WHEN MOVIES GO TO WASHINGTON

Documentary Films & Public Policy in the United States VOL 1

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CENTER FOR MEDIA & SOCIAL IMPACT
SCHOOL of COMMUNICATION
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ABOUT THE PROJECT

When Movies Go to Washington

When Movies Go to Washington: Documentary Films & Public Policy in the United States (Volume 1) is the first in a two-volume investigation about the role of documentary films in legislative and regulatory change and influence in the United States. Volume 1 focuses on the federal level, and Volume 2 focuses on state and local levels. Both volumes were directed and written by Caty Borum Chattoo and Will Jenkins under the auspices of the Center for Media & Social Impact at American University's School of Communication in Washington, D.C. This investigation was funded by the Fledgling Fund (www.thefledglingfund.org). For the Center for Media & Social Impact, American University graduate student fellows Kelsey Tate, Hannah Sedgwick, Nesima Aberra and Michele Alexander provided invaluable research and copyediting support. The report is available at www.cmsimpact.org.

About the Center for Media & Social Impact

The Center for Media & Social Impact (CMSI) at American University's School of Communication, based in Washington, D.C., is a research center and innovation lab that creates, studies and showcases media for social impact. Focusing on independent, documentary, entertainment and public media, CMSI bridges boundaries between scholars, producers and communication practitioners who work across media production, media impact, public policy and audience engagement. The Center produces resources for the field and research, convenes conferences and events and works collaboratively to understand and design media that matter. www.cmsimpact.org.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Caty Borum Chattoo

Caty Borum Chattoo is Director of the Center for Media & Social Impact (CMSI) and Executive in Residence at the American University School of Communication in Washington, D.C. She is an award-winning producer and strategist who works at the intersection of social-change communication, media research and documentary production. Borum Chattoo's social-change storytelling, strategy and research work has been featured in *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *NPR*, *Businessweek*, *The Huffington Post* and *PBS Media Shift*, and her social justice documentaries have aired on the Sundance Channel, Pivot, NDTV (India), PBS World, Link TV, and KCET.

She has produced two theatrical documentary feature films (*Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price and The After Party*), a TV documentary and transmedia series funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (*Stand Up Planet*), several half-hour documentary TV specials, a seven-part documentary TV series (*Sierra Club Chronicles*) and PSA campaigns designed for social change on issues ranging from global poverty to climate change to HIV. As a lead strategist for the Gates-Foundation-funded ViewChange project, she produced a global poverty TV series and architected and directed social-impact campaign partnerships with international humanitarian organizations. Borum Chattoo served as an invited juror for the 2014 and 2015 international BRITDOC Documentary Impact Awards and is a regular contributor to *Documentary* magazine, the trade publication of the leading international association for non-fiction storytelling.

Previously, she was Senior Vice President in the Social Impact practice group at FleishmanHillard International Communications in Washington, D.C. In Los Angeles, she was a longtime collaborator with legendary TV producer and philanthropist/activist Norman Lear as a founding director of Declare Yourself, a national youth civic engagement organization; and Special Projects Director & Senior Producer at the USC Norman Lear Center, a research and public policy center that examines the social impact of entertainment on society. She also served as Program Officer in the Kaiser Family Foundation's Entertainment Media & Public Health program, where she managed HIV-awareness partnership programs, TV specials and PSA campaigns with MTV and BET; Project Director at the Center for Media Education and Fellow in civic journalism at *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts. She holds a master's degree in Communication from the University of Pennsylvania (the Annenberg School for Communication) and an undergraduate degree in Communication Studies (*summa cum laude*, Phi Beta Kappa) from Virginia Tech.

Will Jenkins

Will Jenkins has more than a decade of communications and policy experience at the White House, the Department of Health and Human Services and Congress. Over the years, he has also worked with many filmmakers and media organizations to help them understand and engage in public policy. Jenkins has spoken and led workshops on films and policymaking for the South by Southwest Festival, the Tribeca Film Institute, BRITDOC/Good Pitch, SilverDocs/AFI Docs, the International Documentary Association, the Fledging Fund, Docs in Progress and Women in Film & Video.

In 2010, Jenkins wrote a guide to public policy for filmmakers for Documentary magazine (www.documentary.org/magazine/filmmakers-guide-capitol-hill).

In 2012, he was Policy Director for the Impact Film Festival at the Republican and Democratic National Conventions, where he coordinated screening discussions with politicians, filmmakers, celebrities and reporters for the films *Butter*, *Electoral Dysfunction*, *The House I Live In*, *Hunger Hits Home* and *The Invisible War*. In 2013, he developed the American Film Institute's first "Political Bootcamp for Filmmakers."

During his time in the federal government, Jenkins has served as a spokesperson to local, national and foreign news outlets on a wide range of issues. He has planned high-profile events and policy rollouts featured in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *USA TODAY* and *The Washington Post* and managed appearances for government officials on "Meet the Press," "Morning Joe" and "The Colbert Report."

Jenkins has overseen the planning and evaluation of a wide range of communications products and campaigns by multiple federal agencies. As a legislative aide in Congress, he guided from introduction to enactment the first legislation to protect American military members from the health effects of toxic burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan, which has been called "this generation's Agent Orange." In 2007, Jenkins founded the Democratic Communicators Network, the professional association for Democratic communications staff in Congress and the Administration, which provides mentoring, networking and training for hundreds of members every year. He was also elected to serve on the board of the Congressional Legislative Staff Association, a bipartisan staff association in Washington.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past few decades, an increased number of social-issue documentary film teams have endeavored to fuel policy shifts in the United States—that is, to influence legislation, regulation, enforcement and the views of policymakers related to key social issues on the federal, state and local levels. Indeed, Capitol Hill screenings in Washington, D.C., have become regular rites of passage.

But while anecdotal stories of Hill screenings abound, a deeper strategic and tactical understanding about how social-issue documentary films contribute to policy is harder to ascertain. Documentary filmmakers and policymakers operate in different worlds with distinct agendas and ways of doing business. And yet, they are often able to come together in mutually beneficial ways.

When Movies Go to Washington *provides inside perspectives from policymakers, filmmakers and advocacy leaders who have successfully contributed to shifting or creating policy agendas with the help of documentary films. The report offers documentary film teams tips for engagement with the federal public policy arena. While social-issue documentary filmmakers certainly don't need to transform themselves into finely-tuned policy experts, understanding the basics and some insider tips can make the difference in a policy strategy's effectiveness. It may also provide filmmakers with the ability to fully vet impact strategy teams who may work alongside them. Additionally, a fuller understanding of the policymaking process can widen opportunities for engagement beyond passing laws alone – to the processes by which those laws are carried out and impact the lives of people outside Washington, D.C.*

1 Look for Momentum.

Changing policy does not happen quickly, and results may not be apparent until years after a movie has premiered in the entertainment marketplace. However, when a film can successfully align with the social momentum that has been built up by others over time, it can be a catalyst that pushes the issue forward in a dramatic way.

2 Choose Effective Associations & Advocacy Groups as Partners.

For a film to have federal policy impact, it's helpful to partner early with the right advocacy groups and associations that focus on the social issue at the heart of a documentary film. Not much gets done in the federal government without advocacy and lobbying efforts, so they are crucial to any policy impact campaign. They are trusted guides and issue experts who maintain strong relationships with members of Congress, congressional staffers, and federal agency leaders and staffers. They can help film teams understand the precise policy position of a social issue and realistic policy directions – and they can move an issue forward and engage their own considerable grassroots networks.

3 Understand the Issue's Position in the Policy Process.

When developing a public policy impact strategy for a documentary film, it is crucial to understand the current status in the policymaking process of the issue it explores. Has legislation been proposed already? Is this a new issue without legislation? Is existing legislation not being enforced? Answering these questions – with the help of advocacy group policy experts – is key. Understanding the partisan implications of which major party – Republican or Democrat – controls Congress or the White House is essential to a realistic understanding of what is possible at

4 Find the Right Policymakers.

There are four soft criteria for strategic film teams when considering particular members of Congress or federal agency officials to help support the efforts of the film, in addition to the recommendations from advocacy experts: (1) committee assignment and/or jurisdiction over the issue, (2) local angles of the film and connect to the member of Congress' home district, (3) established long-time commitment to a social issue and (4) level of seniority. And increasingly, a record of bipartisan success is crucial – one-party policymaking generally doesn't progress very far.

5 Create Strong Relationships with Policymakers' Staff.

Film teams are right to think of policy staffers as the people who do most of the work. If a member of Congress or federal official assigns a project to a staff member, it will have a better chance of moving a policy agenda

forward, well beyond the splash of a Capitol Hill screening. Relationships with staff are almost as important as the relationship with the member of Congress and should be nurtured.

6 Understand a Story's Unique Value & Prepare Selling Points.

Policymakers and their staffers are armed with facts and statistics. What they often don't have is precisely what a documentary film team can offer: a compelling, intimate, human story that brings an issue to life and captures emotions. In this way, a filmmaker and policymaker agenda can align – the filmmaker provides the crucial intimate human stories. Film teams should be prepared to talk in ways that align the values of the story with the values and objectives of the policymakers.

7 Know the Facts.

An intimate story alone is not enough to convince a policymaker to pay attention to a documentary film about a social issue. Knowing the facts of the issue is important for establishing credibility with policymakers, who are less likely to support someone's personal advocacy agenda than a sound set of facts that back the human stories.

8 Provide Different Options for Viewing.

Because policymakers and their busy staffers receive so many requests for their time, it can be challenging for them to watch an entire film. A full suite of optimal versions for policy engagement is ideal. It includes: (1) a two-minute trailer to capture initial attention, (2) five-minute trailers or scene clips for small meetings, (3) a 20-minute cut for a larger meeting and Q&A and (4) a full-length film for congressional and federal agency screenings.

9 Consider Nonpartisan Appeals for the Long Game.

In today's federal policy arena, legislation supported only by one major political party generally won't be successful. Working diligently to develop messages and an understanding of a film's core social issue – in a way that can be embraced by the values and interests of both Republican and Democratic policy players – is difficult but useful.

10 Leverage Earned Media Coverage.

Earned media coverage – articles in newspapers, magazines, stories in TV national and local news outlets, even film awards – amplify a message well outside the policy arena of Washington, D.C. Media coverage is a tactical tool that can raise awareness of a supportive public who can mobilize to tell Congress and federal agencies how they feel about an issue. And, at particular points in the policy process, public support can make all the difference. Media coverage for a social-issue documentary is not only an entertainment publicity function but a grassroots coalition tool.

INTRODUCTION

In 2009, the only microbiologist in the United States Congress, Representative Louise Slaughter (D-N.Y.), introduced the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act (PAMTA) in the U.S. House of Representatives. Her goal: To ensure antibiotics used in farm animals do not harm humans. But as both an outspoken advocate for food safety and a longtime member of Congress, she understood the barriers and the odds for success.

As Rep. Slaughter stated at the time, "We're up against a pretty strong lobby. It will really come down to whether members of Congress want to protect their constituents or agribusiness."[1]

The proposed legislation, with a companion Senate bill introduced by Senator Edward Kennedy, had been introduced at that point several times since the 1980s, only to be stopped repeatedly by a powerful agribusiness lobby.[2]

About a year after the introduction of PAMTA, Rep. Slaughter hosted a special screening of the new food documentary, *Food, Inc.*, for policymakers in the Capitol.[3] Along with media buzz about the film, the high-profile screening – along with the film's national exposure – helped bring food-safety issues to the forefront of public discussion. Rep. Slaughter followed the screening with a congressional hearing on the same topic. By the end of the year, her bill had 100 co-sponsors and a related food safety bill, the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act, was passed in the House of Representatives and later became law.[4]

As an entertainment vehicle that generated substantial media attention, *Food, Inc.* captured public consciousness through a broadcast on PBS, a 2009 nomination in the Academy Awards' Best Documentary Feature category, film festival media coverage and a streaming release on Netflix. With the combination of notable film achievements and media coverage, it could be seen as a tidy, fast case study of a documentary that influenced public policy. Was it really as easy as it seemed? How did it work behind the scenes? A glimpse under the hood reveals several key elements. The role of prominent and respected food experts Michael Pollan and Eric Schlosser in the film was likely key in legitimizing the film as an act of public information, rather than partisan advocacy. But, perhaps most central was the policy moment itself: At that time, Congress and the White House were controlled by the Democratic Party, which has a long history of promoting environmental and public health issues. In other words, the policy landscape was right for the legislation. The infrastructure existed for the policy shift to take place at the same time the film moved audiences to action.

Not every social-issue documentary film premieres within an opportune policy and media moment, complete with vocal insider champions and an existing policy infrastructure ready to move forward. In fact, even recognizing an opportune policy moment in the first place is not happenstance, but requires advance landscape research and insider understanding in order to gauge the state of the issue in the policy process.

For most social-issue films, advancing policy shifts is challenging and slow. But the rewards from a social-change perspective can be great, given the considerable role of policy to directly influence millions of lives. But how does it actually work? And, what is the film team's role? Film teams can take on different configurations of advocacy. In some cases, the filmmakers evolve into leaders of movements and advocacy efforts. In other scenarios, policymakers and advocacy groups find strategic ways to integrate a film into their existing campaigns to move a social issue forward. Although this report does not cover the details of every documentary that has worked successfully to advance a policy shift, in-depth interviews with federal-level policymakers reveal consistent patterns and conclusions: The films work because they capture hearts and emotions in ways that policy briefs and fact sheets cannot. But, even

so, successful policy advocacy efforts require sophisticated professional guides (such as advocacy groups or other policy staffers), policy champions on the inside and persistence.

This report provides a comprehensive, contemporary framework – specifically for policy engagement by film and media makers at the federal level – around legislation, regulation and enforcement. The research includes portraits of three films, purposefully profiled years after their original premieres in order to understand the long-term strategy and impact: *Semper Fi*, *Bully* and *I.O.U.S.A*.

Most importantly, given that policymaking is a true insider sport, this report was created primarily from the expert insights and perspectives provided by in-depth interviews with three groups of professional policy insiders:

(1) policy staffers and officials (Congress, federal agencies),

(2) professional issue advocates (NGO issue experts), and

(3) the filmmakers themselves, who often evolve to act as change movement leaders in addition to their creative roles. This report includes the results from 20 in-depth interviews with these disparate professionals who have worked together to set policy agendas and advocate for change. All interviews were completed between October 2015 and April 2016. The policymaker interviews include a former high-ranking presidential appointee at the U.S. Department of Education, a former head of the federal Government Accountability Office, several former legislative and communication staff from senior members of Congress, executive directors of advocacy groups including the Environmental Working Group, ECPAT USA and more.

The report begins with a brief overview of the relevant players in federal policy, with a focus on three strategic areas for social-issue documentary film teams: the legislative branch (Congress), the executive branch (the White House and federal agencies), and the unofficial insiders, advocacy groups (issue experts and advocates who help educate members of Congress in the public interest). It follows with insider case studies of the three documentary films. Finally, the report includes a "Federal Policy Playbook for Documentary Film Teams" – to aid filmmakers, social-issue strategists and advocates who hope to meaningfully interface with policymakers.

THE FEDERAL POLICY ARENA: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The nation's capital is synonymous with institutional power. Washington, D.C., is, after all, the epicenter of federal agencies, Congress, the White House, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), associations, lobbyists and advocates, with power brokers representing every interest group – from corporate to public interests.

It is the place where federal laws are both passed and *enforced*. The emphasis on "enforced" is meaningful as, too often, media portrayals of the policy process in Washington convey the idea that passing a law is the end of the policy process. In fact, it's only the beginning. After Congress does its job, federal agencies are then charged with enforcing the laws – and laws are only as strong as the enforcement of them. The legislative impact process is complicated and time-consuming. But, for documentary filmmakers and their strategy teams who endeavor to understand how their intimate stories can connect with the possibility of institutional policy change, understanding the lay of the land is a first step.

The three branches of the federal government are comprised of: the **legislative** (Congress), **executive** (the president and federal agencies) and **judicial** (courts) branches. For the purposes of strategically fueling policy change, an unofficial "fourth branch" of influence – advocacy groups and associations – matters.

Legislative Branch: Congress

The U.S. Congress is made up of two chambers: the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives. Congress functions to introduce and pass legislation. According to this brief overview of the legislative process, courtesy of the Library of Congress:

> *The enactment of law always requires both chambers to separately agree to the same bill in the same form before presenting it to the President. Congressional action is typically planned and coordinated by party leaders in each chamber, who have been chosen by members of their own caucus or conference – that is, the group of members in a chamber who share a party affiliation.*
>
> *In both chambers, much of the policy expertise resides in the standing committees – panels of members from both parties that typically take the lead in developing and assessing legislation. Members typically serve on a small number of committees, often for many years, allowing them to become highly knowledgeable in certain policy areas. All committees are chaired by a member of the majority party, though chairs often work closely with the committee's ranking member, the most senior member of the minority party on the committee.*
>
> *Committee members and staff focus much of their time on drafting and considering legislative proposals, but committees engage in other activities, as well. Once law is enacted, Congress has the prerogative and responsibility to provide oversight of policy implementation, and its committees take the lead in this effort.*[5]

Executive Branch: The White House & Federal Agencies[6]

The moment Congress passes a law is only the beginning. Even after Congress passes legislation, it may be months or even years before it is put into effect – if at all. The president and federal agencies are responsible for carrying out or "executing" the laws passed by Congress. The first step is to get the president's signature to become law. Presidents may also issue a signing statement with guidance for how the law should be interpreted – particularly if he or she disagrees with Congress. When

the president opposes all or a substantial part of a piece of legislation, he/she often vetoes it. This usually forces Congress to produce a new compromise version (unless congressional leaders have enough votes to override the veto).

After the presidential signature, federal agencies, such as the Department of Education, for example, must issue regulations (also known as "rules") to explain how they will carry out the law. They must establish and administer all the programs that Congress calls for and funds. And, federal agencies also must set-up processes to enforce the laws to ensure they are being obeyed. In addition to executing the laws passed by Congress, the president recommends to Congress an annual budget with priorities for federal agencies and often suggests new legislation. Sometimes the president issues a Presidential Memorandum or an Executive Order, which directs federal departments to take new actions separate from congressional legislation. This often happens when Congress is deadlocked on an issue or controlled by a different party than the White House.

Advocacy Groups & Associations

Issue advocacy groups[7] and lobbyists are not part of the U.S. government, but they are vitally important players in the policy process – think of them as the informal “influence branch.”. Many membership associations, like the AARP or American Medical Association, also have advocacy offices or hire outside lobbyists to advocate for their interests. The best advocates are insiders who are both issue experts and experts on the nuances of how legislation is proposed and passed by Congress, and then enforced by federal agencies. Advocacy groups and associations are key sources for both information and connections.

It's important to understand the distinction between two kinds of policy engagement: lobbying and education. Lobbying is a regulated activity carried out by registered lobbyists that involves both contributions to political campaigns and efforts to persuade policymakers to support specific policy proposals. Instead of, or in addition to, lobbying, many nonprofits and other organizations focus on educating policymakers about key issues.[8] They do not endorse or promote specific legislation or election outcomes, but instead, they seek to raise awareness

INSIDE POLICY-INVOLVED DOCUMENTARY FILMS

Today, Capitol Hill screenings often garner media coverage and additional opportunities for policymakers to meet with documentary film teams. Screenings alone are not synonymous with policy impact, however. Policy influence at the federal level can be a long game, and it usually happens through the collaborative efforts of a dedicated documentary film and strategy team, advocacy groups with strong insider policy expertise and leaders at the congressional or federal agency level. By delving deeply into the long-tail life cycles of three policy-involved films – *Semper Fi*, *Bully* and *I.O.U.S.A.* – including in-depth interviews with the major policy players, best practices for future efforts emerge.

SEMPER FI: ALWAYS FAITHFUL

Film Overview

Directed by Tony Hardmon and Rachel Libert, *Semper Fi: Always Faithful* premiered in April 2011 at the Tribeca Film Festival and on MSNBC on February 24, 2012. The film was shortlisted for the 2012 Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature, and it also was nominated for a 2013 Emmy Award.[9]

Synopsis

Marine Corps Master Sgt. Jerry Ensminger was a devoted Marine for nearly twenty-five years. As a drill instructor he lived and breathed the "Corps" and was responsible for indoctrinating thousands of new recruits with its motto Semper Fidelis or "Always Faithful." When Jerry's nine-year-old daughter Janey died of a rare type of leukemia, his world collapsed. As a grief-stricken father, he struggled for years to make sense of what happened. His search for answers led to the shocking discovery of a Marine Corps cover-up of one of the largest water contamination incidents in U.S. history. Semper Fi: Always Faithful follows Jerry's mission to expose the Marine Corps and force them to live up to their motto to the thousands of soldiers and their families exposed to toxic chemicals. His fight reveals a grave injustice at North Carolina's Camp Lejeune and a looming environmental crisis at military sites across the country.[10]

The Film's Journey

In 1997, after hearing a TV report about a possible investigation of Camp Lejeune and potential chemical contaminants, Marine Corps Master Sgt. Jerry Ensminger began a long journey to uncover the truth about the death of his nine-year-old daughter in 1985 from a rare form of cancer. After living with his family for many years at Camp Lejeune, and armed with a growing suspicion that the Marine Corps knew and failed to fully disclose information about dangerous chemical contaminants in the water supply, Ensminger devoted himself to finding answers. Steadily, he pieced together a strong dossier of materials that confirmed his suspicions – a potential cover-up as high up as the leadership of the U.S. Marine Corps and the Department of Defense.

In 2004, the *Washington Post* published a story about the issue, including Ensminger's involvement, titled "Tainted Water in the Land of Semper Fi."[11] Documentary filmmakers Rachel Libert and Tony Hardmon entered the scene shortly thereafter. They had heard about him, read the *Washington Post* story and quickly requested a meeting. As a social-issue documentary team, they knew immediately this was a story that needed to be told. According to Libert:

> *There's this environmental message coming from such an unexpected source. He was not an environmentalist before this happened. We thought this message could really preach beyond the choir. You can be invested in the story of this man and his passion, even if you didn't connect with that issue. For us, we're interested in social issue filmmaking couched within a story. We don't do straight advocacy films – not our style. This was a perfect fit because there was a compelling story and narrative, and within the narrative is an opportunity to raise awareness about these environmental issues.*[12]

Recognizing that a documentary film could amplify his efforts, Engsminger

agreed to allow Libert and Hardmon to follow his efforts to push for justice in the form of legislative reform. The legislative goal was to secure health care for the thousands of Marines and their families who had been harmed by the toxic water contamination or something even deeper.

Connecting with Policymakers

The same 2004 *Washington Post* story that had captivated the film team also captured the attention of U.S. Representative John Dingell (D-Mich.), who served at the time as the ranking Democrat on the House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Committee. Dingell and his office had been working for several years on environmental regulation issues related to Superfund and other toxic contaminants, and they were looking for human stories to help connect the issue to real lives at stake.[13] After reading the Post article, Dingell's staff invited Ensminger to a private meeting. Shortly thereafter, Ensminger testified about his daughter to the full Energy and Commerce Committee. The documentary film team captured it all.

Ensminger's testimony solidified a role for him and his story, and it created powerful connections for him on Capitol Hill, including one with Richard Frandsen, environmental counsel for the House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Committee. It was Dingell's commitment to the issue that pushed the relationship forward. According to Frandsen, "After I brought in Jerry to meet with him, Dingell assigned me to help him. That's what led to Jerry testifying to Congress in 2004. It definitely helped me to be able to devote my own time to it. You need your [member of Congress] to be on board. Otherwise, I would have had to just fit this into a lot of other things as a staff member."[14] Dingell's office went on to order the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), a federal public health agency under the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, to form an expert panel to look more carefully into the situation at Camp Lejeune.

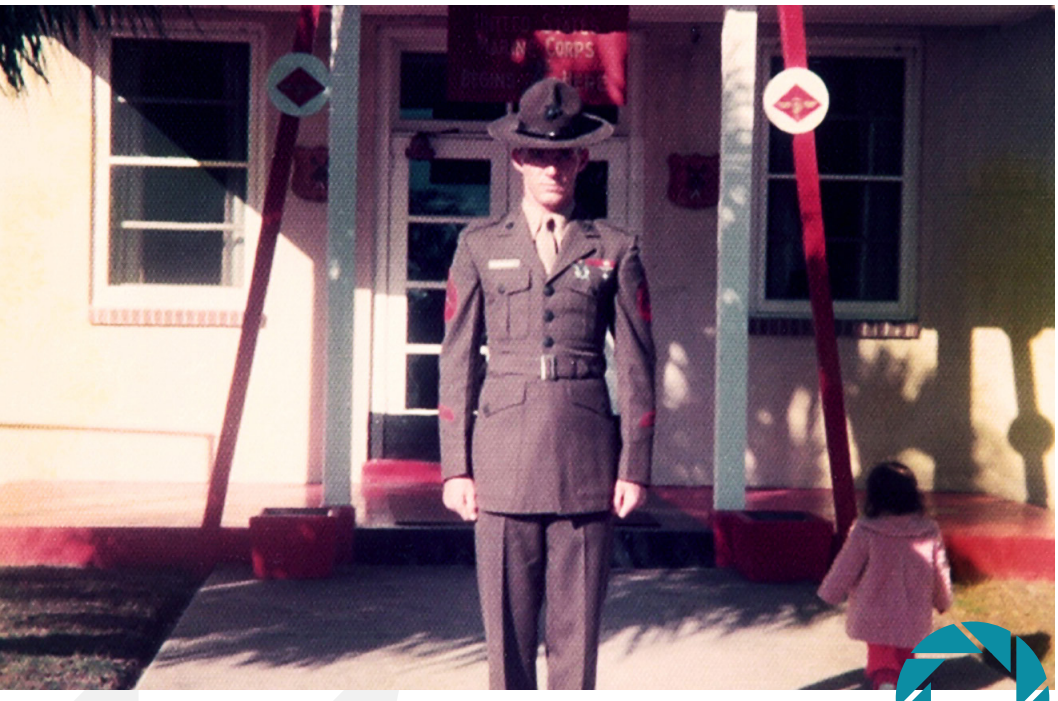
As Ensminger continued to work with Dingell's office, he and the film team knocked on other doors in Congress – strategically focusing on North Carolina, home to Camp Lejeune. A meeting with Senator Richard Burr (R-N.C.) led to Burr's office assigning a senior staffer,

Brooks Tucker, to work with Ensminger. Tucker eventually wrote the legislation that would become the final policy victory. As Tucker recalled, "There was some flagging enthusiasm over the years on the policy side, and it fell to me and a few others to keep the fires burning. The staff has to keep the trains running on time."[15] The slow policy work ebbed and flowed over the next several years. Finally, the documentary film's festival premiere and broadcast on MSNBC in 2012 served a crucial timing role – one that may have pushed the legislation over the edge with advocacy and pressure that couldn't be ignored. Tucker said:

> *There was a general growing awareness about the problem, and the film and discussion about the film and the film being released (including a screening on the Hill of April 2012, one of the first screenings, with a large audience of staffers, Senator Burr, other members of Congress, lots of committee members), and I think that started to really show people what the problem was at the time. The film certainly added more weight to the public awareness…It elevated the story to a national level.*[16]

During the film premiere, Senator Burr's office worked to drum up public support and media coverage, creating a symbiotic relationship that benefited the film, the cause and the proposed legislation directly. Tucker recalled:

> *Our office put out press releases about the film during the premiere, communicating with reporters about the film. Once that was out there, other news outlets – foreign and domestic – began to contact us to ask for statements from the Senator and follow the issue more closely. There might not have been a lot of national fanfare leading up to the MSNBC premiere, but afterwards, it gave media organizations momentum to cover the story. The media connection and formal press connection to the documentary's prominence probably kept this issue going in the 12-13-month time frame when we were having difficulties getting funding for the scientific studies to push the legislation forward. Without the film, it would have been very difficult for Jerry and his folks to claim a national cause about this – it would have been about a few people who are sick in North Carolina and Florida.*[17]



The Role of Advocacy

Documentarians Libert and Hardmon supplemented their own expertise by establishing connections with issue advocates. They wanted to establish a strong grassroots infrastructure while filming Ensminger and digging deeper into the story. The filmmakers understood that they needed to cultivate relationships with issue advocacy groups to help provide facts for the storytelling, to amplify Ensminger's efforts on Capitol Hill and to create an infrastructure for eventual outreach to the public and policymakers. According to Libert:

> *We started identifying groups fairly early on about the issue. We did this early on to educate ourselves, but also to inform the storytelling.*
>
> *Initially, we went after the well-known, bigger advocacy players, but they didn't have the time or inclination to be super-involved. One of our early funders was Chicken & Egg, and Judith Helfand was really helpful in suggesting some of the smaller players. That's when I found out about Environmental Working Group, Green Alliance, Safer Chemicals Healthy Families – those organizations, compared to the bigger groups, were much more effective, and the film was much more on target to what those groups were doing….Mostly I was evaluating whether the groups were passionate and interested in this issue. That naturally evolved. The ones who had time became our major partners.*[18]

Ensminger's and the film team's work on the advocacy front was crucial to developing the policy infrastructure and amplifying the support of several

congressional offices who became involved over the years. Libert and Hardmon worked with strong advocacy supporters – particularly the Environmental Working Group (EWG) and the Project on Government Oversight (POGO) – to help them reach other congressional offices, distribute press releases and alerts to their members, and to help set up Capitol Hill screenings. The advocacy groups did more than just activate their own members and constituents. They acted as sophisticated, trusted expert guides into the policy world.

Heather White, then Executive Director of the EWG, assigned a policy expert in her office to work directly with Ensminger and the film team, who were already working diligently with congressional staffers in the offices of Senators Kay Hagan (D-N.C.) and Richard Burr (R-N.C.). As savvy D.C.-based advocates and policy experts, White and her team were able to amplify the efforts directly. According to White:

> *Because we were based in D.C., we were able to get a sign-on letter that Hagan and Burr had and to get environmental groups to sign on. We were able to get the victims and many other groups to sign onto this letter. This is the way you get the issue on the radar of environmental groups. Then we worked with Jerry and staffers to get the film screened in Capitol Hill. Our role at EWG was to get media attention, to provide another voice from the victims – direct lobbying, letter writing, supporting the screening on Capitol Hill and helping to organize meetings for Jerry."*[19]

Impact & Formula for Success

Although the policy realities shifted over several years of advocacy efforts, a final federal victory was won in August 2012. The Honoring America's Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act of 2012, also known as the Janey Ensminger Act, was signed into law by President Barack Obama.[20] Ensminger and the filmmakers were invited to the White House for the signing ceremony. The law, based on Senator Burr's earlier legislation, provides health care for the Marine Corps veterans and their families who lived or worked at Camp Lejeune from Jan. 1, 1957, through Dec. 31, 1987, and who have a condition linked to exposure to the toxic chemicals as listed in the legislation.[21]

White saw the legislation as a major precedent-setting victory: "This is the only major environmental thing that Congress did at all [that year]. The lesson learned is that we have to talk about the environment in a health frame. Jerry and his story just couldn't be ignored."[22]

According to Ensminger, who had worked on the issue for more than 15 years at that point – and the filmmakers for eight years – the documentary film was essential to the policy victory, and he said he "seriously doubted" the law would have passed without it:

> *That film brought so much awareness and so much attention to the people that needed to see it, and that was Congress. The film brought awareness to the issue to a much larger audience than I ever could. I could have spent decades talking about this and not getting this done. That's what is so important is the awareness. You could have the most egregious act committed against you, but if you can't get it out to the public eye like this documentary did, you might just stand around and beat your head against the issue.*[23]

For *Semper Fi*, the formula for success included:

Emotional Storytelling Beyond the Facts

Ensminger's personal story, and the intimate filming style of the documentarians, created a powerful, emotional force that brought facts and statistics to life for policy leaders, advocacy groups and the public. According to White: "Every story needs to be personal; the conversation needs to be values-based, not technological, and needs to be bipartisan as much as possible…Policy analysts have to become storytellers – we just have to, it's how we persuade, it's how we tell stories and it's how we get to the right outcome. If we can't encapsulate these technical, complex issues in a meaningful storytelling way, we won't be effective."[24]

Creating Champions in Strategic Members of Congress

Ensminger and the film team strategically made deep connections with a senior member of Congress who served on an issue-aligned committee, the House of Representatives' Energy and Commerce Committee. The other strong issue connection was the local angle – Camp Lejuene in North Carolina was the heart of Ensminger's efforts and the entire film. Connecting with the senators from North Carolina established a force of congressional leadership that persuaded other members of Congress to become supporters.

Advocacy Infrastructure

The expertise of EWG and POGO, the film's policy- and media-savvy advocacy group alliance, was essential. According to Libert: "Moving forward now, I would believe there is a possibility that a film could actually help pass legislation…. It does *really* require advocacy partners who know how the legislation process works. And we found that through the Environmental Working Group and through the legislators themselves."[25]

Command of the Facts

Congressional staffers agreed that the film's even-handed, factual approach to the story – and its powerful human center – allowed members of Congress from both sides of the partisan aisle to get involved. According to Tucker, formerly of Senator Burr's office, "There are a lot of preconceived notions about Congress and congressional staffs. Most staffers want to make a difference and feel like they are part of making a difference. So, when something as significant as this documentary came along, we all felt like there was a way to be a part of something bigger."[26]

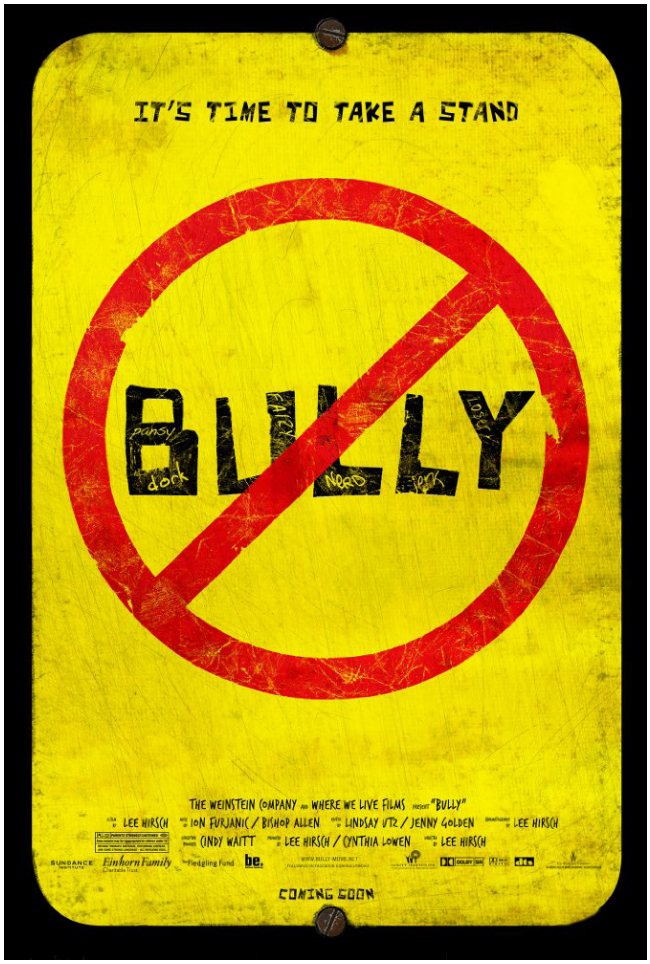
Nonpartisan Message Framing

Uniformly, the policy staffers and advocacy groups who worked together to amplify the film agreed that the storytelling's nonpartisan nature – and Ensminger's approach – was essential to their success. Policy staffers and advocates stated that movement on Capitol Hill simply won't happen any longer without coalition-building and a nonpartisan approach. According to Frandsen, formerly from Rep. Dingell's office, "It was effective for Jerry to frame the issues of 'live up to the motto of the Marine Corps' and patriotism and 'taking care of our veterans' instead of talking in a partisan way. I've seen a lot of partisan activist groups really flame out – some in frustration or some who make it conspiratorial – but they did this exactly the right way to ultimately be effective, even in a polarized world."[27]

Earned Media Coverage

The role of media coverage in this scenario provides important bookends. One 2004 Washington Post article immediately captured the attention of Congress and the filmmakers who ended up covering the story. And again in 2012, when the Janey Ensminger Act had stalled in Congress and needed a public outcry, the MSNBC broadcast of the film – along with the media coverage that accompanied it – spurred vocal grassroots outreach directed at congressional offices, helping to motivate Congress to take the final steps to push the proposed legislation through.

BULLY



Film Overview

Directed by Tony Hardmon and Directed by Lee Hirsch, *Bully* premiered on April 23, 2011, at the Tribeca Film Festival, followed by screenings at international film festivals and theaters across the United States in 2011 and 2012.[28] On October 13, 2014, the documentary premiered on PBS as part of the *Independent Lens* series.[2]

9

Synopsis

Over 13 million American kids will be bullied this year, making it the most common form of violence experienced by young people in the nation. The documentary film *Bully*, directed by Sundance and Emmy-award-winning filmmaker, Lee Hirsch, brings human scale to this startling statistic, offering an intimate, unflinching look at how bullying has touched five kids and their families.

Bully is a beautifully cinematic, character-driven documentary. At its heart are those with huge stakes in this issue whose stories each represent a different facet of America's bullying crisis. Filmed over the course of the 2009/2010 school year, Bully opens a window onto the pained and often endangered lives of bullied kids, revealing a problem that transcends geographic, racial, ethnic and economic borders. It documents the responses of teachers and administrators to aggressive behaviors that defy "kids will be kids" clichés, and it captures a growing movement among parents and youths to change how bullying is handled in schools, in communities and in society as a whole.

Parents play a vital role in supporting their kids, promoting upstander rather than bystander behavior, and teaching and modeling empathy in the home.[30]

The Film's Journey

Only a few years before Hirsch began directing this documentary film, the idea of "harmless" bullying was so deeply ingrained in U.S. youth and school culture – and generally framed as a time-honored rite of passage – that it might have been rendered invisible, not the hot-button social issue it would become. Although bullying in school wasn't new at the time of the film's production and premiere, the social media era played an important supporting role in both the evolution of present-day forms and amplification of bullying. A new cultural spotlight and examination of bullying young people started in Fall 2010, when Tyler Clementi, a Rutgers University freshman, killed himself after being victimized by cyberbullying.[31] The news of the suicide was followed in quick succession by Dan Savage's *It Gets Better* YouTube campaign, which reached out to young people coming out as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT).[32] Universities, companies and notable individuals added to the spotlight with their own statements of *It Gets Better* solidarity, creating the beginnings of a virtual movement of support for LGBT young people.[33] Ellen DeGeneres released a YouTube video statement reacting to recent bullying-induced suicides on October 2, 2010, imploring bullying victims to call one of several anti-bullying groups to find help and resources.[34]

The film opened within this moment of heightened attention about bullying and its connection with suicide in the United States. For Hirsch, who had long contemplated this issue given his own first-hand experience as a victim of bullying in school, bullying was not unfamiliar. But he felt there was a major gap in societal understanding of the issue as a violent, potentially catastrophic pattern. He was convinced that bullying may have been easily dismissed as "kids will be kids" because perhaps the public didn't understand the depths of the devastation on a victim and his or her family. He set out to do what statistics could not – to show individual stories and to re-frame the cultural response to

bullying. According to an interview with Hirsch:

> *The insight this film unlocked was this idea that we had a really obvious human rights problem – millions of young people experiencing abuse daily – and yet, we had very little societal agreement about the scope or the legitimacy of the problem. We wanted to do a film that really showed what kids are going through and what the stakes are, and how violent and terrifying it could be, that we would be able to move people into a different place. It would be undeniable. The film was designed to really kick people in the ass in a lot of ways. The complexities of thinking about how to build a movement and what that would look like came later.*[35]

Hirsch spent the early part of the project's development researching the core issues and the main players. He gradually identified what he perceived to be a major gap in intimate human stories, along with an opportunity to connect various issue groups working on bullying. He said, "There was a lot of research-driven work that was out there, there were definitely efforts happening nationally, but there was nothing that had galvanized people."[36]

Connecting with Policymakers

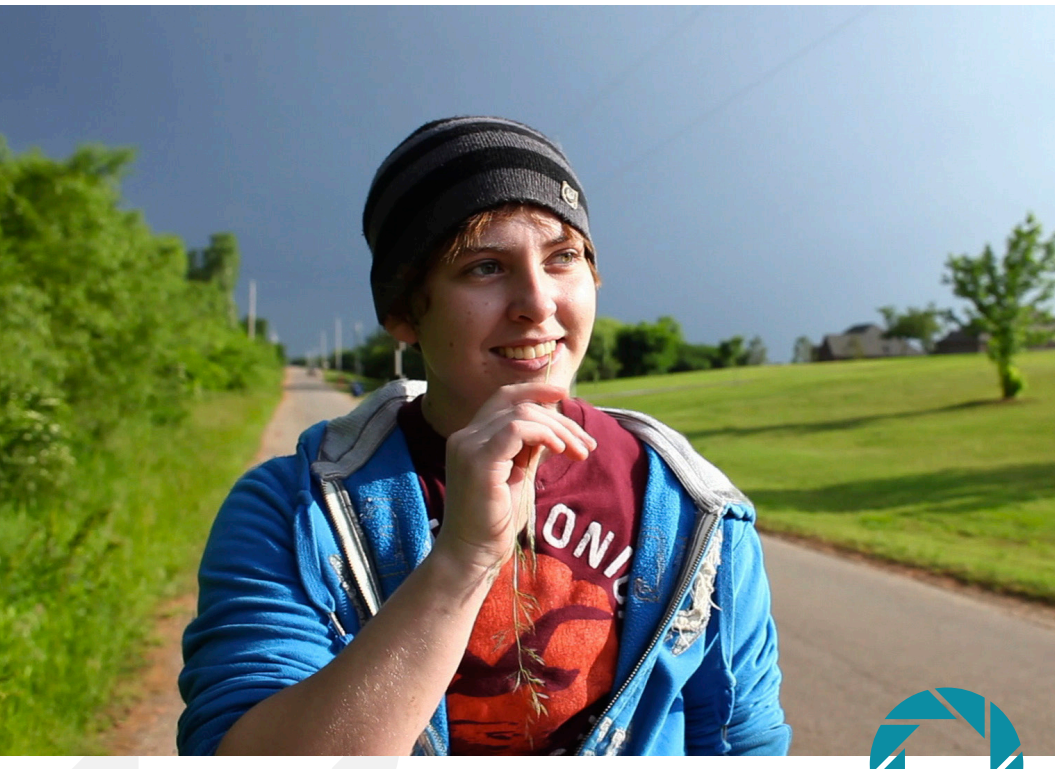
In the early days of the film's release, Hirsch hoped to make legislative change with the film, but his strategy evolved over the course of his years of work on the movement. At the time the film premiered, 45 states had anti-bullying legislation on their books.[37] Still, he aimed to start a movement to build awareness and shift the dialogue about bullying for young people. His efforts evolved into a full-fledged outreach campaign with the film: the Bully Project, "a national movement to stop bullying that is transforming kids' lives and changing a culture of bullying into one of empathy and action."[38]

As the *Bully* team learned, understanding the political backdrop was key. According to Hirsch, the film's "big break" with a policy audience came after the Tribeca Film Festival premiere as the documentary was beginning its theatrical run. At the Department of Education (ED) at the time, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Safe and Drug-Free Schools Kevin Jennings was the Obama political appointee charged with leading a multi-agency executive branch effort to raise

awareness of school-based bullying and develop resources for victims and educators. In the summer of 2010, prompted by Obama, the five-agency effort launched an unprecedented anti-bullying effort – StopBullying.gov – in response to the recent spate of highly-publicized bullying-related suicides. According to the ongoing campaign's website, "The Federal Partners include representatives from the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Defense, Education, Health and Human Services, the Interior, and Justice, as well as the Federal Trade Commission and the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders."[39]

A few months after the Tribeca Film Festival release, Jennings invited Hirsch to screen *Bully* at the Department of Education. Jennings and the ED team carefully curated a high-profile group of decision-makers in the education system, including the largest school administration associations. According to Hirsch, the value of this initial screening was profound, given the introductions to the two teacher unions, the White House, the Department of Justice, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP).

At the Department of Education, Jennings wanted high-level organization leaders to understand how to leverage the film for ongoing anti-bullying efforts related to StopBullying.gov and beyond. Perhaps most importantly, the screening was strategic because the political backdrop at the time was not ripe for legislative change at the federal level. With Republicans in charge of Congress in 2011, policy insiders like Jennings understood that the film would have wasted its efforts fighting for a federal law at that time; historically, the issue had been supported primarily by Democrats. Rather than spend time and resources supporting federal legislation that would likely not move forward, leveraging the connections at the federal agency level – with the five federal agencies involved with the StopBullying.gov effort – was a smarter strategic move. As Jennings explained it:



> *I think the film impacted executive branch employees and that's very important because those are the people who write the regulations in the end. There's a tendency to go right for legislative change, but that misses the fact that passing a law is the end of the beginning, not the beginning of the end. You then need to motivate the bureaucrats implementing the law to make it a priority and put resources into it, to put time and momentum behind it. I knew we weren't going to get any legislation passed at that time. There are so many laws that never get enforced because they are not really implemented. This sometimes has the most impact. It becomes the responsibility of the executive branch and the agencies to actually implement the law…The day the law is passed is the end of the legislative interest in an issue, because they have achieved all the political benefit they are going to get at that time… In advocacy, we tend to privilege legislative action to an unfortunate degree. Most laws can wither and die during implementation. Once you get the policy, you have to put in place some programs that help support the policy.*[40]

Indeed, as Jennings had predicted, although the White House screened *Bully* in April 2012, which culminated in a public statement and call to action to support two pending pieces of federal legislation – the Student Non-Discrimination Act and the Safe Schools Improvement Act[41] – neither became law in the Republican-controlled Congress.

However, the connections made at the Department of Education illustrate one of the core realities of engaging with Washington policy leaders – that is, relationship building and the informal legitimacy conferred from a screening at a major government office. For Bully, the ED screening connected Hirsch to two significant relationships that became central to reaching young people to help them understand and be aware of bullying: The National Association for Pupil Transportation (NAPT), whose members are school bus drivers and administrators, and the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS), which is leading an ongoing effort to educate pediatricians about bullying.

According to Jennings, the connection with school transportation professionals was profound, partially driven by research that showed that school-aged bullying was likely to occur on school buses:

> *There was a big impact with NAPT. I think they think of their job as a very technical one. They think of it as a logistical challenge. The fact that we treated them like professionals and put a human face on an issue was key. This was the first time they had been engaged on the issue and they were really moved to be included.*
>
> *They then developed a training program for bus drivers for recognizing and dealing with bullying on the bus. The association developed a training program through the NAPT head. All of the association's state directors were there at the Bully screening.*[42]

Similarly, Hirsch's philosophy to connect the film and its messages to creating materials and opportunities to reach young people directly translated into an ongoing partnership with HHS.

The Role of Advocacy

Rather than focusing on one particular core advocacy partner, Hirsch recognized the importance of a coalition-based movement and the ability for a story to act as the missing galvanizing element. By the time *Bully* premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2011, he and his team had secured the endorsement of 25 of the most influential groups listed as partners in the film's credits. The role of a coalition-based advocacy approach provided a crucial infrastructure story to distributors at the official festival premiere: The powerful Weinstein Company picked it up immediately for distribution.[43]

In concert with the Weinstein Company's distribution deal, the film was connected with Donors Choose, a program that connected teachers with the chance to take students on field trips to see the film. During the filming and editing phase, Hirsch invited feedback from Facing History and Ourselves, the education nonprofit that provides anti-bias curriculum and trainings for schools and teachers. To optimize the Donors Choose situation, it was clear to Hirsch and the Facing History and Ourselves team that an educational program was needed. According to Marc Skvirsky, vice president & chief program officer at Facing History and Ourselves, the focus of the in-school work was a series of online workshops with more than 2,500 teachers across the country to teach them how to talk about the film and the issue.[44] The program developed into screenings and symposia across the country, including one with 7,000 students in L.A.

Impact & Formula for Success

More than five years after the film's festival premiere, and two years after its PBS broadcast debut, *Bully*'s impact is far-reaching and remains focused on Hirsch's original goals: to raise awareness, change a narrative and create dialogue in areas where young people can be reached directly. The film's successes include approximately four million students who have seen the film through the project's Million

Kids Campaign; an educator kit and curriculum program with 50 different resources for educators developed by Facing History and Ourselves, the Harvard Graduate School of Education and others; and millions of other viewers. Additionally, the work established through the original ED screening continues through the NAPT's "Bully Prevention Training" and on-site materials for school bus drivers, housed at the association's website.[45] According to Hirsch, "Now, if I meet people in their late teens or early 20s, they have usually seen *Bully* It's pretty extraordinary."[46]

The film's policy initiatives are robust and ongoing in different institutional levels – through the U.S. Conference of Mayors, as well as the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) under the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS). In 2015, the Bully Project embarked on a local-level approach by working with the U.S. Conference of Mayors to develop and launch the Mayors Campaign to End Bullying. Thus far, the effort includes 240 mayors across the country, along with a website and resources for mayors to promote an anti-bullying agenda with education leaders in their communities. Toward the end of 2015, the Bully Project and HHS, teamed up with Dr. Marlene Seltzer, an OB-GYN and director of the NoBLE Project (No Bullying, Live Empowered), a program from Beaumont Children's Hospital in Detroit, to work on a continuing medical education program for medical doctors. According to Seltzer:

> *There hasn't been something like this in place for doctors before. Many of the medical societies all have policy statements that they recognize this is a doctor's issue and we should screen for it. But policies don't always translate into what happens on the ground. If people haven't been given the resources and training, it's hard to put practices into place. When you think of the stakeholders about bullying, like who is invited to the table, you think about educators and mental health, but the doctors aren't usually included. The health care provider needs to have a front seat.*[47]

As of this report's writing, the medical program plans to work with children's hospitals and medical groups across the country as it ramps up. HHS will host the program's website, which will curate resources and laws in place for all states.

For *Bully*, the formula for success included:

Timing & the Cultural Moment

When *Bully* was released, it followed a wave of news media coverage, public awareness and a growing grassroots outcry on the issue of bullying – with a particular focus on the lives of LGBT young people. The film fell into an optimal moment that intertwined growing public awareness and public desire to understand the stories behind the headlines. The momentum of the cultural moment undoubtedly helped to propel awareness of the film with policy insiders, leaders and media, helping to pave a path toward layered film distribution and media coverage.

Realistic Assessment of the Policy Landscape

The *Bully* team was engaged in conversations with policymakers for a long time during the earliest parts of the filming process. Hirsch and his team didn't waste resources or time encouraging the public to support legislation that was unlikely to move forward. Instead, he and the team turned their efforts to building long-term engagement with other policy-involved agencies and groups (U.S. Conference of Mayors, HHS) to continue to find ways to reach young people and the adults who encounter them. Understanding the political landscape of the issue, including the party control of the White House and Congress, was absolutely key. As echoed by Jennings, "[it] makes the difference between something being effective or not effective."[48]

Storytelling, Not Ideological Advocacy

The film was produced as an intimate story, not as partisan or ideological advocacy. According to Jennings, "The film was able to be shown because it was a straightforward story. If it had been a bullying prevention program, I could not have gotten it screened. The Department of Education's concern is that this couldn't look like an idea that is being sold. It was just a moving, compelling story. It wasn't a program that was trying to sell itself. And it didn't appear to be advocacy, and that's really important… I knew if people felt personally moved around the issue, it would get them to take action."[49]

Focus on the Long Game

Hirsch originally thought changing federal law was the major focus of the Bully effort. But the film's exposure in Washington, D.C., translated into building awareness and empathy with federal agency leaders and employees, and then with local-level leaders. This long-tail approach proved valuable in the long game for *Bully*.

Coalition-Based Approach to Advocacy

While other films work successfully with one or two core advocacy group partners, Bully's particular model of grassroots outreach has been enabled by its coalition-based approach. The coalition-based approach to advocacy partnerships was a key to the film's grassroots reach and ongoing engagement strategy and success. Additionally, given the Bully Project's ongoing work with multiple institutional communities – including mayors and physicians through HHS – the coalition-based approach is appropriate for an issue that touches multiple areas of a young person's life.

I.O.U.S.A.

Film Overview

Directed by Patrick Creadon, *I.O.U.S.A.* premiered in January 2008 at the Sundance Festival and on CNN in January 2009. It was shortlisted for the 2008 Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature and nominated for a Grand Jury prize at Sundance.[50]

Synopsis

I.O.U.S.A. examines the rapidly growing national debt and its consequences for the United States and its citizens. The film blends interviews with both average American taxpayers and government officials to demystify the nation's financial practices and policies. The film follows Concord Coalition Executive Director Robert Bixby and U.S. Comptroller General David Walker crisscrossing the country explaining America's unsustainable fiscal policies to its citizens. The film interweaves archival footage and economic data to paint a profile of America's current economic situation. The film also proffers potential financial scenarios and proposes solutions about how to recreate a fiscally sound nation for future generations.[51]

The Film's Journey

In late 2006, Creadon received a call from the publishers of the book, *Empire of Debt*, who asked if he was interested in making a film about the national debt. According to the publisher, the book covered a range of topics including "how the American character has shifted to accommodate its new imperial role; how we have abandoned the private virtues of personal liberty, economic freedom and fiscal restraint; and how the government has gained control of public life and the economy."[52] The book's authors warned of impending financial disaster if federal budget policies didn't change.

Creadon read the book and was intrigued. "I saw it as a creative challenge to take this topic and try to make a movie out of it. The movie needed some character development and even some humor. The most important task for a film team to do in an issue film is to humanize the people involved in the issue. Otherwise it's just a glorified PowerPoint. The best issue-oriented films can do the issue well and do the characters well," said Creadon in an interview.[53]

The "PowerPoint" summary of the problem Creadon was setting out to explain, was technical and complex:

> *The [federal] budget has a basic structural problem: Spending is projected to grow faster than revenues. This problem is driven by growing long-term commitments – notably for retirement and health care programs. Social Security and Medicare alone are projected to account for nearly half of the increase in federal spending over the next 10 years. Revenues [from taxes] are projected to rise as well but not by enough to keep up....*
>
> *The current plan to finance all of this is for the government to simply borrow more money. That will mean paying more and more each year just to service the expanding debt. These payments will rise even higher when interest rates, which are now extremely low by historical standards, inevitably start to rise to more traditional levels.*[54]

Adding to the challenge, the proposed solutions involved significant cuts to government programs and tax increases – both of which were widely unpopular with many voters and politicians.

Connecting with Policymakers

To create a compelling story, rather than pulling together a series of facts and figures alone, Creadon and his producing partner, Christine O'Malley, began looking for good characters. They found them in U.S. Comptroller General David Walker and Robert Bixby, executive director of the Concord Coalition, whose Fiscal Wake-Up Tour was trying to raise awareness about the nation's financial situation through a series of town halls. "Walker and Bixby were like 'The Odd Couple.' They were out there together in a van, driving around the country, which was perfect for storytelling," said Creadon.[55]

The Concord Coalition, a nonpartisan organization advocating fiscally responsible public policies, was founded in 1992 by the late former Senators Paul Tsongas (D-Mass.) and Warren Rudman (R-N.H.), and former U.S. Secretary of Commerce Peter Peterson, whose own foundation pursued similar objectives.[56] The Fiscal Wake-Up Tour was the Coalition's latest effort to take the conversation outside of Washington and get voters talking about the need for budget reform—though the tour avoided endorsing specific policy proposals. This approach carried over into the film's release strategy as well. "The politicians will make the ultimate decisions, but they will be influenced by the people in their home states," said Bixby. "That's why we went outside of Washington to get people interested in the issue. We really went directly to people in their home states."[57]

Understanding that they wanted the film to resonate beyond partisan camps, the filmmakers tried to avoid taking political or ideological sides in the film. "Really highly contentious films don't end up moving the needle too much," said Creadon. "You end up having the opposition dig in even more deeply, and they can end up being counterproductive and stifling conversation and debate."[58]

In keeping with the filmmakers' storytelling strategy, the final film featured interviews from two Federal Reserve chairmen, two U.S. senators, two U.S. Treasury secretaries and two business leaders who represented different political parties and economic viewpoints. Having Bixby and Walker on board early in the filmmaking helped open doors for these interviews and gave credibility to the filmmakers' goal of objectivity. "In some ways, I wanted to make everybody angry. I wanted everyone feel that it was fair," said Creadon.[59]

The Role of Advocacy

The filmmakers' top priority was to make a great movie. The advocacy was carried out by nonpartisan organizations like the Concord Coalition, and later the Peter G. Peterson Foundation, the latter of which also had been working on these issues for decades and would continue after the film's run. Of meeting the advocacy groups, Creadon said, "There's an interesting dynamic when the filmmaking team first meets the advocacy groups. It's like a first date. You want to get to know them and allow them a chance to get to know you. You have to really trust each other."[60]

The filmmakers were careful to set boundaries when establishing these partnerships to make sure they maintained artistic control, including the final cut of the film. According to Creadon:

> *There's always a moment when the advocacy group realizes that the filmmaking team is not their puppets and that we're not going to do everything they want us to do. The filmmaking team has to be the vetting mechanism. They have to know how to tell a story and to decide where to push back on what events are important and interesting to film. We are not a PR firm. In the end, we made the movie that we wanted to make – not what the Concord Coalition wanted to make – and at the same time, we made a movie that the Concord Coalition embraced.*[61]

The film set out to convey the problem clearly through entertaining stories, interviews that fairly portrayed different perspectives and memorable motion graphics. "We blew the dust away from the old manuals and charts and graphs. We let a lot of light, urgency and humor into an issue that is incredibly intimidating to most people. People don't really want to talk about this issue because they don't want to feel like they are stupid," said Creadon.[62]

Beyond praise from reviewers, anecdotal reports and turnout for screenings, it is difficult to determine what precisely audiences learned from the film or what actions they took after watching it – audience surveys or other measures were not part of the distribution strategy. The film was purchased by the Peterson Foundation after it premiered at Sundance. According to Creadon, the group was an ideal match because it didn't have to make money from the movie, but instead, its leaders wanted as many people as possible to see it and learn from it. This shaped the launch and distribution strategy.[63]

Impact & Formula for Success

Shortly after the film's national screening event, Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy and a new spotlight directed toward the nation's financial situation. While the financial crisis initially increased attention in the film's themes, events eventually drove public and policymaker attention to addressing the immediate crises rather than long-term budget solutions.

Despite the crisis of the recession, the momentum created by the film and related efforts did help lead to policy initiatives related to the budget.

According to Walker, these included the establishment of the bipartisan National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform in 2010, which made widely-praised recommendations that were never acted on by Congress, and the implementation of "sequestration," which made across the board spending cuts to federal programs.[64] However, the long-term budget reforms hoped for by Bixby and Walker were not put into place.

According to Bixby, "The moment was there when Obama came into office, and it's gone now. The moment will probably come back again. The moment it was contributing to is now over. But understanding the 'moment' is important. You try to create the next moment."[65]

Bixby listed other parts of the policymaking process that could lend themselves to creating that next moment: the president's annual budget proposal, the annual congressional budget resolution or even the threat of a government shutdown, which has happened repeatedly in recent years. But nothing will happen, noted Walker, unless there is political consensus that something needs to get done. "You have to engage the public to make the political risk of doing nothing greater than the political risk of making tough choices that would create a better future. Engaging the public puts pressure on the politicians."[66]

While the decision to not promote specific policy proposals supported the Fiscal Wake-Up Tour's and film's goal to be nonpartisan, Walker noted that this also made such efforts to engage the public more difficult: "You try to encourage people to contact their elected officials, write op-eds, but ultimately you have to have something to mobilize behind. You can get more people to do it because they know they have an opportunity to express their opinion. Ultimately, you have to give people something they can be for or against – like a piece of legislation – not just a concept."[67]

For *I.O.U.S.A.*, the formula for success included:

Crucial Timing for the Issue

In 2006, the national debt was not a high-profile issue. But as the filmmaking progressed, according to Creadon, "all of a sudden the national debt – and the state of the U.S. economy – was a train bearing down on us. When our movie finally hit theaters, it was timed almost perfectly with what was actually happening with the film and in real life. It was a really interesting opportunity for us."[68] The timing worked from a distribution perspective in the marketplace, as well. "The timing was right because there was a lot of anxiety about what was happening in the American economy," said Eric d'Arbeloff, co-president of the film's distributor, Roadside Attractions. "The film is really about the national debt not the U.S. economy, but part of our job as distributors is to make the film relatable to viewers at the right time."[69]

Strategic Marketing Campaign & Innovative Distribution

The growing national awareness and a well-funded marketing campaign led to a high-impact strategy for the film's release in theaters. On August 22, 2008, about 45,000 people in 350 theaters across the country watched *I.O.U.S.A.*, along with a special simulcast town hall on the debt hosted that night by Warren Buffett. "We had developed a relationship with Fathom Events, which is a way for the big theater chains to use their digital projectors to get the theaters full on off-nights," said d'Arbeloff. "So, they put the movie into a national footprint in mainstream multiplexes and supported it with a ton of their own media coverage."[70] The trailer promoting the opening event ran in all three of the major movie theater chains – about 35,000 theaters – more than one million times in total. The event was also promoted through the book publisher's financial newsletter, whose subscribers were particularly concerned about these issues.[71]

Policymaker Screenings & Specialized Versions

In addition to the national opening and subsequent screenings across the country, the film was shown several times in Washington, D.C., for policymakers. At a Capitol Hill screening, House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) noted that "the American people do not have a sense of the fiscal hole we have dug for ourselves."[72] The filmmakers also created shorter versions on the website to encourage wider distribution and use. As Walker noted, "Most people won't sit for an hour and a half, especially policymakers."[73]

FEDERAL POLICY PLAYBOOK FOR DOCUMENTARY FILM TEAMS

PART 1 FEDERAL POLICY ENTRY POINTS FOR DOCUMENTARIES

When a documentary film team seeks to develop a federal policy impact strategy for a film's core social issue, it is crucial to understand the issue's current status in the policy and political process – and the mutual benefit between the documentary film and the policy players. In general, there are specific entry points for documentary filmmakers to consider:

1 Raising Awareness

If the American public is not aware of an issue or topic (which can be determined by a strategic scan of existing public opinion data from the likes of Gallup and Pew) – then the goal may simply be to determine the most influential target audience on the issue (existing associations or advocacy groups, lawmakers, agency officials) and find messages and stories that will catch their attention and bring the issue into key discussions.

2 Growing a Coalition

A film may raise the profile of an advocacy organization, coalition or association already doing good work on the issue and enable them to advance their agenda. Or if no such group exists for an issue, a film could inspire a new coalition to form when individuals and organizations realize they share a common cause.

3 Winning an Election

If the issue is important to specific groups of voters during an election, a film could help make the issue part of the campaign debate and motivate voters and candidates to prioritize the issue. The goal could be to make an issue part of an election platform, candidates' speeches, political advertising or campaign themes. In some states, voters can directly change policy through ballot measures. If candidates make promises on the issue and win their elections, this can set the stage for action down the road.

4 Holding a Congressional Hearing

Films can raise the profile of otherwise routine congressional hearings and help build momentum for change. Film subjects are sometimes asked to testify at hearings because their stories are memorable or persuasive. The hearings are held by the congressional committees with "jurisdiction" (or authority) over a particular issue, program or government agency. The role of committees continues to evolve, but generally they have two primary responsibilities: legislation and oversight. Because of the complexity of the issues they deal with, committees are divided into subcommittees, which can focus on particular topics with greater depth. Some issues (for example, national security) are claimed by multiple committees and subcommittees, which can result in separate hearings and investigations on the same issue by each relevant committee or subcommittee. Three kinds of oversight hearings regularly occur:

1. Standard Agency Oversight Hearings: These are held at least once a year in each committee of jurisdiction. Federal agency leaders are called in to testify on their budget and the programs they oversee. Depending upon the agency, these hearings may be uneventful or get a lot of attention.

2. Agency Investigation Hearings: If members of a committee suspect some wrongdoing, misspending of funds or poor management at a federal agency or other institution, they will begin an investigation, which leads to a hearing on that specific issue.

3. Crisis Hearings: When there is a crisis in the news, committees will immediately start holding oversight hearings to get to the bottom of whatever happened and determine what legislative responses may be required.

The second and third types of hearings are most likely to include a range of witnesses, and committee staff will be looking quickly to find compelling personal stories that highlight the problems they are investigating. This is where documentary films and their intimate stories, along with the subjects of the films, can bring their stories to a larger audience by testifying.

5 Introducing Legislation

A powerful film can inspire lawmakers or their staffs to work on new legislation to remedy the problem. Introducing a bill is one of the easiest parts of the policymaking process — although introducing legislation that has a good chance of becoming law and effectively addressing a problem is much harder. Any senator or representative can introduce legislation on any topic they

want. Some members of Congress introduce a hundred or more pieces of legislation in a single two-year session. If legislation isn't passed in one session, they often re-introduce it in the next. If no legislation exists, then a strategy can be developed to find a sponsor to draft and introduce it.

6 Passing Legislation

While getting a bill introduced is relatively straightforward and can be accomplished by any member of Congress – junior or senior, and regardless of committee – seeing it through to becoming law is complex and usually requires a multi-pronged strategy. This strategy involves advocacy groups, congressional leadership and committee offices, federal agencies and the White House. Careful planning can enable a film's release to help build or maintain momentum during this important phase of policymaking. Of the thousands of bills introduced every year in Congress, only a relatively small number will be "considered," which means being brought to a vote by either the House or the Senate. Others may end up as amendments to other legislation under consideration. Filmmakers can search by topic areas to see which bills related to their film have been introduced in the current or previous sessions of Congress (each session of Congress lasts for two years). But not all bills are created equal, and there is a hierarchy. Legislation that is introduced by top congressional leaders – the Speaker of the House, the Majority Leader of the Senate or the committee chairs – has a much better chance of advancing than legislation introduced by rank-and-file members of Congress.[74]

When rank-and-file members of Congress introduce legislation, they will usually try to get as many "co-sponsors" as they can. These come in two flavors: "original co-sponsors" sign on before the legislation is introduced; other "co-sponsors" sign on afterwards. Members may co-sponsor bills for a variety of reasons, including requests from constituents, pressure from advocacy groups, friendship with the member who introduced the legislation or personal interest in the issue. Members will often look to see if others from their political party support the legislation, so it is increasingly important in a gridlocked environment to have both Republicans and Democrats as original co-sponsors. As legislation moves forward and gains momentum, there will likely be increased engagement from a range of advocacy groups both in support and opposition. Today, legislation is much more likely to pass as an amendment to a larger bill that "must pass" (for example, a defense bill or a major budget appropriations bill) than to pass on its own. Sometimes a decision to add legislation as an amendment can happen at the last minute, and it can require rapid mobilization of support to win enough votes.

Once identical legislation has been passed by both the House and the Senate, it goes to the president for signature. If he or she signs it, then the real work has just begun – implementation and enforcement of the legislation then moves to the federal agencies, such as the Department of Education.

7 Issuing Regulations

Just because a bill is signed into law doesn't mean the work is done. Executive federal agencies – like the Department of Education, Department of Health & Human Services – spend months or even years determining exactly how a law will be implemented. This rulemaking process involves several stages of public input where anyone can voice their views and concerns via Regulations.gov. Advocacy groups will often organize letter-writing campaigns during these public input periods. These comments are reviewed by federal officials and often incorporated into the final regulations. Federal agency policymakers also meet with advocacy groups and experts to discuss how best to carry out the laws. Departments draft regulations that are reviewed by all affected agencies and then sent to the White House Office of Management and Budget for final review. This is the final step in the process and there will often be last minute meetings requested by advocacy groups at this stage if they still have concerns about the draft regulations. Once the reviews are completed, the new regulations will be posted online in the Federal Register (Regulations.gov), and the relevant agencies will begin carrying them out.

8 Carrying Out the Law

Federal agencies run hundreds of government programs, from Head Start to airline security, and they are responsible for enforcing a wide range of laws. Even after federal regulations are issued, there are opportunities to push for improvements. Sometimes, the right laws are already in place but are not properly enforced or they are carried out ineffectively due to a lack of funding or oversight. An issue-focused documentary film can raise awareness and encourage federal agency officials to do their jobs correctly. It may also lead to an oversight hearing with the same result.

PART 2 TIPS FOR ENGAGING WITH FEDERAL POLICY PLAYERS

WORKING WITH CONGRESS

Members of Congress are always on the lookout for good stories to support their policy agendas. Filmmakers should often look beyond famous or high-profile congressional leaders – whose schedules and agendas are already crowded – to find someone with special knowledge or a personal connection to their issue. Building a relationship with a policymaker who is already invested will make a big difference, as this level of commitment can determine whether or not the member will assign a staff person to devote time to pushing a policy agenda forward. Policymakers are sometimes willing to introduce screenings of films on issues they support, whether in Washington, D.C., or their districts or states. A request from a prominent citizen or advocacy group can also help make this happen. This kind of policymaker relationship can help raise the profile of the film and provide the policymaker a unique platform to talk about the issues. But one size does not fit all in this case. Considering which member of Congress – and his/her staff – to engage is strategic:

Committee Assignments & Chairmanships

It is helpful for congressional allies to serve on or chair the committees and subcommittees with jurisdiction or responsibility for the issues addressed in the film. This increases their ability to hold hearings on this issue as well as get votes to move forward related legislation.

Local Angles

It is important to remember the constituents that an elected official represents. It can be counterproductive to ask a politician to publicly advocate for an issue that may go against the best interests of his or her constituents. It is better to identify allies who can fully associate with the message of the film.

New Members of Congress

The newly-elected members of Congress are often looking for ways to define themselves on key issues. So they may be more open to taking a lead on a breaking issue and to investing time and energy to advocate for change (even if they might not be effective – yet – for passing legislation). In general to move a major policy agenda forward, look for the senior members and committee leaders. However, members who are up for competitive re-election campaigns are often given special opportunities to promote legislation, so this can also be a good opportunity.

Congressional Staff

Even low-level congressional staffers can help in many ways beyond basic logistics, such as giving valuable advice and even potential anecdotes to bring up during an interview or meeting with a member of Congress. If a member of Congress assigns a project to a staff member, it will have a better chance of moving a policy agenda forward, well beyond the splash of a Capitol Hill screening. Staff can also help recommend other subjects to interview through their networks. Usually the communications director or press secretary is the best person to start with to prepare for an interview or meeting; however, advocacy groups may have stronger contacts with other staff, as well.

Checklist: Key Vetting Questions for Congress

There are four soft criteria for strategic film teams when considering particular members of Congress to help support the efforts of the film, beyond the recommendations from advocacy experts: (1) committee assignment and jurisdiction over the issue, (2) local angles of the film (3) established long-time commitment to a social issue and (4) level of seniority. A potential fifth criteria is partisanship: If the member of Congress doesn't work across the aisle effectively, chances for policy movement in today's Congress are minimal. Key vetting questions for documentary film teams to research and ask:

- [ ] Has the member of Congress sponsored or co-sponsored legislation on issues similar to those in the film? (Pro tip: Search Congress.gov)
- [ ] Has the member of Congress spoken on the issue or related issues before? (Pro tip: Search C-span.org)
- [ ] Does the member serve on – or preferably chair – a committee or subcommittee with jurisdiction over the issue?
- [ ] Does the member have a track record of getting his or her bills passed (either as standalone measures or as amendments to other legislation that has been passed)?
- [ ] Does the issue affect the member's constituents?
- [ ] Does the member have a personal connection to the film, filmmaker or potential advocacy partners?
- [ ] Does the member have a track record of bipartisan success?

WORKING WITH FEDERAL AGENCIES

Federal agencies are charged with enforcing laws that have been passed – and as such, they play a major role in the national policy process. Enforcing a law that has languished can make a considerable difference in the lives of people affected by it, after all. The public, including filmmakers, can play an important role in the work of federal agencies. Filmmakers can search usa.gov for topic areas related to their film to see what agencies are active on those topics. If filmmakers are interested in how a particular law is being carried out, they can refer to the text of the law to see what federal agencies are assigned to it on Congress.gov. Federal agencies work regularly with nonprofit groups, advocates and associations, so these groups can also help connect documentary teams with agency leadership and staff. Key nuances of the federal agency arena include:

Federal Register

The Federal Register is an up-to-date library of all federal actions. It lists proposed rules, final rules, public notices and presidential actions. The public can comment on proposed rules during specific timeframes and can help shape the final decisions of agencies. Individuals and organizations can submit comments through Regulations.gov, which has additional information about the process.

External Affairs Offices

Federal agency policymaking can seem more complex and less accessible than the process of passing legislation, but federal agency policymakers engage regularly with advocacy groups and the general public, so there are many opportunities for those who know where to look. Most federal agencies have their own public affairs offices as well as public or community engagement offices, which are good places for filmmakers to connect. Advocacy group partners are likely already in touch with these offices.

Sub-Agencies and Offices

Like congressional committees, federal departments are divided up by issue areas and subdivided into more specialized agencies or offices. For example, one agency within the Department of Health and Human Services is the National Institutes of Health (NIH). NIH has almost 30 institutes or centers such as the National Cancer Institute or the National Eye Institute. These sub-agencies may be the most promising for filmmakers to initially engage since they often know the most about particular issues.

Checklist: Key Vetting Questions for Federal Agencies

Working with this level of the executive branch requires an understanding of which agencies have jurisdiction over particular fields or issues. Many times, federal agencies work together or have overlap in their jurisdictional areas. Documentary film strategy teams will want to work through or research a checklist for this type of federal policymaking.

- [ ] Does the issue fall under the jurisdiction of the particular agency?
- [ ] Which sub-agency, if any, is involved in the issue?
- [ ] What laws about the issue is the federal agency charged with enforcing?
- [ ] Has the agency worked in the past or recently with other federal agencies as a coalition based on the issue?
- [ ] What campaigns or public awareness activities has the agency directed or is a part of?

WORKING WITH ADVOCACY GROUPS & ASSOCIATIONS

For a film to have a policy impact, it's helpful to partner early with the right advocacy groups and associations that specialize in the social issue at the heart of the film. These groups run the gamut, from large institutions like the AARP and American Heart Association, to smaller organizations like the Environmental Working Group. Not much gets done in the federal government without advocacy and lobbying efforts, so they are crucial to any policy impact campaign. Associations and advocacy groups that support the issues in the film are trusted guides and issue experts. They maintain strong relationships with members of Congress, congressional staffers and federal agency leaders and staffers. Crucially, these issue experts can help film teams understand the current state of a social issue and what is realistic in terms of policy change – and where and when the pressure points can use public outcry in the form of letters and calls to Congress (and which members of Congress, precisely). From an outreach perspective, these groups are powerful. The right advocacy groups maintain huge numbers of constituents, fans and members – the kinds of people who will spread the word through their networks, arrange local screening and put the film into the hands of other decision-makers. Finally, they can continue to move a film forward even after the film team has moved on to other projects. Appropriately aligned, effective advocacy organizations can serve a variety of complimentary professional roles alongside a documentary film team:

Policymaking Guides

Advocacy groups help filmmakers determine where a particular issue is in the policymaking process, what policy impact goals filmmakers could set to move things forward, and who the allies, undecideds and opponents are for those goals.

Mobilizing Members

Advocacy groups can significantly add momentum built up by a documentary film, and amplify the film team's media and grassroots outreach. This may involve promoting the film's release, putting the film in the hands of key policymakers, mobilizing their members to write letters or take other actions related to an issue, launching social media campaigns and hosting screenings or other events about the film.

Connecting to Funders

Advocacy groups may also help filmmakers identify funding sources to implement their policy strategy. Groups may provide research and data and find individuals with compelling stories for the film.

Sustaining the Effort

Advocacy groups will be around long after the film's run and can keep pushing for the changes inspired by a film through the full policymaking process.

Checklist: Key Vetting Questions for Advocacy Groups

Before establishing advocacy partnerships, it is important for filmmakers to identify advocacy groups that are both effective and well-respected by the audiences they want to reach. This is particularly important considering the advocacy groups' brands may become associated with the film or even act as a source of financing. And filmmakers are smart to consider the long game of the issue: If a film is intended to reach audiences from both political parties, then partnering primarily with overtly partisan organizations may become a barrier. It's helpful to research which organizations are quoted in the political press in Washington, D.C. (such as the *Washington Post*, *Politico* and *Roll Call*). Reporters from these outlets can be good sources to find out how a particular group is viewed and for providing other background on an issue. An effective rule of thumb for a pragmatic film strategist: If the advocacy organization doesn't have a seat at the policy table, either because of reputations or agendas, or shows a lack of effectiveness (as revealed by researching and answering the questions below), it likely will not help advance a policy goal.

- [ ] What expertise does the advocacy group have on an issue?
- [ ] What experience does the group have in influencing policy related to the film's issue in Congress or at federal agencies?
- [ ] Is the organization frequently quoted or included in political trade press about the issue?
- [ ] Does the group mostly work with members of one political party, or both?
- [ ] How high of a priority will the film's issue be on the group's agenda?
- [ ] What actions on the issue has the advocacy group already planned in the near future?
- [ ] Where does the group receive its funding?
- [ ] What is the size and scope of the group's constituencies – including communication channels (e-newsletters, social media, other)?

PART 3 METRICS FOR POLICY IMPACT

For documentary filmmaking teams who plan to leverage their film stories to advocate for policy agenda setting or shifts, simply passing or enforcing the law aren't necessarily the only or most meaningful signs of policy influence or impact. Indications of policy shifts or new policy agenda setting can be articulated by strategy and film teams in several ways. These policy impact indicators include:

Policy Entry Point	Indication of Influence/Impact
1 **Raising Awareness**	• Capitol Hill or district/state screenings • Congressional hearing • Earned media (news) coverage • Meetings with policymakers • Discussion by a policymaker on political news shows • Issue inclusion in the State of the Union address • Policymaker speeches highlight issue or quote film
2 **Growing a Coalition**	• Capitol Hill or district/state screenings • Public petition to Congress or White House • Policymaker speeches highlight issue or quote film • Partner advocacy groups expand mailing lists
3 **Winning an Election**	• Issue included in ballot initiative • Issue included in voter guides • Issue included in party platforms
4 **Engaging Congress**	• Capitol Hill or district/state screenings • Establish/expand congressional caucus on issue • Congressional Hearing • Legislation is introduced • Legislation is voted on • Legislation passes • Congressional letters to federal agencies
5 **Engaging Federal Agencies**	• Public letters to agencies • Inclusion of the issue in speeches by the president or senior officials • Inclusion of the issue in the president's budget • Final rule(s) issued on new law • Programs established (as required by law) • Penalties/fines issued (as required by law)

APPENDIX

FEDERAL POLICY ONLINE RESOURCES

Election Campaigns

Federal Election Commission:

http://www.fec.gov/pages/brochures/citizens.shtml
Official guide to citizen participation in election campaigns.

Open Secrets:

http://www.opensecrets.org
The Center for Responsive Politics tracks money in U.S. politics and its effect on elections and public policy.

Project VoteSmart:

http://votesmart.org
Positions of every candidate and elected official from president to local government can be easily and instantly accessed.

Congress

Congress:

http://www.congress.gov
The official site for information on legislation, calendars, committees, hearings and members of Congress, including contact information.

The House of Representatives – Committees:

http://www.house.gov/committees

Senate – Committees:

http://www.senate.gov/committees/committees_home.htm

Congress & the Legislative Process:

https://www.congress.gov/legislative-process

Library of Congress:
http://www.loc.gov
The largest library in the world, with millions of books, recordings, photographs, maps and manuscripts in its collections—many of its resources are available to the public online and in person.

Federal Agencies

Federal Register Guide to How Federal Regulations Are Created (and the public's role):

https://www.federalregister.gov/uploads/2011/01/the_rulemaking_process.pdf

Overview & Descriptions of Major Federal Departments:

https://www.whitehouse.gov/1600/executive-branch

A-Z Federal Agency Directory:

http://www.usa.gov/directory/federal/index.shtml

Federal Register: List & Descriptions of Federal Departments & Sub-Agencies:

https://www.federalregister.gov/agencies

Additional Federal Agency Contact Information:

http://www.usa.gov/Contact.shtml

How to Participate in the Federal Rulemaking Process:

http://www.hhs.gov/regulations/rulemaking-tool-kit.html

Tips for Submitting Effective Comments:

http://www.regulations.gov/docs/Tips_For_Submitting_Effective_Comments.pdf

U.S. Government Information and Services (extensive collection of information on government programs, laws, history, and topics such as defense, environment, health and business):

http://www.usa.gov/Citizen/Topics/All-Topics.shtml

Advocacy Groups & Associations

Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest (CLPI):

http://www.clpi.org/nuts-a-bolts
CLPI trains nonprofits and promotes increased advocacy within the nonprofit and philanthropy sector in order to create systemic change on the critical issues of our day.

GuideStar:

https://www.guidestar.org/search
Provides information about every single IRS-registered nonprofit organization, including mission, legitimacy, impact, reputation, finances, programs, transparency, and governance. Can also be accessed through www.networkforgood.org by clicking the research button by an organization's name.

Idealist:

http://www.idealist.org
Search for nonprofit organizations by issue and location.

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[74] There are exceptions to this idea, however. The most common: Members facing a tight re-election back home may be given the opportunity to pass legislation that is important to their constituents and can raise their profiles.

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