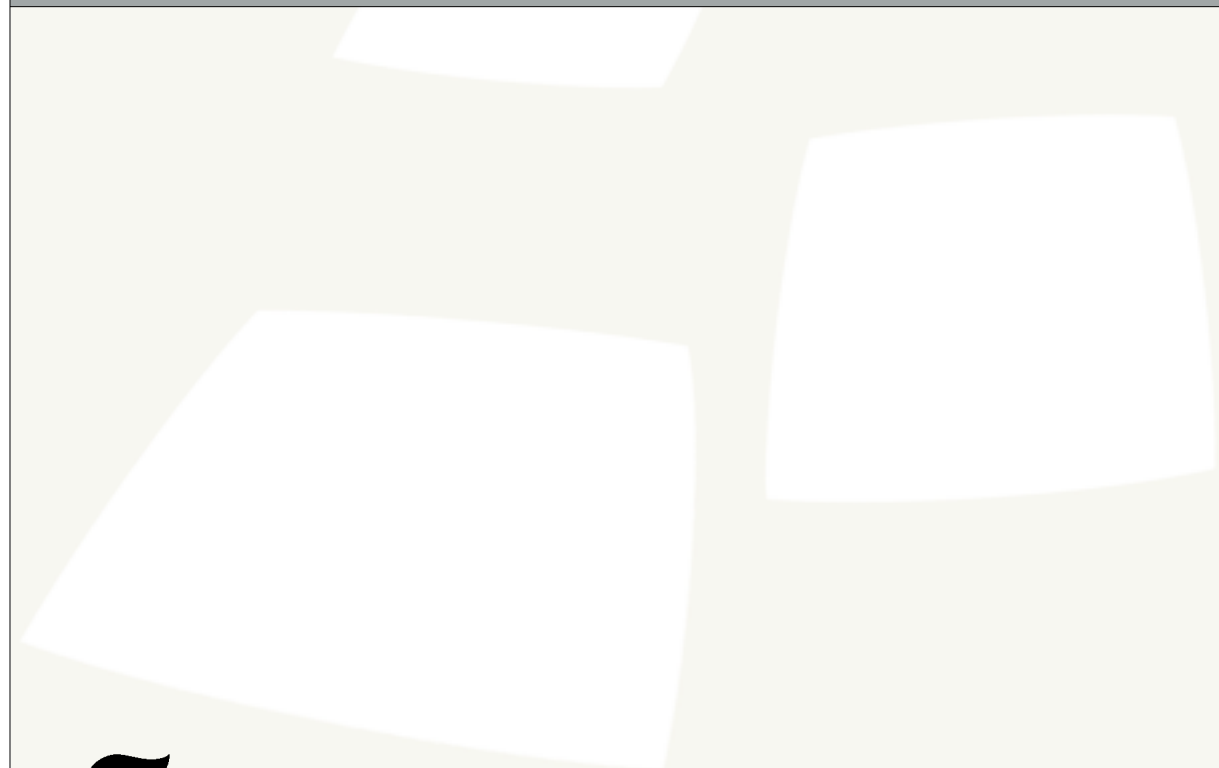
The Council on Foundations was formed to promote responsible and effective philanthropy. The mission requires a commitment to inclusiveness as a fundamental operating principle and calls for an active and ongoing process that affirms human diversity in its many forms, encompassing but not limited to ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, economic circumstance, disability and philosophy.

We seek diversity in order to ensure that a range of perspectives, opinions and experiences are recognized and acted upon in achieving the Council's mission. The Council also asks members to make a similar commitment to inclusiveness in order to better enhance their abilities to contribute to the common good of our changing society.

## Why FUND Media



## Stories from the Field



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Council on Foundations

1828 L Street, NW, Suite 300

Washington, DC 20036-5160

202/466-6512

www.cof.org

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Karen Hirsch  
Editor

April 2002

# Foreword



The Council on Foundations has long recognized the vital relationship between media and philanthropy. For 35 years, we have promoted and celebrated projects representing excellence in both fields.

The most visible example of this work has been our sponsorship of the Film & Video Festival, a showcase for outstanding media projects supported by foundation grants, highlighting ways film and video can be used to achieve grantmakers' program goals. From its inception, the festival has been allied with Grantmakers in Film and Electronic Media (GFEM), an affinity group of the Council, which provides a forum for grantmakers to discuss trends, changes, possibilities and successes in funding media.

In 1984, the Council published a report titled *How to Fund Media*. There have been many changes in technology and the opportunities to use media in the 18 years that followed, so it was time to revisit the subject. The results are this book and its companion Web site, located at [www.fundfilm.org](http://www.fundfilm.org).

In this book, the Council and GFEM have created a resource not only for grantmakers, but also for media grant-seekers, especially independent producers who often must make a case for funding. For them, this book offers insight into some of the issues that drive foundation decisionmaking.

The case studies in this book offer a glimpse of what is possible with media grantmaking. Recognizing how our world is shaped by the media, and how it rapidly is being re-shaped by new media, the Council and GFEM will continue to help grantmakers fulfill their media goals and develop the full potential of media now and in the future.

Dorothy S. Ridings  
President and CEO  
Council on Foundations  
April 2002

## Why Fund Media

by Karen Hirsch

There is little doubt that media—film, television, radio and the Internet—are central communication tools of our time. An average American adult views nearly sixty films a year, listens to the radio sixty hours per month, spends roughly ten hours a week on the Web, and watches television more than four hours a day. Combined that comes to about four full months a year. Yet, despite the degree to which media shapes our daily lives, culture, politics and society, most foundations do not fund it.



The making of *Downside UP*, a film by Nancy Kelly.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL LAVIN FLOWER

Why? After all, the business of disseminating ideas is essential to the philanthropic community, and every foundation has communication goals. Why wouldn't every foundation want to invest in the most powerful communication resources available? Joan Shigekawa, associate director of the Creativity and Culture Program of The Rockefeller Foundation, puts the question this way: "Throughout the twentieth century, media has been one of the dominant creative expressions in American culture. Rather than 'why fund media' . . . [the question] would be, 'why *not* fund media?'"

Foundations offer plenty of reasons. Some are based on widespread misconceptions. Others are real challenges. The goal of this report is to dispel myths, examine obstacles, offer a few solutions, and share some successes. Our hope is that

foundations that routinely declare in their guidelines "we don't fund media" might reconsider their position after reading this report.

The word "media" applies to a vast array of forms. We are here examining independent media, i.e., media created by producers and artists who work outside corporate or commercial structures. These producers are not employees of television radio stations, Hollywood studios, or AOL. They are not creating works on commission or assignment. By its very nature, "independent media" generates stories that would otherwise go untold and gives voice to perspectives otherwise absent. It pushes the boundaries of art, and it can also be wielded as a tool for social change.

In the pages that follow, we present seven case studies. These stories are told from dual perspectives—that of the mediamaker and that of the foundations that supported

"Rather than 'why fund media'... [the question] would be, 'why *not* fund media?'"

—Joan Shigekawa, associate director of the Creativity and Culture Program of The Rockefeller Foundation

Karen Hirsch is a writer and filmmaker who has specialized in the strategic use of media by nonprofits for the past 14 years.

their projects. It was our intention to get *inside* the media-funding process. We hope these stories will help grantmakers see the incredible potential of media funding, provide grantseekers with insight into how foundations choose projects, and enable both parties to better understand one another.

The case studies reflect a wide variety of funding interests. Some of the program officers interviewed in these pages manage funds allocated for media, but most do not. Program goals among these nontraditional media funders run the gamut from environmental protection to nonprofit capacity building, from job training to community development, from urban renewal to the arts.

“We’re beginning to see a much wider nonprofit organizational commitment to media as a modality of organizing and community engagement,” says John Santos of The Ford Foundation, which awards grants for media projects not only through its Media, Arts and Culture Program but also through its two additional programs—Peace & Social Justice and Asset Building & Community Development.

Before we turn to our case studies to demonstrate the many reasons to fund media, let us look at the most common reasons foundations give for not funding media. These are roadblocks that have become entrenched over decades, but they can be overcome, if you know how.

**ROAD BLOCK**  
NO. 1

**Sticker Shock**

The most common reason for not funding media is sticker shock. When funders think of a documentary, they generally think of what they’re most familiar with—something produced for television. A typical PBS documentary can cost several hundred thousand dollars per hour for production alone. Outreach and promotion can easily add hundreds of thousands of dollars to the project cost. It can be difficult for a foundation to consider these numbers when the same dollars could cover the operating budget for a medium-sized nonprofit for an entire year.

What are the remedies for sticker shock? How do the foundations that fund documentary productions, even small foundations, address this concern?

Broaden the Definition of Media. “Media” does not have to equal “million-dollar documentary for PBS.” One of our primary goals in this report is to offer an expanded definition of media. Other highly effective media formats often have project budgets under \$50,000, such as activist videos (see Chapter 3), radio documentaries (see Chapter 4), and youth-produced media projects (see Chapter 8).

Compare Like and Like. Grantmakers should resist the inclination to compare a documentary budget to the operating budget of a nonprofit. Rather, compare one documentary budget to another. More specifically, look at budgets for similar projects, and compare public television documentaries to other public television documentaries, or activist videos to other activist videos. (Visit the Council on Foundations Film & Video Festival



Small and significant seed grants under \$5,000 have launched influential documentaries like Ellen Bruno’s *Sacrifice*, which examines the social, cultural, and economic forces at work in the trafficking of Burmese girls into prostitution in Thailand.

Web site—[www.fundfilm.org](http://www.fundfilm.org)—for information on “How to Read a Budget” and other resources.)

Consider Small Grants. Just because a production budget might be \$150,000 or more does not mean a foundation cannot make a small and significant grant. In Chapter 6, documentary filmmaker Arthur Dong (*Licensed to Kill*) and several program officers who support his films discuss the importance of small

grants, even for amounts under \$10,000. In Chapter 5, we explore how seed grants under \$5,000 have launched influential documentaries like Allie Light and Irving Saraf’s *Dialogues with Madwomen*, which won the Freedom of Expression Award at the Sundance Film Festival and was broadcast on PBS’s *P.O.V.*, and Ellen Bruno’s *Sacrifice*, another Sundance and *P.O.V.* screener, which brought international attention to the issue of child prostitution.

**ROAD BLOCK**  
NO. 2

**Media Gatekeepers**

A second and very real concern is about media gatekeepers and distribution. Foundations fear that media projects they fund

Work Around the Gatekeepers. Many mediamakers intend for their projects to be “picked up” or acquired by national broadcasters. But this does not always happen. As a result, independent mediamakers have developed ways to ensure distribution of their productions without the help of national broadcasters or “gatekeepers.” For example, even the films supported by the Independent Television Service (ITVS), which funds independent productions for broadcast on public television, are not guaranteed national airdates from PBS unless accepted by PBS’s Green Light Committee. That’s why ITVS has a division to promote its films station by station, often securing hundreds of airdates in this manner. Industrious independent filmmakers have been known to do the same.

The Internet is beginning to offer opportunities to distribute media content from point to point rather than going through a central channel. In Chapter 4, we discuss [www.radioexchange.org](http://www.radioexchange.org), a collaboration between The Station Resource Group (an organization of leading public radio stations) and Atlantic Public Media that will distribute radio documentaries directly to radio stations, circumventing National Public Radio.

Invest in Community-Based Distribution. While broadcast is an important and worthy goal, some of the most important work a film or video can do is not on the airwaves but on the ground. In Chapters 3, 6 and 7 we examine collaborations between filmmakers and nonprofit organizations in which film and video greatly expanded the scope and impact of nonprofit campaigns. When integrally connected to the efforts of nonprofit organizations and coalitions, a film or video can be *the* resource that sways the feelings of a community or gains the attention of Congress. In these chapters, we see how targeted screenings to audiences dealing with the issue at hand are as important in the life of a social-issue film as securing an airdate.

**ROAD BLOCK**  
NO. 3

**Risk in Funding Individuals**

Then there is the apocryphal tale of “The Filmmaker Who Ran Away With the Money.” There is an abiding reservation about funding individuals, and numerous foundations simply do not do it. How do foundations that invest in media overcome apprehensions about funding individual artists?

Support Intermediaries. Many foundations choose to support intermediary nonprofits that serve independent mediamakers. This can be a way of supporting individual projects or a way to invest in the field. Most independent media projects have a fiscal sponsor, i.e., a tax-exempt nonprofit that is the umbrella organization for the project. Through these partnerships, foundations can make their grants to organizations and not individuals.

Foundations also make contributions to organizations serving the independent media field. These organizations run the gamut from large, high-visibility organizations like Robert Redford’s Sundance Institute to smaller organizations that serve mediamakers working in a particular community or medium. In Chapter 5, we highlight the vital role of nonprofit organizations like Film Arts Foundation and National Alliance of Media Arts and Culture (NAMAC).

Take the Plunge. Making grants to individuals is not as complicated as it might seem. In Chapter 2, we hear from foundations that do award grants to individual artists, and we discuss the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) requirements for doing so.

**ROAD BLOCK**  
**NO. 4** What Is the Value?

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to media funding is that foundations do not see the value. In the pages that follow, program officers articulate the unique benefits of funding media from the foundation’s perspective.

Stories with Impact. More than any other resource, media brings home the reality behind social issues in a visceral way. It is far more likely that audiences will remember a compelling television documentary or radio segment than the details of a print report. As Joy Moore of The Annie E. Casey Foundation says in the sidebar on page 47, “There are always going to be reports and traditional ways to get the story out. Media gets it to a broader audience and can employ techniques that a report can’t. It can provide a face to the statistics.” As our case studies show, great storytelling through media gives foundations the opportunity to

capture the attention of general audiences, legislators and other media outlets.

Nonprofit Capacity Building. Foundations are discovering the power of media as a tool for nonprofit capacity building—that is, to help nonprofit organizations expand their reach and impact. In Chapter 3, we profile Green Fire Productions, a nonprofit that exclusively produces strategic videos for environmental and social justice organizations. Of a Green Fire video, Kathy Crist, a national field organizer working to protect the Snake and Columbia rivers,

“Media gets [the story] to a broader audience and can employ techniques that a report can’t. It can provide a face to the statistics.”

— Joy Moore,  
 manager of grantee relations  
 The Annie E. Casey Foundation

The making of *Peace of Mind*,  
 a project of Global Action Project,  
 which was produced by  
 Israeli and Palestinian youth  
 and broadcast around the world.

says, “More than any other resource, [the video] helped us nationalize the issue with the public, Congress, and the media.”

In Chapters 6 and 7, program officers discuss investments in documentaries that have been used as sustained grassroots organizing and educational tools. Hilary Goodrich, program director with the Fund for a Just Society, an organization that usually funds small grassroots organizing efforts, attests, “You can’t just say that because it’s a film, it doesn’t have the potential to be incredibly valuable as part of an ongoing organizing strategy. The films that we fund are few and far between, but we’ve been really gratified by the results.”

Supporting the Future of the Arts. Most foundations committed to the arts have traditionally excluded media as a funding area, but that seems to be changing. Merrill Lynch provided major support for the retrospective of video artist Nam June Paik that took over the Guggenheim Museum in New York City in 2000. In Chapter 2, Anita Contini of Merrill Lynch says, “[Media] is an important art form to support . . . as important as supporting any of the visual or performing arts.” Jean Gagnon, president of The Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science and Technology, believes it is incumbent on all foundations to support cutting-edge

While broadcast is an important and worthy goal, some of the most important work a film or video can do is not on the airwaves but on the ground.



work. “Given the fact that new technologies are becoming increasingly dominant in society as a whole,” he says, “it is crucial for private foundations or those involved in philanthropy to be able to grasp that phenomenon.”

Reaching Today’s Youth. One area of tremendous growth in recent years has been youth-produced media (see Chapter 8). Robert Sherman, who funds youth media through the Surdna Foundation’s Effective Citizenry program, says, “The absence of the voices of young people is a glaring hole in democratic dialogue.” Erlin Ibreak, director of the Youth Initiatives Program of the Open Society Institute, says, “[Young people] are producing images we’ve never seen before and stories we haven’t heard until now. And they are

deconstructing the mass media and its effect on them, really taking hold of something that has a powerful—and often negative—impact on their lives. It’s been really exciting to learn about this field and get involved in it.”

Working together, producers, nonprofit organizations, presenters and funders are unleashing the power of media. They are realizing its potential as a tool for community mobilization and grassroots organizing, as an empowering expression for today’s youth, and as an art form. It is our belief that for every foundation there are media productions that can further its organizational goals. Our hope is that this report will help grantmakers and grantseekers find those matches.

## The Coming of Age of Media as Art

by Jim Hubbard

For artists working in media and for curators who regularly program their work, the funding of artistic expressions in media remains absolutely crucial to our culture. As John Hanhardt, senior curator of Film and Media Arts at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, asserts, “If one is not supporting film and the media arts, then one is not supporting the leading edge of transformation of our culture.”

Nam June Paik at work in 2000.

PHOTO BY DAVID HEALD  
© THE SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM  
FOUNDATION, NEW YORK



Nevertheless, many funders cannot understand the need for funding media-based art. Inundated by hugely expensive and highly profitable Hollywood movies, bombarded by the inanities of commercial television, they are unaware of the urgent need to fund the wonderful artistic expressions using film, video and new media that find viewers in film showcases, museums and galleries. “They cannot figure out why and how a nonprofit mentality would even enter into the media equation. They can’t imagine that people need money, because they see it as a place where you can make millions,” explains Cynthia Gehrig, president of the Jerome Foundation.

At least since the 1920s, artists have been exploring various imaginative uses of film. Utilizing surrealistic techniques to explode narrative, painting directly on film, creating abstract animation, and revealing the physical and psychological underpinnings of film outside the language of Hollywood, artists have created an alternative art history. Beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the introduction of the PortaPak (the first portable and affordable video camera) video artists began to realize the possibilities of the medium outside the half-

hour, commercial-interrupted norm of broadcast television. In the past decade, adventurous media artists have employed computers to make new images and to explore the possibility of interactivity in forging art forms that are utterly unlike anything known before.

These endeavors—video art, experimental film, innovative narrative films and new media art—deserve support because they create something original and thought-

provoking. These art forms change our world, making it a more complex and exciting place. They allow us to see ourselves in an entirely new light. Joan Shigekawa of The Rockefeller Foundation, which is one of the world’s major funders of media art, elucidates: “Throughout the twentieth century, media has been one of the dominant creative expressions in American culture. Rather than why fund media—to the extent that we fund the creative community in the country—it would be, why not fund media?”

### VIDEO ART: NAM JUNE PAIK

Nam June Paik has been at the leading edge of video art for almost 40 years. He is “a pioneer artist in transforming how media, video and television could be seen as a means for creative

Jim Hubbard has been making experimental films for over 25 years and has worked on the preservation of film and video for the past ten.

expression,” according to John Hanhardt, who curated the Paik retrospective that took over the entire Guggenheim Museum in 2000. The exhibition was the perfect embodiment of Hanhardt’s belief that “museums, if they are to maintain themselves as institutions fully engaged with the history and contemporary directions of our visual culture, need to embrace film and media. If they don’t, then they will become only historical institutions.”

Much of Paik’s work involves elaborate installations and complex sculptural forms utilizing numerous monitors. The retrospective was underwritten by a number of foundations, including The Bohen Foundation, which commissioned two of

Furthermore, Merrill Lynch’s support for the Paik show is seen in the larger context of supporting more traditional artistic endeavors. “Media is a very important art form,” Contini stresses. “It shows us that technology has the capacity to enrich and enhance our view of the world around us. It is an important art form to support, as important as supporting any of the visual or performing arts.”

Indeed, video art and installation using video have remade the visual arts in the last 40 years. Joan Shigekawa reminds us, “If you think about the journey traveled by video art from the late sixties until the eighties or nineties, it’s pretty fast

no more than we’ve had in our general grantmaking program.”

Even if foundations decide not to fund individuals, they can still do it indirectly. They can establish re-grant programs, or they can fund organizations with the understanding that they will hire individual artists. Gehrig states, “I think the key thing for foundations that don’t fund individuals is to realize that there are nonprofit media organizations that can accept money for programs that do benefit individual makers: regional media centers, state film boards and video activist groups. There’s a variety of nonprofit media organizations that we need to help to become more competitive applicants for grantmaking funds.”

The Jerome Foundation funds “emerging” mediamakers, which it defines as professional-level artists, early to late career, whose work is not yet substantially recognized by their peers. The directors of the foundation chose this strategy because they “always try to find a niche in the arts funding environment in which a small foundation like Jerome can make a difference.” Furthermore, Gehrig says, “It’s been a good niche for us. Overwhelming response has been for us to continue with that focus.” In addition, Jerome provides underwriting for the Museum of Modern Art to purchase a number of works funded by the foundation each year.

left: *ShePuppet*, a video by Peggy Ahwesh.



right: *Certain Women*, by Peggy Ahwesh with Bobby Abate.



*Daughters of the Dust*, a feature film by Julie Dash, funded in part by The Rockefeller Foundation.



the more spectacular new pieces. Merrill Lynch provided major funding.

Anita Contini, first vice president, senior director of Global Sponsorships, has the responsibility of connecting funding opportunities with the work Merrill Lynch is doing. Her work comes out of the marketing department and is “aligned to overall business and brand objectives.” She saw the exhibition as an opportunity to associate Merrill Lynch “with technological innovation, particularly because Nam June Paik is one of the greatest originators and innovators of contemporary multimedia art.” Beyond this, Merrill used the Paik retrospective as a chance to educate its employees about video art. They arranged visits to the museum, organized curatorial talks for employees and even brought Hanhardt in to speak to executives. Contini emphasized that “it’s not so dissimilar to what museums do when they do educational programs about their exhibitions.”

track to travel from ‘what is it?’ and ‘I don’t get it’ to the selection of video artist Bill Viola to represent the United States at the Venice Biennale in 1995.”

While no one doubts the importance of foundations supporting exhibitions, it is crucial that more foundations fund the creation of new work. Many foundations remain disinclined to fund individuals under the mistaken belief that the IRS imposes onerous conditions on such grantmaking. Foundations are required to obtain approval from the IRS before starting individual grantmaking programs. This is to prevent conflicts of interest that occurred in the past. There are many ways that foundations can get approval to make individual grants and, according to Cynthia Gehrig of the Jerome Foundation, “my strong feeling is that it is no more complicated than any other grantmaking process. In practice, ours has been very simple to administer, and we’ve had very, very few problems with it—

**EXPERIMENTAL FILM: PEGGY AHWESH**

Peggy Ahwesh has been making experimental films for more than 20 years. Her work has been shown at such places as the Museum of Modern Art in New York, The Cinematheque in San Francisco and the Rotterdam Film Festival. She started out making exquisite, idiosyncratic, personal works, often in self-processed Super-8 film, that revealed startling psychological and social truths about ordinary people. She has also made work in 16mm film and video. “I worked for many, many years . . . applying for grants and not getting them,” she says. After more than a decade of showing her uncompromising work, she received her first grant from the Jerome Foundation. “It was a huge boost to my ego, to my sense of belonging to a community of artistic workers.” As a consequence of the grant, her work became even freer: “I was always very frugal, but I allowed myself to do some experimentation because I had more money.”

**“If one is not supporting film and the media arts, then one is not supporting the leading edge of transformation of our culture.”**

— John Hanhardt, senior curator of Film and Media Arts, Guggenheim Museum

Ahwesh echoes many experimental filmmakers when she says, “I think the Jerome Foundation is a miracle and has kept us afloat . . . during the culture wars, people abandoned experimental film and I think that was really a tragedy. So the Jerome Foundation to me is really important.” As filmmaker Toni Dove explains, this commitment is doubly important because, “While the explosion of independent film has in many ways been good for smaller films, it has also put more emphasis on the commercial film and contributed to reducing the support for experimental work.

**NARRATIVE FILM: STEPHEN WINTER**

While there may be an explosion of feature-length narrative filmmaking, not all of it will find funding from investors or studios. Stephen Winter is a young filmmaker whose work represents the complexity of funding narrative work outside the mainstream. His first feature was *Chocolate Babies* (1996), a comedic fantasy about a harsh underworld where raging HIV-positive African American and Asian gay outcasts become radical AIDS activists kidnapping anti-gay politicians. Winter made the 80-minute film for about \$100,000 using loans and credit cards. Frameline, the film’s distributor, provided finishing funds and

Francisco, where Sylvester was born. I talked to surviving relatives and friends, did a lot of research and took time to do the first couple of drafts. The grant also helped legitimize the film.”

The Rockefeller Foundation is very interested in expanding the boundaries of what kinds of stories are told in cinema. It has funded such groundbreaking films as Chris Eyre and Sherman Alexie’s *Smoke Signals*, the first feature film written, directed and acted by Native Americans, and Julie Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust*, a poetic evocation of a time of transition in the culture of the Gullah, descendants of slaves living on the islands off South Carolina and Georgia.

That’s why we’re a grantmaking institution and not a cinema production company.”

**NEW MEDIA: TONI DOVE**

Toni Dove is exploring an entirely different world of narrative filmmaking. She began her career as a painter, moved on to installation, incorporating multiple slide projectors, and has been utilizing computer-based interactivity in her work for nearly a decade. She conceives of her most recent work as “movies that come off the wall and into the room with you.”

Currently, Dove is working on a piece called *Spectropia*:

those involved in philanthropy to be able to grasp that phenomenon.”

Funding this kind of vanguard work can be very difficult for foundations, but John Hanhardt, for one, believes that it is vitally important for foundations to support new media. This new world of possibilities “should not be available only to a few. It should represent a variety of cultural points of view and individual points of view. Here again, foundations can provide enriching leadership. Informed risk should take place in terms of supporting freedom of expression and possibility.”

In the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is crucial

“Given the fact that new technologies are becoming increasingly dominant in society as a whole, it is crucial for private foundations or those involved in philanthropy to be able to grasp that phenomenon.”

— Jean Gagnon, president,  
The Daniel Langlois Foundation  
for Art, Science and Technology



facing page, left:  
*Spectropia: A Ghost Story on the Infinite Deferral of Desire* by Toni Dove.

left: Toni Dove’s *Artificial Changelings* is a romance thriller about shopping.

opened the film, mostly in West Coast cities. Winter is still paying off the credit cards.

In 1997, Winter started work on *Sylvester, Mighty Real*, a film about Sylvester, the disco star, who in the 1970s was “out, flamboyant, black, gay, fabulous and extremely talented.” Winter says the film will depict “a spiritual journey from childhood to confronting AIDS in the 1980s.” *Sylvester* is budgeted at \$3.5 million. While Winter and his producer are actively seeking investors, they turned to foundations for development money. “This is a musical about a very particular time period, a chapter in gay culture that arguably hasn’t been portrayed adequately in film before. It’s about a unique black artist, and films about black artists are few and far between,” argues Winter.

In 1998, Winter received a grant from The Rockefeller Foundation. What did the grant give him? “Two years. It got me to write the screenplay. I was able to go to Los Angeles and San



Filmmaker Toni Dove began her career as a painter. She conceives of her most recent work as “movies that come off the wall and into the room with you.” Dove’s work has been supported by several foundations.

Although these films achieved a certain commercial success, that is not so important as artistic success. Joan Shigekawa explains it this way: “Foundations ask a different set of questions than for-profit investors in a film. We ask if the production will reach its intended audience. We hope that the filmmaker does not have to go in to credit card debt to finance his vision. We hope the filmmaker will be able to have health insurance. We hope that as many people see it as possible, but our net return on a supported project is that the audience engage the issue and not how much money was made on ticket sales.

*A Ghost Story on the Infinite Deferral of Desire*, “a cross between a theater piece, a movie and a video game. I think of it as a movie instrument that two players play for an audience.” *Spectropia* has been supported by numerous funding agencies including The Rockefeller Foundation, The Greenwall Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, and the New York Foundation for the Arts. The Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science and Technology also provided major funding.

The Daniel Langlois Foundation, based in Montreal, has been an important funder of new media since its founding in 1997. Jean Gagnon, the president of the foundation, believes that it is incumbent on all foundations to support leading-edge work. “I think that given the fact that new technologies are becoming increasingly dominant in society as a whole,” he says, “it is crucial for private foundations or

that all foundations that are interested in furthering and nourishing a stimulating, lively artistic culture fund artistic modes of expression in media. According to John Hanhardt, “The sustained confident attention to these media art forms is absolutely essential, and it should come from foundations, both the large ones and well-known as well as newer ones.”

Toni Dove concludes: “I think it’s incredibly important at this particular point in time especially for artists to be viewed as a cultural resource for research and that they be allowed to develop and contribute to existing media syntax. I don’t think we want game developers to be completely in control of the language. There should be a broader spectrum and one that doesn’t only have a profit goal. Artists are producing a very interesting experimental language in new technologies that could be very useful to the culture at large.”

Based in Oregon, Green Fire Productions creates videos in partnership with nonprofits. This film still of a rally to protect ancient forests is from *Ancient Forests: The Power of Place, 1994*.

## Activist Video: Expanding the Impact of Nonprofits

by Caron Atlas

Across the country, environmental, health, housing, civil rights and other community organizers recognize the power of video in our media saturated society, but in spite of cheaper equipment, the costs and skills to make quality video can seem out of their reach. A field of activist video has developed over the years to meet this need.

From the Green Fire production  
*Bringing Back the Salmon*.



Working out of nonprofit production companies and media art centers, activist mediamakers join with nonprofit partners to conceptualize, produce and distribute video as an integral part of organizing campaigns. They use the process of media making to build organizers' capacity to broaden their constituencies and catalyze change.

Green Fire Productions is an Oregon-based nonprofit production company founded in 1989 by award-winning filmmakers Karen Anspacher Meyer and Ralf Meyer. Green Fire's mission is to partner with environmental and social justice organizations to produce and distribute the communication and organizing tools needed to support conservation, sustainability and justice issues. By producing quality, short-format video programs and distributing raw footage called "b-roll" to broadcasters, Green Fire exposes injustices and makes visible innovative solutions to environmental and social problems.

Green Fire collaborates with a wide range of grassroots, statewide, regional, and national organizations including nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and progressive businesses. Green Fire is often

commissioned by these partners to make a video, with partners sharing the cost of production. Green Fire also initiates its own video projects. More than 30,000 copies of Green Fire programs are in circulation in all 50 U.S. states and in Canada, Europe, New Zealand and Australia.

For Anspacher Meyer, "Video increases environmentalists' ability to motivate people to get involved and to inspire people to care about an issue. As humans, we listen to each other's stories." Green Fire uses video to bring together the perspectives of community members, environmentalists, scientists, economists and policymakers. "It's exciting because in a lot of ways we're connecting the dots, getting groups to link with someone who might be their adversary. They get to look at their issue in a new way. They end up with a new ally."

Caron Atlas is an independent consultant who connects art, media, and culture with social change and develops creative support systems for this work.

Green Fire is respected and trusted for the integrity of its work, its flexibility, and its willingness to take the time to listen to and respond to the varied needs of their partners. One of the first things Green Fire producers do with a production partner is clarify the goals, audience, message, ideal messengers, and distribution plan for the video. They ask a series of questions whose answers provide a framework for a strategic use for the video and the basis for evaluating the impact of the work.

- What is the goal of the campaign?
- What does the organization want the video to help it accomplish?
- Who is the audience?
- What is the message that will resonate most with this audience?
- Who are people or interviewees that will most convincingly convey this information?
- What is the current outreach plan?

As part of their campaign to restore Snake River salmon, the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) and allied conservation groups working in the Pacific Northwest needed to stir up members and other conservation-minded people across the country to show support for removing dams on the Snake River. Letters needed to be written, calls made, and faxes sent to the administration, Congress and other key decisionmakers. Yet very few people across the country knew much about the issue.

The NWF national office selected Green Fire to develop and produce an advocacy-oriented program that presented the story from an environmental and ecological point of view, a perspective that had been missing from most reporting on the issue. The goal was to engage viewers in the story of Snake River salmon and introduce them to the science, economic issues, and legends surrounding the Northwest icon—and the restoration potential of dam removal. The complex issue had to be distilled and relayed in a way that was easily understood.

Kathy Crist, national field organizer for the Columbia and Snake River campaign, is struck by how the video moves

viewers by connecting them directly to the sounds and images of the Columbia and Snake Rivers. Moreover, “the interviews bring so much credibility to the campaign. It’s extremely effective to have real people telling their story.” More than 2,000 copies have been distributed nationally, with screenings held by NWF affiliates and associated nonprofit organizations and through house parties and screenings at churches and other community groups. As a result, 10,000 postcards have been sent to the administration about the issue. The video directly tied into one of the campaign’s major goals—to increase visibility of the issue nationwide. “More than any other resource, [the video] helped us nationalize the issue with the public, Congress, and the media.”

While *Bringing Back the Salmon* aimed at mobilizing environmentalists, *Taking a Second Look* targeted skeptics. A coalition of national and regional conservation organizations

and the National Park Service chose Green Fire to create a video about successful dam removal efforts that had taken place across the country. To best address the concerns of the target audience, the video features interviews with key decisionmakers including mayors, city council members, and corporate CEOs, along with engineers and concerned community members, some of whom initially opposed the dam removal but are now impressed by the results.

More than 3,000 tapes are used regularly by government agencies. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources uses the video for training and community outreach in all of its offices, and engineers use the tape to build support for projects. The video helps

people move past partisan shouting matches to a more open-minded evaluation about what is involved in dam removal.

The debate about dam removal in Collegeville Borough, Pennsylvania, was contentious, and the city council divided. However, after council members viewed the video they voted 5-0 in favor of removal. Councilwoman Terrie Stagliano reported to Scott Carney of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission

For foundations, video is an effective tool for advocacy, a means rather than an end.

Film still of the restored Milwaukee River on the one-year anniversary of the removal of Edwards Dam, from *Taking a Second Look*, by Green Fire Productions.



## Media Evaluation

Funders, along with mediamakers and their partners, are challenged to prove that media makes a difference. However, if media is embedded in organizing, as it often is in activist video, it is difficult to isolate its particular contribution to change. Video, after all, is a tool that is as effective as those who use it.

According to Charles Benton of the Benton Foundation, evaluation is “the real frontier” and the Benton Foundation has decided to devote considerable organizational time and talent to become more systematic in evaluating results and measuring change as a result of using media creatively. For Benton the classic deductive approach is limited.

An inductive approach, based on observation and description, might hold more promise. Sara Stuart, executive director of Communication for Change, also recognizes that the most effective evaluation methodology will not be a conventional one. It will need a longer time line, and involve qualitative and interpretive information as well as quantitative data. She looks to models of participatory evaluation such as those used successfully in Latin America.

To evaluate the impact of their work, Green Fire Productions returns to the goals and strategies they mutually determined with their production partners at the beginning of their work together. Green Fire’s funders approach evaluation through dialogue with these partners, who offer evidence of the number of postcards sent, new volunteers and spokespersons signed up, non-conservation venues reached, editorials written, or city council votes shifted, through strategic use of video. The Brainerd Foundation had Advisory Board member Harvey McKinnon speak with Green Fire’s nonprofit environmental partners about how Green Fire helped them succeed in their campaigns. He noted in his report that one group contact said that having Green Fire make a video for them “was the best investment we’ve made. You can show the video to anyone and they’ll identify with someone in the video.” The Wilburforce Foundation supports Green Fire because of these results, but Program Officer Denise Joines also acknowledges that media does not easily lend itself to the outcome-based evaluation favored by the foundation. It is but one tool in an advocacy toolbox.



A wild salmon negotiates a waterfall in the Umpqua River, Oregon, in this film still from the Green Fire production, *Bringing Back the Salmon*.

that there was a clear change of mind after viewing the video. Council members saw their town as part of something larger, a national movement. Said Anspacher Meyer, “when I heard this news, I got goose bumps all over. This was just the response we were hoping for while producing the tape.”

This evidence of social change helps Green Fire’s foundation funders build a case for supporting their work under their environmental and conservation guidelines. Green Fire’s work supports their goals of furthering the health of ecosystems, protecting wildlife habitats, and defending biodiversity by

building the capacity of groups working toward these ends. The foundations understand the power of media but do not fund Green Fire out of a media program or strategy. For them, video is an effective tool for advocacy, a means rather than an end.

Denise Joines of the Wilburforce Foundation explains why her foundation supports Green Fire. She describes Green Fire staff as “skilled professionals

who have not only ability, talent, and equipment to produce effective media to be used by organizers, they are also environmentalists themselves. As a nonprofit organization, they understand the needs and methodologies of nonprofit organizations.” Joines appreciates Green Fire’s “ability to tell a story so people will pay attention and display images in a way that people will want to watch. Green Fire understands the media and helps organizations use it in the most effective way.”

The Brainerd Foundation invests in “critical, cutting-edge issues in a political environment” and in giving campaigns “the tools to win.” Staff and board have become disillusioned about the tools activists bring to the foundation—videos that are spotty, ineffective, and primarily preach to the choir. Green Fire, on the other hand, provides “good product and good dissemination,” getting the video in the right hands at the right time. Still, it wasn’t easy for Program Officer Jim Owens to sell them initially to his board. What made the difference was the quality of the Green Fire’s clips and their range of approaches, including providing b-roll footage to broadcasters, a practice



regularly used by corporations. Green Fire helps balance the corporate perspective by supplying rare footage of unprotected ancient forests, recent logging of these forests, and endangered salmon spawning to media outlets including the local news, CNN and *60 Minutes*.

Turner Foundation Program Officer Douglas Stewart acknowledges that “the implicit question is, why fund this work when we have finite resources?” In the case of Green Fire, “one of the reasons we support them is because they concretely demonstrate how their video is an effective tool for advocacy . . . for example, a Green Fire tape had a direct effect on a city council decision to remove a dam.” Turner is also impressed with Green Fire’s strategic approach and the authentic quality of its partnerships.

Green Fire’s effective capacity building appeals to funders, and they are sometimes funded out of a capacity-building program area. The process of developing and using the videos helps organizers to more clearly define and focus their goals and message, determine who they need to reach, and strategize about how best to reach them. While the

cost of video can be a deterrent for funders, those that support Green Fire recognize its collaboration with a wide range of partners as both efficient and cost effective. They appreciate Green Fire’s combination of earned and contributed income, and that its prices are affordable to nonprofit partners. Funders see their support of Green Fire as a means of leveraging both a financial investment and an investment in skill building,



“We’re connecting the dots, getting groups to link with someone who might be their adversary. They get to look at their issue in a new way. They end up with a new ally.”

— Karen Anspacher Meyer, filmmaker and cofounder, Green Fire Productions

particularly when Green Fire collaborates with foundation grantees.

Green Fire nevertheless faces fundraising challenges. Fee-for-service and project support have left them unable to build their own organizational capacity. Green Fire has succeeded in shifting loyal funders from project to general support in recent years, allowing the organization to upgrade their equipment, bring editing in-house, and develop new multimedia formats. This funding makes possible the research and development of new projects, subsidizes production budgets, and helps Green Fire meet its partners’ immediate needs for footage and consulting. However, with grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$25,000, production budgets must be kept to a minimum (\$15,000–\$50,000), and Green



Fire is unable to add staff and bring its infrastructure to the next level. Green Fire, like many activist mediamakers, find it difficult to make their case with new foundations, even though it has a high rate of success once it is in the door. Anspacher Meyer attributes this to the “we don’t fund media” rule and the challenge of competing with direct services.

Funding media may not have the more directly measurable results of funding direct service but the risk can pay off enormously through a long-term ripple effect. Charles Benton, chairman of the board and trustee of the Benton Foundation, says, “media is the magnifier and multiplier.” Activist media broadens constituencies by telling compelling stories and creates a sense of place in a world decontextualized and homogenized by mass media. It shifts power through self-representation, demonstrates the human impact of policies, and holds decisionmakers accountable. For media activist Lillian Jimenez, it “provides the insights, analysis, and multiple perspectives needed for citizens to make up their own minds, something critical to a democracy.” These contributions may be challenging to measure but they are essential components of social change.

“Telling a story with images and music tied together can move people like nothing else.”

— Henry Ansbacher, executive director, The Just Media Fund

## We Just Fund Media

One innovative program devoted solely to nonprofit capacity building through the use of video is The Just Media Fund, a supporting organization of the Denver Foundation. The organization supports the production of short-format videos (5–10 minutes in length) to be used by Denver area nonprofit organizations for specific organizational goals including fundraising, volunteer recruitment, and grassroots organizing.

“Videos are very effective tools,” says Henry Ansbacher, executive director of The Just Media Fund. “It’s a way to put a site visit in a box and take it to someone’s house. A video warms up the audience and generates an emotional reaction. The presenter then turns off the VCR and calls the group to action.”

Launched with a “postage-size” announcement inviting applications at the end of 2001, The Just Media Fund received 40 applications. In the first round, The Fund will award between eight and ten grants of up to \$25,000.

The Just Media Fund is committed to high-quality productions and expects production budgets to range from \$2,000 to \$4,000 per minute. Ansbacher believes this is a worthwhile investment. “We live in a media-savvy society, and I don’t think people have a lot of tolerance

for bad video. We think video provides a way for nonprofits to leverage foundation dollars. If you make a \$20,000 grant and that helps the organization become more self-sufficient and they’re able to raise \$50,000 using the video, then that’s been helpful. And they can use it again next year.”

The Just Media Fund will provide an evaluation tool to all grantees helping them track how many people saw the video, and whether the video achieved the desired impact.

Ansbacher hopes this pilot project will inspire more foundations to support video. “Foundations are happy to make videos about themselves, but they haven’t made the step to fund a battered women’s shelter to make a video inspiring people to support them.”

“Telling a story with images and music tied together,” he concludes, “can move people like nothing else.”

## Radio Documentaries: A “Best-Kept Secret” No More

by Mike Janssen

Independent filmmakers have Sundance. Why shouldn't independent *radio* producers have their own international showcase? That question came to Johanna Zorn, a senior producer at public radio station WBEZ in Chicago, who thought it was time that the genre of radio documentary, which feeds public radio some of its most memorable work, get its due.



“I’ve been in public radio my entire career,” says WBEZ’s Johanna Zorn. “You get a little tired of being a best-kept secret.”

If you listen to public radio, you’ve probably heard an audio documentary, either as a stand-alone hour in a station’s schedule or amid the flow of hard news on magazine-style shows like NPR’s *All Things Considered*.

Some audio documentaries study pressing societal issues such as poverty, mental illness or incarceration. Others veer toward the avant-garde, collaging snippets of conversations with sounds from everyday life, such as a rumbling train or crashing ocean waves. Whatever the subject, they stand out. They take their time to unfold, present a strong narrative thread, and sound intricately layered and realized.

You might not know, however, that most of these documentaries come from producers who survive on grants,

“Sometimes the first time you hear about an issue is on public radio, and then you start reading about it a couple of months later in the traditional press.”

— Sunny Fischer, executive director, The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation

far from the payrolls of stations and networks. As the label “independent” suggests, many of them work alone, and although public radio has a yearly roster of conferences about everything from programming to new media, it had been years since documentarians had a gathering of their own.

WBEZ was an apt sponsor for such an event. The station is home to

*This American Life*, a weekly public radio show that often includes work from independent producers who specialize in personal narrative, and another of its programs, *Chicago Matters*, also features documentaries. Zorn garnered support from the station’s board and management and started to plan what, in November 2001, became the inaugural Third Coast International Audio Festival.

Radio documentarians from around the world flocked to Chicago and shared their insights in panel discussions, and WBEZ encouraged them to enter their works in a judged

Third Coast Festival’s Gold Award winner, “The Vietnam Tapes of Lance Corporal Michael A. Baronowski” generated one of the greatest letter outpourings in the history of NPR’s *All Things Considered*.



competition that culminated in an awards banquet on the last day of the conference. The station worked the winning pieces and other entries into a three-hour program that aired on public radio stations around the country, and even overseas. Finally, a Web site ([www.thirdcoastfestival.org](http://www.thirdcoastfestival.org)) extended the conference's life and brought audio files of the documentaries to a wired and even wider audience.

When Zorn and her colleagues started to seek funding for the festival, they looked at how film festivals such as Sundance were supported, but she recalls they found only "moderate" success in brokering corporate trades. Holiday Inn, the site of the conference, came on board, but no airlines wanted to

"Independent documentaries strive to have people tell their stories in their own words. They give voice to the voiceless."

— Joan Shigekawa, associate director of the Creativity and Culture Program of The Rockefeller Foundation

Like Fischer, Shigekawa appreciates public radio for its ability to introduce new ideas into public discourse, and she likes documentaries for their commitment to shunning celebrities and politicians in favor of finding authentic stories. "They give voice to the voiceless," she says. "Independent documentaries strive to have people tell their stories in their own words. They defy generic formats."

Unfortunately for independent producers, Driehaus and Rockefeller are unusual. Only a handful of foundations support audio documentaries, and as a result many independent radio producers rely on grants from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the National Endowment for the Arts, state arts

Shigekawa. "Evaluating media proposals is problematic for a great many foundations," Shigekawa says. "You have to be able to read a treatment and analyze a budget, and have some knowledge of the producer's or director's prior work, or the ability to evaluate a work sample.

That knowledge is widely available in the United States, but not necessarily on foundation staff. So then the question becomes, who will evaluate this proposal?" (See page 54 for tips on evaluating media proposals.)

Shigekawa and Allison also acknowledge that media, entrenched as it is in the public square, has the potential of stirring controversy that funders might rather avoid. "The flip



Jay Allison, independent producer and founder of [transom.org](http://transom.org), a Web site posting audio files of documentaries from undiscovered independent producers.



[transom.org](http://transom.org)



Ellin O'Leary, founder of Youth Radio, with some of their younger colleagues at the Third Coast Festival.

PHOTO BY NICK KREBILL

More than 300 producers entered work in the Third Coast Festival competition, and 260 attended the event. The three-hour broadcast of award-winning work aired on 150 public radio stations around the country.

participate. Corporations also shied away from giving support.

Foundations, however, proved more enthusiastic, and WBEZ's first boost came from a \$100,000 challenge grant from The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation, a Chicago neighbor.

"It was such an unusual project, and it was being shepherded by very smart people," states Sunny Fischer, the foundation's executive director. "There hadn't been a place for individual radio documentarians to meet for a very, very long time." Driehaus also places a premium on funding competitions, especially in architecture, so the Third Coast's promise to recognize outstanding documentaries held special appeal.

Because the foundation has supported public radio for years, its board needed little persuasion, Fischer says. "Public

radio provides in-depth coverage of subjects that you rarely hear about other places," she adds, noting that the medium is often ahead of the curve when it comes to identifying trends and hot-button issues. "Sometimes the first time you hear about an issue is on public radio, and then you start reading about it a couple of months later in the traditional press."

"We tend to like entrepreneurial efforts," she says. "It wasn't a hard sell at all."

WBEZ found another receptive donor in The Rockefeller Foundation, which gave \$25,000. "When the project came in, it was one of those things where you say to yourself, 'Why hasn't this happened before?'" recalls Joan Shigekawa, associate director of the foundation's Creativity and Culture Program.

councils and other wellsprings of government funds. Independent producer Jay Allison says many documentarians have approached foundations and come away empty-handed. "We don't fund media' is a cliched, mournful sentence in the forefront of the minds of so many independent producers," says Allison, executive producer of the Third Coast Festival's Gold Award winner, "The Vietnam Tapes of Lance Corporal Michael A. Baronowski."

"The question is actually a larger question," Shigekawa suggests. "It's, 'why have independent media producers in all media had such limited support from foundations?' In the main, we are much more likely to support nineteenth-century arts— theatre, music, dance." Foundations shy from funding radio documentaries for several reasons, according to Allison and

side of having more and more people know about what you do is, people are going to know about what you do," Allison says. "And the public is an unruly thing."

The other major issue is one of access. Regardless of a producer's talent, there's no guarantee of landing a story on the air. "It's hard for them to self-broadcast," adds Shigekawa. "A filmmaker can take their film or video and have it seen at the Film Forum or Sundance. But where are you going to broadcast your audio piece?"

Now, Allison says, the Internet offers an opportunity to change that, possibly giving foundations a greater incentive to fund documentaries. You can see his efforts online at his Web site, [www.transom.org](http://www.transom.org), which is described as

“a performance space, an open editorial session, an audition stage, a library, and a hangout.”

The idea for transom.org came from journalist Bill McKibben, who, like Allison, craved a more diverse selection of stories on public radio, and the name comes from the old practice of throwing unsolicited submissions to a magazine or newspaper “over the transom.” Today, the site gathers and posts audio files of documentaries from undiscovered independent producers, who talk about their work and get feedback from a widely scattered community of fellow producers, some established, others also trying to break through. It’s one part of what has

idea that might bring even more independently produced pieces to a wider audience: The Radio Exchange ([www.radioexchange.org](http://www.radioexchange.org)).

The Radio Exchange will be an on-line clearinghouse for works from independent producers and stations across the country. Contributors will encode their pieces in MP3 digital audio format and upload them to a database. Staffers at public radio stations will then visit the site, read synopses and reviews of the uploaded works, and download them for broadcast on a locally produced show. The Radio Exchange will “move the center” of the public radio system, Allison says, and begin making a truly

most talked-about attraction. “It had been a long time since there was any gathering of the tribe, and the most exciting thing was to see that the tribe had gotten younger,” Allison says. “There were lots of people there I’d never seen before, and so that created the corollary feeling of hope that goes along with having younger people around.”

The three-hour broadcast of award-winning works aired on 150 public radio stations around the country, and even as far afield as Australia, where the country’s public broadcasting service aired several winners. Third Coast’s Web site is still running today and features new pieces on a regular basis. It had 15,300

with a message, whether it’s storytelling from a wide range of ethnic communities, youth, or underrepresented voices.” Shigekawa and others acknowledge that the festival’s ripples will be difficult to measure until several years from now, as the recurring event gathers momentum and raises the profile of radio documentaries even higher.

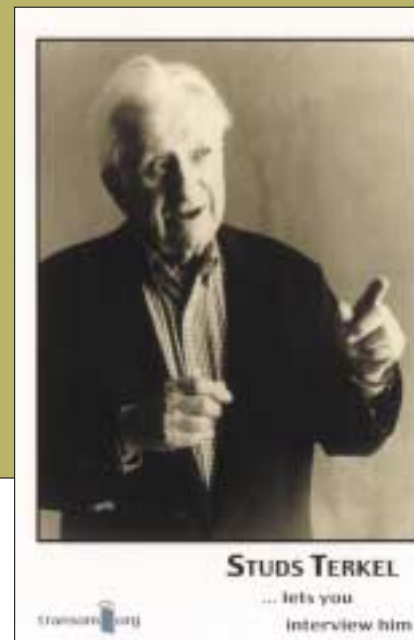
“It’s my hope that the genre will break through and come to dominate and become a format of its own,” Shigekawa concludes. “Real stories from real people.”

Sounds like a readymade tagline.

The Radio Exchange ([www.radioexchange.org](http://www.radioexchange.org)) will be an on-line clearinghouse that brings new voices to public radio.



Promotional postcard for the stations of Atlantic Public Media. PHOTO BY JOEL MEYEROWITZ



Pulitzer Prize winner Studs Terkel was a guest on transom.org in 2001.



A profile of Ruth Ellis, who came out as a lesbian in her 70s, is featured on [www.thirdcoastfestival.org](http://www.thirdcoastfestival.org).

become a personal mission for Allison—to funnel fresh voices into a public radio system that he says is often too insular.

“Unless you propose a weekly or daily hour-long show, public radio doesn’t want to hear from you,” he reports. “And that kills creativity—especially among young people with no budget and a fiery gleam. That’s what we need now.”

Allison puts pieces from the site on two Cape Cod radio stations he founded recently with WGBH-Boston, and some have even made it to national programs. The site itself has proved popular, garnering about 33,000 pageviews in December 2001, almost double the traffic six months earlier. Allison has now joined with the Station Resource Group, a membership organization of leading public radio stations, to develop another

decentralized network of producers and stations. The project recently received its first major funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

“If the mechanism were in place so that the real diversity of program material could get to the air, and stations committed the time, we could have a whole different range of voices on the air,” he says. “Once that exists I think support [from foundations] would be a much more attractive option.”

If the Third Coast Festival was any indication, Allison’s idea would have a growing number of contributors eager to be heard. More than 300 producers entered work in the competition, and 260 attended the event, including a group of teenaged reporters who, with their irrepressible irreverence, became the

hits in December 2001. Zorn hopes to add discussion boards to the site this summer when WBEZ can afford the necessary software.

Without hesitating, Zorn and her funders agree that the Third Coast Festival was a success. Fischer says her foundation is considering funding this year’s event. “We were delighted to have done it,” she attests.

“With the kind of response that they had, not only from participants but from stations that took the broadcast, it’s quite clear to me that new relationships were built and that people were hungry to share their knowledge and expertise at this event,” Shigekawa says. “It is a very sound investment, because for a very modest grant you can reach many more people in terms of radio

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PHOTO BY NICK KREBILL

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You might not know, however, that most of these documentaries come from producers who survive on grants, far from the payrolls of stations and networks. As the label “independent” suggests, many of them work alone, and although public radio has a yearly roster of conferences about everything from programming to new media, it had been years since documentarians had a gathering of their own.

WBEZ was an apt sponsor for such an event. The station is home to *This American Life*, a weekly public radio show that often includes work from independent producers who specialize in personal

narrative, and another of its programs, *Chicago Matters*, also features documentaries. Zorn garnered support from the station's board and management and started to plan what, in November 2001, became the inaugural Third Coast International Audio Festival.

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Unfortunately for independent producers, Driehaus and Rockefeller are unusual. Only a handful of foundations support audio documentaries, and as a result many independent radio producers rely on grants from the Corporation from Public Broadcasting, the National Endowment for the Arts, state arts councils and other wellsprings of government funds. Independent producer Jay Allison says many documentarians have approached foundations and come away empty-handed. “‘We don’t fund media’ is a cliched, mournful sentence in the forefront of the minds of so many independent producers,” says Allison, executive

producer of the Third Coast Festival's Gold Award winner, "The Vietnam Tapes of Lance Corporal Michael A. Baronowski."

"The question is actually a larger question," Shigekawa suggests. "It's, 'why have independent media producers in all media had such limited support from foundations?' In the main, we are much more likely to support nineteenth-century arts—theatre, music, dance." Foundations shy from funding radio documentaries for several reasons, according to Allison and Shigekawa. "Evaluating media proposals is problematic for a great many foundations," Shigekawa says. "You have to be able to read a treatment and analyze a budget, and have some knowledge of

producer's talent, there's no guarantee of landing a story on the air. "It's hard for them to self-broadcast," adds Shigekawa. "A filmmaker can take their film or video and have it seen at the Film Forum or Sundance. But where are you going to broadcast your audio piece?"

Now, Allison says, the Internet offers an opportunity to change that, possibly giving foundations a greater incentive to fund documentaries. You can see his efforts online at his Web site, [www.transom.org](http://www.transom.org), which is described as "a performance space, an open editorial session, an audition stage, a library, and a hangout."

"And that kills creativity—especially among young people with no budget and a fiery gleam. That's what we need now."

Allison puts pieces from the site on two Cape Cod radio stations he founded recently with WGBH-Boston, and some have even made it to national programs. The site itself has proved popular, garnering about 33,000 pageviews in December 2001, almost double the traffic six months earlier. Allison has now joined with the Station Resource Group, a membership organization of leading public radio stations, to develop another idea that might bring even more independently produced pieces to a wider audience: The Radio Exchange

of program material could get to the air, and stations committed the time, we could have a whole different range of voices on the air," he says. "Once that exists I think support [from foundations] would be a much more attractive option."

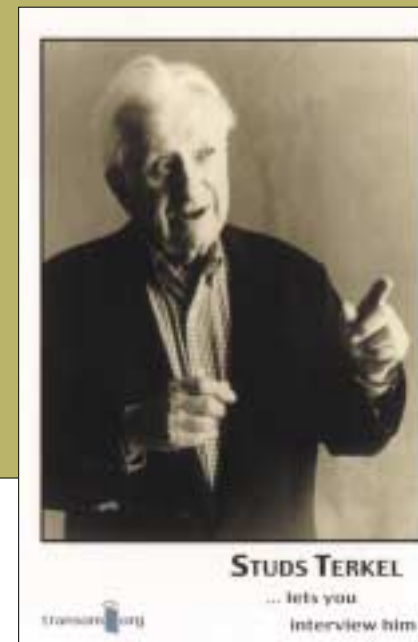
If the Third Coast Festival was any indication, Allison's idea would have a growing number of contributors eager to be heard. More than 300 producers entered work in the competition, and 260 attended the event, including a group of teenaged reporters who, with their irrepressible irreverence, became the most talked-about attraction. "It had been a long time since there was any gathering of the tribe, and the most exciting thing was

The Radio Exchange ([www.radioexchange.org](http://www.radioexchange.org)) will be an on-line clearinghouse that brings new voices to public radio.



Promotional postcard for the stations of Atlantic Public Media.  
PHOTO BY JOEL MEYEROWITZ

Pulitzer Prize winner Studs Terkel was a guest on [transom.org](http://transom.org) in 2001.



A profile of Ruth Ellis, who came out as a lesbian in her 70s, is featured on [www.thirdcoastfestival.org](http://www.thirdcoastfestival.org).

the producer's or director's prior work, or the ability to evaluate a work sample.

That knowledge is widely available in the United States, but not necessarily on foundation staff. So then the question becomes, who will evaluate this proposal?" (See page 54 for tips on evaluating media proposals.)

Shigekawa and Allison also acknowledge that media, entrenched as it is in the public square, has the potential of stirring controversy that funders might rather avoid. "The flip side of having more and more people know about what you do is, people are going to know about what you do," Allison says. "And the public is an unruly thing."

The other major issue is one of access. Regardless of a

The idea for [transom.org](http://transom.org) came from journalist Bill McKibben, who, like Allison, craved a more diverse selection of stories on public radio, and the name comes from the old practice of throwing unsolicited submissions to a magazine or newspaper "over the transom." Today, the site gathers and posts audio files of documentaries from undiscovered independent producers, who talk about their work and get feedback from a widely scattered community of fellow producers, some established, others also trying to break through. It's one part of what has become a personal mission for Allison—to funnel fresh voices into a public radio system that he says is often too insular.

"Unless you propose a weekly or daily hour-long show, public radio doesn't want to hear from you," he reports.

([www.radioexchange.org](http://www.radioexchange.org)).

The Radio Exchange will be an on-line clearinghouse for works from independent producers and stations across the country. Contributors will encode their pieces in MP3 digital audio format and upload them to a database. Staffers at public radio stations will then visit the site, read synopses and reviews of the uploaded works, and download them for broadcast on a locally produced show. The Radio Exchange will "move the center" of the public radio system, Allison says, and begin making a truly decentralized network of producers and stations. The project recently received its first major funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

"If the mechanism were in place so that the real diversity

"For a very modest grant you can reach many more people in terms of radio with a message, whether it's storytelling from a wide range of ethnic communities, youth, or underrepresented voices."

— Joan Shigekawa, associate director of the Creativity and Culture Program of The Rockefeller Foundation

## Small Grants Seed Big Films by K. M. Soehnlein

Money for filmmakers—that was the simple goal of the Film Arts Foundation Grants Program when it began in 1984. The San Francisco organization had been around for just seven years at that point, but it had quickly grown from a gathering of filmmakers looking to pool resources to a service organization offering classes, a newsletter, a resource library and a variety of equipment for rent to dues-paying members. Helping get money into the hands of its filmmaker-members and the larger community they were building was the logical next step.

Gail Silva, Film Arts' director, recalls, "We had so little money that we devised categories where we could make a difference."



**filmarts**  
FOUNDATION

In the 1980s, many independent media projects found funding through a strong national re-granting program. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) was distributing money to regional media arts centers, which were then selecting filmmakers for grants at all levels of production. Filmmaker Helen De Michiel—now the executive director of the National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture (NAMAC)—recalls living in Minneapolis at the time and receiving re-granted NEA money through her local media arts center, Film in the Cities. "They were willing to take risks on somewhat unformed ideas," she says, "or on films that needed a push to move them through the filmmaking process." Some parts of the country, however, like the San Francisco Bay Area, were so abundant in working film artists that even a steady flow of federal money wasn't meeting the community's funding needs.

**"We're not throwing money willy-nilly. It's a very selective process."**

K. M. Soehnlein is a San Francisco-based freelance writer and the author of the novel *The World of Normal Boys* (Kensington Books).

— Gail Silva, executive director,  
Film Arts Foundation

It was in this climate that San Francisco media arts organization Film Arts Foundation (FAF) set up a small endowment, the Fund for Independent Cinema, to support an annual grants program. Initial funding came from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The fund established three grants categories: personal works (artist-made films or videos that could be fully produced within the grant amount), development, and completion/distribution. Gail Silva, FAF's director, recalls, "We had so little money that we devised categories where we could make a difference." One of those categories in particular—development—is still one of the most difficult for which to receive money, and eighteen years later remains one of the FAF grants program's strongest commitments.

The idea behind development funding is simple: first money starts the project. Silva explains, "It gets you things essential to competing in the funding world. You can make a clip that



Film Arts Foundation gets approximately 300 grant applicants per year to its grants program. Typically 60 or so are for development; of those, between four and six are selected.

PHOTO BY DAVID LIM

Development money is often called seed money, and the metaphor is apt. The filmmaker's idea is the seed; foundations provide the fertilizer.

you can show to other funders or use the money to travel for research, which helps get a proposal together." Development money is often called seed money, and the metaphor is apt. The filmmaker's idea is the seed; foundations provide the fertilizer. However, it often takes the expertise of a grassroots intermediary, like FAF, to make the case as to where that fertilizer should be spread.

She adds, "We're not throwing money willy-nilly. It's a very selective process." Unlike completion funding, which is most often granted based on a rough edit of the film, or production funding, which usually requires a preview clip or well-researched proposal, development money is basically given to an *idea*. "It's a risk because not every filmmaker finishes their project," Silva admits. "Maybe they can't raise any other money, or maybe some piece of the project falls apart. Sometimes they do research and then discover that there's no story there." In general, re-granting programs like FAF's are in a better position to absorb some of that risk than a foundation whose board may be looking for measurable results every time. "If now and then a filmmaker determines he or she can't develop the film," Silva says, "better they discover that early on than to get too far along." More commonly, seed money allows good ideas to blossom. FAF development grantees include success stories like Susaña Munoz and Lourdes Portillo's *Las Madres: The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo*, a 1985 Academy Award® nominee; Allie Light and



Film Arts Foundation gets approximately 300 grant applicants per year to its grants program. Typically 60 or so are for development; of those, between four and six are selected. Funds have primarily gone to documentaries, although narrative projects have been funded for script development as well. Silva says the panelists Film Arts hires to make granting decisions look for "how clear the ideas come across in the proposal," and whether or not the required work sample and filmmaker's track record demonstrate "the sophistication and experience to carry it off."

Irving Saraf's *Dialogues with Madwomen*, which won the Freedom of Expression Award at the Sundance Film Festival in 1994 and was broadcast on PBS's *P.O.V.*; and Ellen Bruno's *Sacrifice*, another Sundance and *P.O.V.* screener, winner of the Golden Spire Award at the San Francisco International Film Festival. Filmmaker Nancy Kelly, recipient of a 1999 development grant, premiered her finished film, *Downside UP*, this February at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (Mass MoCA). Her documentary examines the way her hometown of

North Adams, Massachusetts, rose from economic blight after Mass MoCA was constructed in an enormous abandoned factory downtown. For Kelly, the \$2,500 FAF grant, along with another \$10,000 in seed money from the LEF Foundation, was essential to get herself and her crew across the United States for the museum's opening. She explains, "Ten thousand people showed up for opening day. We have that on tape thanks to those first grants. It's really such a small amount of money, but it was so crucial to the story and for gathering momentum for the project." (See sidebar on page 34.)

The Film Arts endowment receives money each year from the San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund's Grants for the Arts program. The Hotel Tax Fund collects a 14 percent tariff on every occupied hotel room in San Francisco; Grants for the Arts (GFTA) gets 8.5 cents from each dollar collected. According to GFTA director Kary Schulman, the agency is responsible to use this money to fund works that directly benefit the city's visitors. "We can make an argument for funding an organization like Film Arts Foundation, which is recognized for its expertise in the field,

its history, and its reputation for supporting the making of art in the city," she says. Through FAF, GFTA contributes to the exhibition of works at film festivals and other public events, even though funded projects might be years away from completion. "We understand that some kinds of impact are not measurable," Schulman says. "Our desire to see work reach the end-user depends upon money coming in at the beginning."

Although GFTA is the only agency providing money to FAF specifically for regranting, others have stepped up when asked to foster the growth of FAF's Fund for Independent Cinema. The Fleishhacker Foundation is one such San Francisco-based family foundation. Executive director Christine Elbel says that a \$15,000 grant given by Fleishhacker for FAF to run a capital campaign to increase support for the fund was a recognition of Film Arts' reputation as "a mainstay for artists, especially at the early development of their careers." The Fleishhacker Foundation's board includes an arts committee with a special commitment to funding film and video. "We gave money to Film Arts Foundation because our own grants can only fund a small fraction of the



facing page, left: The making of *Downside UP*, a film by Nancy Kelly. PHOTO BY MICHAEL LAVIN FLOWER  
above: Film still from *Downside UP*. PHOTO BY DAVID LIM

Nancy Kelly used her seed money to make a trailer that helped her eventually raise money from ten other foundations, along with tens of thousands of dollars in in-kind services.

people out there," says Elbel. "Film Arts Foundation is a national model of a service organization that provides direct support to artists. Technically, we don't fund endowments, but this was a way to get money to artists." Nancy Kelly has used her seed money well. She used the opening day footage—including interviews with museum officials, her family and other townspeople—to make a trailer that helped her eventually raise money from ten other foundations, along with tens of thousands of dollars in in-kind services such as

**Downside UP** Budget Summary

	Production Budget	\$205,861
<b>INCOME</b>	<b>Cash Funds Raised to Date</b>	<b>161,200</b>
	LIInCS Grant (ITVS)	65,000
	Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities	35,000
	High Meadow Foundation	16,000
	Hoosac Bank	10,000
	LEF Foundation	10,000
	Springcreek Foundation	6,000
	Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation	5,500
	Lucius & Eva Eastman Fund	4,000
	Cultural Council of Northern Berkshire	2,700
	FAF Grants Program	2,500
Fleishhacker Fund	2,500	
Rough House Editorial	2,000	
	<b>In-Kind Contributions</b>	<b>34,125</b>
	WMHT	22,340
	Banff Center for the Arts, Alberta	11,785
	<b>Total Funds Raised to Date</b>	<b>195,325</b>
	<b>Funds Still Needed</b>	<b>10,536</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>	Pre-Production	2,738
	Producing Staff Total	34,200
	Production Personnel—	
	Independent Contractors	22,800
	Production Expenses	31,394
	Post-Production Personnel	20,750
	Post-Production Expenses	44,505
	Administrative Costs	9,425
	Miscellaneous (music rights, graphics, etc.)	20,300
	Insurance & Fees	19,749
	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$205,861</b>

editing time. At the time of this writing, Kelly was waiting on word about a grant from a large national foundation that had turned her down for production money but, having seen the film, was now talking to her about getting involved in its distribution. “After the program officer looked at my work-in-progress,” relates Kelly, “he called back and said, ‘I lost sleeping thinking about it.’” Because *Downside UP* is ultimately an argument for art and culture as an economic engine in distressed communities, this program officer sees Kelly’s film as a potential educational tool on a much wider scale. Kelly also believes her film can persuade conservative politicians and others opposed to public funding for the arts that “art is not just good for your soul. Art has revitalized North Adams’ downtown and has brought in 120,000 tourists a year.”

Gail Silva expresses her wish that more foundations would take on direct support of mediamakers, although she recognizes that not all foundations have the expertise to do so. “It’s not easy for a foundation to know all the intricacies: how to read a budget; what the marketplace is; can this



Film still from Susaña Munoz and Lourdes Portillo’s *Las Madres: The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo*.



*Dialogues with Madwomen*, a film by Allie Light and Irving Sarif, won the Freedom of Expression Award at the Sundance Film Festival in 1994.

“It’s not easy for a foundation to know all the intricacies: how to read a budget; what the marketplace is; can this person actually pull it off? Re-granting gives us an opportunity to put together a panel of people who are specifically knowledgeable in the field.”

— Gail Silva, executive director, Film Arts Foundation

person actually pull it off?” she says. “Re-granting gives us an opportunity to put together panel of people who are specifically knowledgeable in the field.”

Today, Film Arts’ program is one of the few providing re-granted money for media development. The NEA’s regional re-granting was a casualty of the early 1990s culture wars, replaced by centralized decisionmaking. Helen De Michiel of NAMAC, whose membership comprises media arts centers around the country—many of whom once leveraged NEA money to procure matching grants from local foundations—argues that as funding processes have changed, so too has the type of work that receives funding. She says, “There are very few major funders out there for nonfiction features; basically HBO, Showtime and ITVS are the only ones who can greenlight \$250,000–\$350,000 to make these films. So what filmmakers propose in order to get that money are products that work on television, with a three-act

narrative structure. Work that’s community-based, often about local issues with larger political repercussions, is becoming invisible.”

Development money re-granted on a regional or local level also has an effect beyond the jumpstart it gives to particular projects. By affording artists the chance to explore new ideas, it enriches the work being made in a given community and contributes to a collective body of art vital to the culture at large. De Michiel speaks of this process in terms of sustainability, urging private foundations and media arts centers to pursue one-on-one relationships and begin to pool resources for re-granting. “These organizations are on the pulse; the foundations have the money,” she says. “In order for us to have a vibrant independent media culture at the national level, the incubators must start early and locally, and the strengths must be built up from there.”

Arthur Dong, who created the award-winning film *Licensed to Kill*, explores the relationships between Christian fundamentalist parents and their gay or lesbian children in *Family Fundamentals*.

The story of the Bremner-Jester family, pictured here in 1965, is featured in the film.

PHOTO BY CHARLES SCHNEIDER PHOTOGRAPHY

## The Documentary in Action

by Patricia Thomson

A powerful thing happened in Casper, Wyoming, the week after Matthew Shepard was beaten by two gay-bashers and left for dead on a prairie fence. It centered on a documentary called *Licensed to Kill*, in which director Arthur Dong, who 20 years earlier had himself been a victim of anti-gay violence, enters the prison cells of convicted gay-bashers and quietly, effectively probes into the background, motivations, and psyche of these young men. Why did they do it? Where does their hate come from? Why do they feel their attacks were socially sanctioned?

# Licensed



Arthur Dong's film *Licensed to Kill* takes a riveting journey into the minds of men whose contempt for homosexuals led them to murder. PHOTO BY ZAND GEE

# to Kill

The crowd in Casper listened attentively as *Licensed to Kill* recounted large and small actions guided by hate. Many in the audience had come to town for a vigil in memory of Shepard, and one man after another stood up after the screening to tell his own story, demonstrating that Shepard was not an isolated case. "Every one of them had a similar experience; it was chilling,"

recalls Sara Dubik-Unruh of the Community Outreach for Prevention and Education (COPE), who had arranged the screening. "It took my breath away to realize how many people in our community have been devastated physically, emotionally, and spiritually by these types of attacks," she wrote to the filmmaker. "I felt honored and in awe of the men who shared their experiences at that showing." Dubik-Unruh now screens *Licensed to Kill* every semester at Casper College, joining the leagues of others who use the film and its study guide for education, sensitivity training, defense courses, and more—

teachers, gay activists, inner-city youth centers, social service agencies, probation officers, police departments, and even the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

*Licensed to Kill*, which went on to win an Emmy nomination, awards from the Sundance and Berlin film festivals, and a PBS broadcast, would never have seen the light of day without funding from private foundations. In fact, nearly every penny that didn't

come out of the filmmaker's pocket was provided by foundations. Three major media funders—the Soros Documentary Fund, The Rockefeller Foundation, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting-backed National Asian American Telecommunications Association—gave the bulk of the production budget. But the rest came in small grants of \$2,000 to \$7,000 from foundations that were more interested in the message than the medium, including the Unitarian Universalist Funding Program, Horizons Foundation, The Zellerbach Family Fund, the Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation, and the Hugh M. Hefner Foundation.

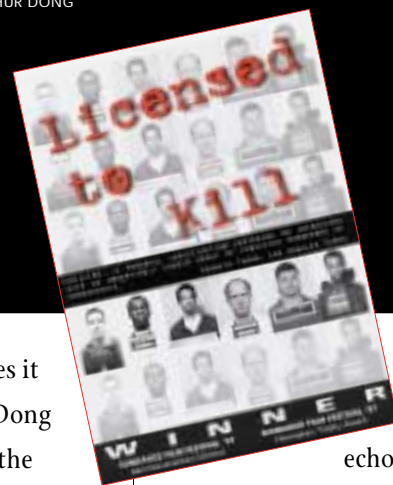
Patricia Thomson is the former editor-in-chief of *The Independent Film & Video Monthly* and writes for *Variety*, *American Cinematographer*, and other film magazines.

When it comes to funding film production, “It’s hard to feel you’re having an impact with small money,” says Ruby Lerner, president of Creative Capital Foundation, which provides grants to performing, visual, and media artists. But as former executive director of the Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers (AIVF), Lerner knows that a little can go a long way in the documentary world. “We can’t offer that much money, because we’re small. But we know that \$5,000 has helped a lot of people get critical things done in the production process.”

Dong is one of those filmmakers who knows how to stretch a dollar. *Licensed to Kill* and his latest documentary, *Family Fundamentals*, each cost in the ballpark of \$130,000. That’s lunch money by Hollywood standards. More significantly, it’s far cheaper than documentaries used to be when film stock was the preferred format.



Corey Burley, one of the many perpetrators of hate crimes against gay men, interviewed in *Licensed to Kill*.  
PHOTO BY ARTHUR DONG



Dong is careful to note that his budgets are lower even than most independent productions because he doesn’t hire a director, producer, editor, or cinematographer, but does it all himself. Even so, whether it’s a one-man-band like Dong or a small documentary team, a little bit of funding at the right moment can have a big impact.

Take Dong’s *Family Fundamentals*, a film about the conflicting values that divide Christian Fundamentalist parents and their gay or lesbian children. One of the film’s subjects, Brian Bennett, was about to head off to the California State Republican Convention. Bennett had once been chief of staff for United States Representative Bob Dornan, who was a surrogate father to Bennett despite the fact that the congressman was a conservative Republican and vocal opponent of homosexuality. When Bennett

came out of the closet, Dornan broke all ties. This convention presented Dong with the chance to film Bennett interacting with other Republicans as an open homosexual. “It was a one-time event. I had to go,” says Dong, but he needed \$5,000 to cover the shoot. That’s when the Theophilus Fund, a private donor-advised fund in San Francisco, stepped in, enabling Dong to capture this event.

Later, an offshoot of this fund called the Theophilus Foundation helped out at another critical moment. Dong was racing the clock to finish his film in time for the 2002 Sundance

Film Festival. *Family Fundamentals* had been accepted, but Dong still needed to complete the sound mix and pay for transfers, up-conversions and insurance. Theophilus quickly issued \$15,000 to cover those costs, and *Family Fundamentals* made it over the finish

Dong belongs to that special breed of documentary filmmakers who think of production and outreach together from the get-go.

line, allowing the film to premiere at the country’s most important launchpad for documentary films.

“Fundraising is hard every step of the way,” says Creative Capital’s Lerner,

echoing the lament of countless filmmakers who can spend as many years chasing funds for a film as they do actually making it. “Unless you are lucky enough to get one of the big funders like the Independent Television Service (ITVS) or HBO, you’re going to be piecing things together,” she says. “Sometimes to get a larger entity even interested in a project, you need to show [a sample reel], which again means that up to that point, you’re going to be piecing together small money.”

On the positive side, says Lerner, smaller investments give foundations a certain flexibility. “You can make a \$5,000

investment very early on, then look at what that bought you and say, ‘Wow! This is really going somewhere. Here’s another \$5,000.’ Or at that point you might say, ‘Ugh, this is not turning out as exciting as I’d hoped.’ So before you’ve made a \$50,000 investment, you can assess your investment every step of the way.”

For filmmakers, small grants can be particularly effective in the early stages of a film. Seed money is precisely that—the seed that promotes future growth. Coming from a foundation with a vested interest in a topic, it provides a stamp of approval, a mark of credibility that can act as a magnet for other potential funders. (See Chapter 5.) For his part, Dong used seed money from the Lear Family Foundation (\$5,000) and the Soros Documentary Fund (\$15,000) to lay the all-important groundwork for *Family Fundamentals*: researching the Christian Right and assembling an advisory board of individuals from both the Fundamentalist movement and gay and lesbian organizations.

Evangelicals and Philip Yancey, an editor and columnist for *Christianity Today*, the leading Protestant magazine in America, among others. “Once I had them confirmed, I was able to approach possible subjects for the film. They didn’t know me from Adam, but they knew of the people on my panel. ‘Oh, you’ve got so-and-so. Well, I agree with his values, and his religion is my religion. So I guess you’re okay.’ That was well worth the work.”

This board of advisors played a critical role in obvious ways—information, access and balance. But just as important, it helped pave the way for the next stage of the film—its outreach.

Dong belongs to that special breed of documentary filmmakers who think of production and outreach together from the get-go. Outreach is not an afterthought, but operates on a parallel track throughout the film’s creation, and potential users are involved early on. (See also Chapter 7.)

For Dong, the benefits of this integrated approach crystallized with *Licensed to Kill*. During production he connected



“I spent over half a year forming my advisory panel,” says Dong. “It wasn’t an overnight thing or easy to reach some of these advisors, especially the more conservative ones, because why would they want to talk to me? I’m from PBS, right? ‘Mr. Liberal.’ So I nurtured the relationships—and it was worth doing.”

As a result, Dong was able to bring aboard individuals like Forest Montgomery from the National Association of

Filmmaker Arthur Dong (left) with director of photography Robert Shepard on location at Robertson Correctional Unit in Abilene, Texas.

PHOTO BY ANGIE ROSGA

with the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, an umbrella group with over 20 member organizations around the country. “I worked with the coalition as a whole, which meant working with all those local agencies,” Dong recalls. “That led me to have screenings in those cities where there’s an agency.” As a result, community screenings increased exponentially. “I learned how valuable that relationship was. So when I set out to compile my advisory panel for *Family Fundamentals*, I picked people who were connected with agencies as well,”

their backyard, or a group of waitresses in Nevada who are organizing against wearing three-inch heels as a condition of employment,” says Goodrich. Film is not normally on their plate, but the foundation awarded \$7,000 toward production of *Licensed to Kill*, and later came back with \$8,000 for editing, lab costs, and outreach for *Family Fundamentals*.

By the time of *Family Fundamentals*, Dong could more effectively support his case. In his application, he included something new: an in-depth evaluation of the impact of

Susan and David Jester, whose lives are portrayed in the documentary *Family Fundamentals*.  
PHOTO BY DAVID JESTER



effectively support his case. In his application, he included something new: an in-depth evaluation of the impact of

A little bit of funding at the right moment can have a big impact.

such as the National Association of Evangelicals, which has chapters throughout the United States.

Dong plans to involve his advisors and peer organizations in townhall forums around *Family Fundamentals*. “Venues will be safe and neutral spaces, such as libraries, museums, and public centers,” writes the filmmaker in his proposal. “People with different feelings about LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender] rights will be invited and welcomed, albeit with one important condition: that they are sincerely interested in civil dialogue and are open to the idea of working through differences to find common ground.”

For the Unitarians, Dong’s strategic alliances with organizations like the United Church of Christ, Soulforce, and People for the American Way, plus his strong board of advisors and their affiliations, made all the difference. “If Arthur had submitted this proposal on its own without the other connections, we probably wouldn’t have funded it,” says Program Director Hillary Goodrich. The organization’s nondenominational Fund for a Just Society normally provides grants to groups organizing for systemic change. “We usually fund small grassroots groups challenging an institution that could be, say, dumping toxins in

*Licensed to Kill*. Surveying the film’s users, he collected dozens of anecdotes and testimonials from users, which he then synopsised for his grant proposal (See sidebar page 41.)

“I was able to evaluate what I did on *Licensed to Kill* and incorporate that as solid evidence—to show that I could do this again for *Family Fundamentals*. With *Licensed to Kill*, I didn’t have that type of evidence,” Dong says. “I got more sophisticated.”

Dong is not the only one. Many documentary filmmakers are becoming increasingly savvy about outreach—how to do it, when to begin, whom to partner with. But for outreach to happen, a film first has to be made. Foundations interested in social change can get in on the ground floor and support films that support their causes—even if they have limited funds. “You can’t just say that because it’s a film, it doesn’t have the potential to be incredibly valuable as part of an ongoing organizing strategy,” says Goodrich. “The films that we fund are few and far between, but we’ve been really gratified by the results.”

## Licensed to Kill Evaluation

The following is filmmaker Arthur Dong’s evaluation of the impact of his documentary *Licensed to Kill*. This synopsis was included in his grant applications to foundations when he was raising money for his next film, *Family Fundamentals*.

Listed below are some notable examples of how *Licensed to Kill* is being used as an educational tool. They are included here as a sampling of the extensive network Dong has established.

- Hales Franciscan High School, a Catholic boys’ high school in Chicago with an all African American student population, uses the film in a required course for seniors called Social Justice. *Licensed to Kill* is shown to examine hate crimes related to sexual orientation and has succeeded in stimulating significant discussion among students.
- Olmstead County Courthouse in Preston, Minnesota, uses *Licensed to Kill* for in-house sensitivity training of probation officers and corrections officials in their three-county system. It has been successful in encouraging compassion and understanding toward gay victims and to shed light on the motivation of assailants who attack gay men.
- The Los Angeles Police Department uses *Licensed to Kill* to train homicide detectives. The film is also used to train officers and detectives in the hate crimes department of the LAPD.
- Community Outreach for Prevention and Education based in Casper, Wyoming, brought the film to town at the same time Matthew Shepard was attacked. Several days later it was showcased at the County Building, where a vigil for Shepard was held following his death. It is now used regularly in courses at Casper College and has been incorporated into a self-defense course for the gay community.
- The FBI Library in Quantico, Virginia, uses *Licensed to Kill* as a resource in their training academy as well as a reference for staff agents.
- The Brotherhood, a New York City community agency focused on serving inner-city youth, shows *Licensed to Kill* to audiences of 14 to 16-year-old boys to encourage them to re-examine dominant attitudes toward homosexuality and violence.
- The New Conservatory Theater in San Francisco used *Licensed to Kill* to develop several theater pieces about anti-gay violence. *The Other Side of the Closet*, a play geared toward young audiences, opened recently and will tour local schools.
- Santa Clara County, California uses *Licensed to Kill* in their staff development training at the Department of Social Services.

“You can make a \$5,000 investment very early on, then look at what that bought you and say, ‘Wow! This is really going somewhere. Here’s another \$5,000.’”

— Ruby Lerner, president, Creative Capital Foundation

### Arthur Dong Funding Sources

<i>Licensed to Kill</i>	
Soros Documentary Fund	\$ 50,000
The Rockefeller Foundation	35,000
NAATA	25,000
Unitarian Universalist Funding Program	7,000
Horizons Foundation	2,000
Zellerbach Family Fund	2,000
Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation	2,000
Hugh M. Hefner Foundation	6,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$129,000</b>
<i>Family Fundamentals</i> (as of January 2002)	
Guggenheim Foundation	\$ 33,000
Soros Documentary Fund—Seed Grant	15,000
Eastman Kodak/P.O.V. “In The Works” Grant	10,000
Theophilus Foundation	10,000
Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Grant	8,000
Paul Robeson Fund	8,000
Unitarian Universalist Funding Program	8,000
Columbia Foundation	5,000
Playboy Foundation	5,000
Lear Family Foundation	5,000
Theophilus Fund	5,000
California Arts Council Visual Arts Fellowship	5,000
Lewy Gay Values Fund	2,500
Gill Foundation—Challenge Grant	1,400
Private Donor	600
NAATA	Pending
Frameline	Pending
P.O.V. Completion Funds	Pending
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$121,500</b>

## A Voice of Their Own: Youth Media by Kathryn Hunt

The mass media rarely makes room for the voices and viewpoints of young people, despite its profound influence on their lives. By the time an American student turns 18, he or she will have watched an average of 25,000 hours of television—more time than was spent in the classroom—and seen nearly a million advertisements. When movies, video games, and the Internet are tossed into the mix, the time that a child devotes each day to the consumption of media is matched only by the time he or she spends sleeping. Children and young adults are groomed to be submissive consumers of media, responsive to its lucrative markets, and not creative, thoughtful makers of their own images. But that’s changing.



G.A.P. cofounders Diana Coryat (right) and Susan Siegel began working in youth media by simply asking young people to talk about what their daily lives were like.

Youth media organizations like the Global Action Project, Inc. (G.A.P.) in New York City are offering young people the chance to turn that equation on its head by giving them the tools to produce their own media and reach audiences with messages of their own devising. Youth media (video, radio, Web sites, and television) puts young people between the ages of 12 and 21 at the center of public discourse; it insists that their voices and perspectives are essential to the vitality of American democracy, and it gives them the means to reach audiences with whatever they have to say.

“We began working in youth media by simply asking young people to talk about what their daily lives are like,” says G.A.P. cofounder and codirector Diana

Coryat, a filmmaker and media educator. She launched the project in 1991 with Susan Siegel, an educator and youth development consultant,

Kathryn Hunt is a writer and filmmaker from Port Townsend, Washington. She directed *Take This Heart*, a film about children in foster care.

when they accepted an invitation to conduct a video production project in rural Ghana. They worked with a group of young Ghanians who decided to tell the story of a friend who had died of malaria because he didn’t have access to medical care to treat the disease. “We brought the video home and showed it to American kids, and the response was unbelievable. Here were other young people telling the story, and the American kids were touched and moved by what they heard and saw,” says Coryat. The video made the lives of young Africans real to the Americans in a way that no television documentary made by grown-up professionals could do. “The American students decided to make a video letter and a handmade book on home-care remedies to

send back to the young people we’d worked with in Africa,” Coryat reports.

The founders knew they had discovered a powerful tool for creating a dialogue among youth who knew little or nothing about each other’s lives.

Young people could become educators

Young people could become educators for each other, opening up the world in a way the mass media failed to do for them.



Chris interviews a woman in New York’s Central Park.

for each other, opening up the world in a way that the mass media failed to do for them. Youth-produced media, the women realized, also had the potential of building social awareness and leadership skills and encouraging civic involvement. They decided to seek funding for a youth media project that would be based in New York.

It was slow going at first, but gradually philanthropists began to take notice. Community foundations in New York initially funded G.A.P., in part because they recognized the potential of youth media to bring students from disparate ethnic backgrounds together to work toward common goals and build trust. Urban Voices TV, which brought together kids from all over Manhattan to produce documentaries, was one of their first projects. Eventually other funders began to see the promise of youth media, and The John D. and Catherine T.

MacArthur Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Open Society Institute, the Surdna Foundation, Inc., and AOL Time Warner, among others, all made sizable grants to G.A.P., which today has an annual operating budget of \$375,000.

G.A.P. offers a range of workshops in New York and abroad, including Urban Voices Pre-Professional Training; Voices and Visions of Refugee/Immigrant Youth; and international projects in Northern Ireland, Croatia, Guatemala, and the Middle East for Palestinian and Israeli teenagers. Project costs run between \$25,000 and \$75,000, depending on the duration of the workshop and its location. But foundations don't have to come up with big dollars to get into the field of youth media. Relatively small contributions of \$1,000 to \$10,000 can support a piece of a project, such as outreach, equipment purchases, artists' stipends, and project evaluation efforts.

Whatever the size of the grant, youth media offers funders the chance to see their dollars making a difference on a

number of fronts. Michele Sacconaghi, executive director of the AOL Time Warner Foundation, says that the foundation began funding youth media because it encompasses several of the foundation's program interests.

"We feel that media tools like video and the Internet are essential for young people to learn to use, and we want to support them to communicate with competence and confidence with these tools and to develop their own voices."

The foundation recently made a grant to G.A.P. "The Global Action Project is right on target in the way they bring together many strands: arts, media literacy, civics, and skill-building. They work really hard to empower young people to have a voice and make a difference in their communities," she adds.

Young men and women involved in youth media projects learn production "how-to" skills, but the heart of the endeavor often lies elsewhere. Participants come

together in workshops for six weeks to a year to work with others of diverse backgrounds; to talk about issues vital to their lives and their communities; to work with media artists to develop their own artistic expression; to hone critical-thinking skills; and to discover and exercise their own capacities for leadership and civic activism. Some young people stay involved in G.A.P. projects for three or four years, acquiring skills and maturing as artists. Youth media projects are likely to reach out to poor and working-class youngsters, kids of color, lesbian and gay youth, refugees, and young women—young people who are often subject to offensive or facile images of themselves in the mass media—and who are unlikely to have a voice and have little access to high-tech training. Youth media gives them the tools and the support to begin to speak up.

"The young people are not only producing media, they are also using what they learn and what comes out of the experience of working together to influence adults and to engage



**"Young people's perspectives are fresh and interesting. They are producing images we've never seen before and stories we haven't heard until now."**

— Erlin Ibreck,  
director of Youth Initiatives  
Program for the  
Open Society Institute

others in dialogue about issues that really matter to them," observes Erlin Ibreck, the director of the Youth Initiatives Program for the Open Society Institute, which funds G.A.P. and other youth media projects. OSI is the only foundation in the country with youth media as a program area.

"Young people's perspectives are fresh and interesting," she says. "They are producing images we've never seen before and stories we haven't heard until now. And they are deconstructing the mass media and its effect on them, really taking hold of something that has a powerful—and often negative—impact on their lives. It's been really exciting to learn about this field and to get involved in it."

Ibreck has talked with other adults who have listened to radio programs produced by teenagers and who express surprise at the sophistication of the reporting. "I think people begin to realize when they hear young people tell their own stories how complex and challenging their lives are. I find that adults want to hear more of that," says Ibreck.

She recalls the impact of a project Youth Communications, a New York-based organization that worked with teenagers to help them tell their stories about being in the foster care system to public officials. "They were able to get the attention of policymakers because what they said was new and came right out of their own experience," she says. "In this case, they influenced the direction of public policy in a significant way."

Foster Care Youth United grew out of these early efforts, and the group of young journalists now publishes a bimonthly magazine with a circulation of 10,000 that bills itself as "the voice of youth in care."

A desire to affect social change is central to many youth media projects and their funders. Students are encouraged to explore issues that impact their lives, families, and communities as subject matter for their video and radio projects. Often what they learn about themselves and their communities inspires them to become more active citizens, capable of asking tough questions about what they see in the world around them. G.A.P. videomakers, for instance, have exchanged video-letters with young people in Dubai, Saudi Arabia, in the wake of the September 11 attacks; and another group of G.A.P. producers—this one made up of young refugees in New York City—met with Hispanic youth to show their video *Two Homes* and to conduct a "refugee simulation" workshop. The workshop

was designed to give the American kids a sense of what it might be like to arrive bereft of home and belongings and to make your way in a strange land. The workshop gave young people a perspective on immigration issues missing from reporting by the mass media and helped them better understand the experiences of recent immigrants.

"The absence of the voices of young people is a glaring hole in the democratic dialogue," argues Robert Sherman, program officer for the Surdna Foundation, Inc. in its Effective Citizenry program. The Surdna Foundation has a strong commitment to promoting youth development and leadership, and it began to take a serious look at youth media about five years ago.

"The board and staff wanted to see young people have the chance to express their own points of view

forcefully. We saw youth media as a way to promote skill development and youth development at the same time. But it's not about teaching skills or making media for their own sake. It's about the changes that come about through these projects, and their social impact."

**"The Global Action project is right on target in the way they bring together many strands: arts, literacy, civics, and skill-building. They work really hard to empower young people to have a voice and make a difference in their communities."**

— Michele Sacconaghi,  
executive director, AOL  
Time Warner Foundation



## Youth Media Resources

The trend in youth media today is to unite young producers and their mentors with others in the United States and elsewhere engaged in the same groundbreaking work. On-line networks, product distribution sites, film festivals, and conferences help to strengthen ties and create forums for information sharing. Some promising projects to check out:

**Gen-Y Studios:** A project of Robert Redford's Sundance Institute that immerses young mediamakers in the world of independent film for a week-long workshop with a diverse group of their peers during the film festival each year. [www.sundance.org](http://www.sundance.org)

**ListenUp!:** A national media Web site that links young media producers and organizations and encourages kids to produce public service messages for a national campaign. [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org)

**Video Machete:** A Chicago-based collective of community activists, video producers, and youth working together for positive social change. Participants learn to use art as a means of exploring their lives and the world around them. They are in the process of developing a national distribution network for youth videos. [www.videomachete.org](http://www.videomachete.org)

**Wiretap:** An on-line independent information source by and for socially conscious youth that showcases investigative news articles, personal essays, art, and activist resources. The San Francisco-based project seeks to challenge stereotypes, inspire creativity, foster dialogue, and give young people a voice in the media. [www.alternet.org/wiretapmag](http://www.alternet.org/wiretapmag)

**Youth Communication:** A project that helps teenagers to develop writing and critical-thinking skills by training them in journalism and other communication fields. Sponsors of a project that has provided a strong national voice for children in foster care. [www.youthcomm.org](http://www.youthcomm.org)

**Youth Media Network:** An interactive, nationally produced, youth-run Web portal initiated by the Global Action Network. Mediamakers will produce and webcast their own stories using video, audio, photography, poetry, graphics, and music. [www.global-action.org](http://www.global-action.org)

**Youthnoise:** An on-line resource designed to connect, inform and empower youth. Young producers and adults work together to provide info and resources that encourage young people to get involved in civic life and speak up. [www.youthnoise.org](http://www.youthnoise.org)

With the emphasis on group process and social activism, some worry that the quality of the productions suffers. Its effectiveness is limited if the lack of artistic quality and production values means that the only people who can bear to sit through a film screening are the students' families. The Surdna Foundation funds youth media projects out of its Effective Citizenry and its Arts programs—choosing to support the quality of both the process and the product.

Ellen Rudolph, program officer in the arts for the Surdna Foundation, notes that some media projects fail to help students express and develop their artistic voice, turning out poor productions that have little reach. She points to G.A.P.—which is funded by the Surdna Foundation—as an example of an

Youth producers from G.A.P.'s Summer Refugee project.



organization that has managed to wed sophisticated arts education and social ideas. “Their arts training is strong, and they want the kids to make work that can stand up in public exhibitions, work that is a genuine expression of themselves that they can take pride in,” she says. “We look at the camera as just another medium for artistic expression.”

When Coryat and G.A.P. codirector Siegel entered the nascent field of youth media a little more than a decade ago, only a handful of organizations in the United States were tilling the same soil. Today there are 80 organizations working with young people to produce videos, radio programs, and Web sites, and to

write for newspapers and magazines. With experience under their belts and allies in the funding world, some organizations are beginning to create national and international networks for distribution, discourse, and the sharing of best practices. Not surprisingly, the Internet plays a crucial role in this trend. “It all converges on the Web,” says the Open Society Institute's Erlin Ibreck. “The ability to distribute is there; it is accessible to people anywhere in the world. The expansion of technology has had a huge impact on this field. Kids grew up with television, video, the Web. It's amazing to watch them think up fresh new ways to use the medium.”

Coryat concurs, adding that G.A.P. is currently developing the Youth Media Network, an interactive, nationally



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Surdna Foundation Inc.



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director of Youth Initiatives  
Program for the  
Open Society Institute

produced, youth-run Web portal. Youth mediamakers from all over the world, working with artists, will coproduce the site using video, audio, photographs, graphic arts, poetry, and music.

“That's where it all started for us—with an international exchange of stories that kids were telling about their own lives,” she recalls. “We've started to network with other youth organizations in this country. The next leap will be when we begin to go global and connect kids around the world with each other through Web-based projects. That's where this is all headed, and it's wonderful to be along for the ride.”

above, left: Bushra and Sivan,  
two of the Palestinian  
and Israeli youth who  
produced *Peace of Mind*.

## A Media Proposal Checklist for Grantmakers and Grantseekers

The process of evaluating media proposals presents unique challenges. Since few foundations have media programs, it is rare for a foundation to have internal guidelines for assessing media proposals.

This checklist identifies ten frequently asked questions about media proposals. It also offers assessment guidelines. Program officers might use the list internally with colleagues or may distribute it to grantseekers. Likewise, you may choose to use this list as-is, or alter it to suit the particular needs of your foundation. Mediamakers should address each of these ten points in every proposal.

### 1. Does the program fit within the mission of the foundation?

This is the question first and foremost on the mind of any program officer. If the subject matter, the target audience and the intended impact of the project all match the foundation goals, it is a proposal worth reviewing.

### 2. Is the project original?

The producer needs to have researched whether or not there are similar or related productions already in existence. If the topic has been covered before in significant ways, how will this production differ? A complete proposal should include a short section describing the producer's research into existing media.

### 3. Has the producer carefully defined the audience?

Often proposals are general when it comes to audience using phrases like "the audience for this film is PBS viewers." The producer needs to be specific about the demographics of the target audience in terms of such items as:

- age
- gender
- economic background
- ethnicity
- religion
- geography
- size of potential audience

### 4. Does the audience need the programming?

A strong proposal will include quotes or letters of support stating the need for the program from individuals and from organizations that serve the target audience. If the proposal does not include this information, program officers can contact grantees directly to see if the project is of interest to them and their constituents.

### 5. Is the distribution plan solid and realistic?

Again, proposals are often too general on the subject of distribution. In some ways this is understandable because producers cannot get commitments from end-users until they have seen the finished work. However, proposals can and should be specific about distribution and discuss options. For a documentary intended for broadcast, the producer should address cable outlets and international sales—not just PBS. If the program is meant for educational distribution, who are the specific distributors that serve the target audience? The proposal should include quotes or letters of support from potential broadcasters and distributors.

### 6. What is the outreach and promotion plan? How will the project attract its target audience?

Every media production is in competition with a myriad of voices (in the media, the home and workplace) vying for the audience's attention. What specific strategies, tools, resources and partnerships will the producer use to draw people to this production?

For example, if the project includes a Web site, what are the specific steps the producers will take to promote the site? What is the plan to secure free advertising, reviews and links? Will there be any paid advertising? If so, where will that appear?

### 7. Work Samples: Does the mediamaker (and her/his team) have the appropriate talent and experience?

The resume of a veteran mediamaker speaks for itself. That of an emerging or younger media maker may not. Previous work samples are the most important indication of whether the producer can successfully complete the proposed project. Program officers do not have to be experts or critics to evaluate work samples. If you like what you see, that is enough.

Producers often create a sample tape specifically for the proposed project. This is meant to give potential funders a taste of the content and style of the production.

Sample tapes can be confusing to program officers as these are often works in progress. It is rare for producers to have a big budget for sample tapes. Therefore, the technical quality of the sample is often not as high as it will be on the final production. In terms of content, while making that sample tape the producer often learns valuable lessons that inform the final production. This gap between what the sample tape looks like and the written proposal can be perplexing to program officers.

Producers should address this head-on in the proposal. If there were budget limits that impacted production quality, producers should say so. If the focus of the program has sharpened, producers should identify these changes.

If, however, the producer does not address these issues, the program officer should not hesitate to ask the producer specific questions about the sample tape.

### 8. How to evaluate the budget?

When evaluating the budget for a media proposal, it is helpful to look at the budget in comparison to comparable media projects—not other types of projects or services. For more details on evaluating budgets, go to the Grantmaker Resource section of [www.fundfilm.org](http://www.fundfilm.org).

### 9. How to assess the time line?

Not all media projects have an extended time line, but large-scale projects, like documentaries, usually do.

On average, it takes a filmmaker about three years to raise the funds for a documentary or film, about a year to produce the film, and about a year to get the film into distribution. Some projects take much longer. There can be unforeseen challenges that extend a time line beyond the producer's initial projection. Producers need to be realistic in creating production time lines.

It is worth noting that films have a long life span once completed. After the initial broadcast or launch, a film can have steady videotape sales and be rebroadcast for many years to come.

### 10. How to assess the impact of a media project?

There is no easy answer about evaluating the impact of a media project. Media projects create impressions and stir emotions in ways that may change lives forever, and there is no way to tally that.

However, there are methods for doing quantitative and qualitative evaluations of media projects. A proposal should include realistic quantitative targets: How many potential viewers will see the program? How many tapes will likely be sold over a five- to ten-year period? How many people will visit the Web site? How long does the project expect the average visitor to explore the site?

Qualitative evaluation can be done by the creator, a presenter, or an independent contractor. It usually involves interviews and surveys with audience members.

It is important for producers to address evaluation in the project proposal and budget.



Still from *Brown*, an on-line documentary by Ian David Aronson, found at [www.digitaldocumentary.org](http://www.digitaldocumentary.org).

For a glossary of terms and terminology of foundations and grantmaking, visit: [www.cof.org/glossary/index.htm](http://www.cof.org/glossary/index.htm)

For a glossary of terms and terminology of video and film production, visit: [www.bavc.org/glossary.htm](http://www.bavc.org/glossary.htm)

If you wish to distribute copies of this checklist to colleagues, grantseekers, or other partners, please include acknowledgement of *Why Fund Media: Stories from the Field*, published by the Council on Foundations.

# Do's

**Make sure your project is original.** Research distributors interested in your topic and read their catalogs. Talk to organizations or individuals who know the subject. Survey selected members of your intended audience.

**Research each foundation carefully.** Gain a full understanding of each foundation's mission. Take the time to look at what the foundation has funded over the last two years, where it has made grants, and the size of those grants. In your cover letter, ask for an amount within that giving range that will underwrite something specific in your line item budget. For example, if the foundation generally awards grants in the \$5,000 range, pick one \$5,000 item the grant could cover entirely.

**Try to contact the program officer** and see if he/she will discuss your project before you apply to see if it is a potential match. This will probably only work at medium-sized or smaller foundations. Large foundations will want to see a letter of inquiry (LOI).

**Think about what your project can do for the foundation.** Put yourself in the grantmaker's shoes. Why would the organization invest in your project? Discuss how your project can help the organization further their goals.

**Present a complete, well-written proposal.** If you're not a great writer, team up with one. Follow the foundation's specific guidelines. Make sure your writing is concise, direct and compelling. Look at A Media Proposal Checklist (page 54) to see what foundations are looking for in a proposal.

**Make sure your sample tape and work samples look great inside and out.** The tape need not be lengthy, but it should represent you and your work in the best light. Simple attractive packaging is appropriate. If you want the tape returned, be sure to include a self-addressed stamped envelope.

**Call your program officer after submitting your application but before the panel meets.** Make sure the proposal arrived safely and then ask if the program officer has any questions or concerns that you can address.

**Call the foundation if your project is rejected.** If the program officer will take your call, thank the foundation for considering your proposal, then politely ask for any additional information on why you were rejected or request any panel notes. This feedback can assist you greatly as you write future grants.

**Send a written thank-you note whether you get the grant or not.** Grantseeking is about relationship building. You may apply again or meet the program officer again in your career.

# Don'ts

**Don't assume your project is original** just because you want to produce it.

**Don't be dissuaded** by a foundation's lack of experience with media grants, especially if your project looks like a good match. But, if a foundation has no demonstrated interest in your topic or target audience, don't apply.

**Don't call a program officer too frequently** and never ask a question that is already covered in any of the print materials. This is a fast way to have them lose interest in you and your project.

**Don't forget** that it's the job of foundations to give away money to projects that further their goals. They are looking for the right investments.

**Don't forget** that defining your audience, outreach and distribution are the most important parts of your written proposal.

**Don't send a low-resolution sample tape** or work sample if you can possibly avoid it. Grantmakers have limited or no experience in production. They think the final tape will look like the samples you send—so send tapes that put your best foot forward.

**Don't expect the foundation to get back to you** with any mistakes a grantmaker finds in your proposal or with any questions that might arise from your narrative or budget.

**Don't make a follow-up call when you are angry.** Never berate a foundation for not granting you funds, and do not try to change their minds.

**Don't hesitate** to apply to the same foundation more than once. Every grant cycle is different.

## Contact Information

### Organizations:

Council on Foundations  
Evelyn Gibson  
Manager, Constituent Awards Programs  
(202) 467-0471  
fundfilm@cof.org  
www.fundfilm.org

Deep Focus Productions  
Arthur Dong  
(323) 662-6575  
arthur@DeepFocusProductions.com  
www.DeepFocusProductions.com

Film Arts Foundation  
Gail Silva  
Executive Director  
(415) 552-8760  
info@filmarts.org  
www.filmarts.org

Global Action Project, Inc.  
Diana Coryat  
Co-Founder, Co-Executive Director  
(212) 594-9577  
media@global-action.org  
www.global-action.org

Grantmakers in Film and Electronic Media  
Tim Gunn  
Secretary/Treasurer  
c/o National Video Resources  
(212) 274-8080  
timgunn@nvr.org

Green Fire Productions  
Karen Anspacher-Meyer  
Executive Director  
(503) 736-1295  
karen@greenfireproductions.org  
www.greenfireproductions.org

National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture (NAMAC)  
Helen De Michiel  
National Director  
(415) 431-1391  
namac@namac.org  
www.namac.org

Third Coast International Audio Festival  
Johanna Zorn  
Director  
(312) 832.3352  
jzorn@wbez.org  
www.thirdcoastfestival.org

Working Films  
Judith Helfand  
(910) 342-9000  
info@workingfilms.org  
www.workingfilms.org

www.transom.org  
A Project of Atlantic Public Media  
Jay Allison  
(508) 548-8585  
jwa@well.com  
www.transom.org

### Individuals:

Peggy Ahwesh  
Media Artist  
peggy@echonyc.com

Toni Dove  
Media Artist  
Tdove@aol.com  
www.tonidove.com

Karen Hirsch  
Editor  
Why Fund Media  
(206) 784-5163  
firefly@speakeasy.net

Stephen Winter  
Filmmaker  
Relentless Pictures, Inc.  
(718) 638 6379  
stefe1417@aol.com

For information about the videos of Nam June Paik, contact the distributor Electronic Arts Intermix  
(212) 337-0680  
www.eai.org

For more information about funding media, please visit [www.fundfilm.org](http://www.fundfilm.org)