The State of SIE
Mapping the landscape of social impact entertainment
Welcome

Note

Teri Schwartz
Dean, UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television

We stand at a critical intersection in our human history where there is a need for new, diverse voices to be heard — for powerful new stories to be told.

Story has the ability to build bridges of understanding, tolerance, empathy, and respect, helping us to make sense of our lives and the world around us. The time has come to use the infinite power of story, as expressed through entertainment and performing arts, to inspire social impact.

We are the Storytelling School. We believe that story can both delight and entertain but to inspire social impact. The structure of this new center would be built upon three pillars: research, education and special initiatives, and public engagement, programming and exhibition.

At the time, there wasn't a university model fully focused on this topic that I could draw upon for information as the field was in its infancy. That would change in 2007 when I met visionary philanthropist, Jeff Skoll. Jeff was in the early days of building Participant Media — a great company whose vision to use the power of story to not only entertain but to inspire social impact aligned with mine at the educational level. Jeff has played a crucial role in shaping the ideological foundations of this emerging field. Through Participant Media, he has produced and supported some of the most iconic, award-winning SIE films to date, including Oscar® winners Spotlight, Citizenfour, and An Inconvenient Truth, amongst many other brilliant films. Without question, I was very inspired by what Jeff and his team were endeavoring to accomplish. I forged ahead with the confidence that we were doing something meaningful that would have lasting impact at both the industry and university levels.

In 2009 when I became the Dean of UCLA TFT, I brought the idea for the center with me as part of an overarching vision and set of goals for the School. We were fortunate that it was a vision shared by Jeff who made a transformational leadership gift of $10 million to name and endow the new Skoll Center for Social Impact Entertainment at UCLA TFT (Skoll Center SIE) in 2010. We are deeply honored and grateful to have this remarkable center bear Jeff's name and reflect his profound core values and mission to make the world a better place.

The State of SIE is the Skoll Center SIE’s first major publication: a report that aims to map and explore the emerging field of social impact entertainment. We’ve gathered opinions and key insights from some of the most compelling voices across this landscape, exploring many of the major themes that have defined the Skoll Center SIE’s work to date: the most effective strategies for driving impact through storytelling; the question of when, within the creative process, impact should first be considered; the key role of research to explore, contextualize and help define the field; and the importance of partnering with the right allies across the entertainment and performing arts industries for new ideas, special projects and initiatives.

SIE is an idea whose time has come. At our world has become more complex and challenging, artists, scholars, educators, and industry leaders are realizing the true value of social impact entertainment — not just in terms of moving and changing people from all walks of life by creating deeper meaning and connections for all of us, but also by a new-found belief in the double bottom line: that you can do well and do good in life.

In my own contribution to this report, I expand on my work in this field and explore strategies and opportunities for educators working in this space.

I hope you find this report very useful and engaging. I am so optimistic about the future of SIE. Its promise and possibilities are limitless. Please consider this an open invitation to join us on this amazing journey — we look forward to welcoming you on board.
The State of SIE

This report explores the landscape of social impact entertainment through the experts who know it best. Peter Bisanz introduces this exciting space and its transformative effect upon the world.

When I was 35, I found myself in an unexpected and humbling position working as a lowly, unpaid intern for the Central Tibetan Administration in the foothills of the Himalayas. I was soaking wet in a monsoon, trying to capture the essence of the Dalai Lama’s teachings with a camera that had probably seen its heyday in the era of Batasax.

I had already climbed the ladder in Hollywood but was consumed by doubts about my ability to have an impact there — since social impact entertainment (or SIE) really didn’t exist at that time — so I left it all behind for graduate school in England to study social entrepreneurship.

Two years and a master’s degree later, and still trying to find my way, I realized that all of the reasons I had originally, so passionately, pursued a career in film were united in the amazing opportunity in front of me. I finally felt that what I was doing — what I was recording — could truly have an impact. That was the feeling I had previously been searching for in Hollywood.

Eventually, this realization led me to write, direct and produce a feature-length documentary, Beyond Our Differences, which explored the commonalities of the world’s religions, how leaders of divergent faiths tackle some of the toughest challenges of the modern age, and what inspires them to do so.

Although I didn’t have a name for it at the time, this project was my first major introduction into the emerging ecosystem we now call social impact entertainment, and it set me on the meandering path to my work at the Stoll Center for Social Impact Entertainment at the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television.

The purpose of this report

The State of Social Impact Entertainment is our first attempt to capture this field as it exists today. We’ve explored the key components of SIE, what works to engage audiences on social issues; why SIE’s financial potential is growing considerably; which metrics most accurately reflect its impact; what the established theories of change are and, perhaps most importantly, how all of this relates to mainstream Hollywood.

Whether you are the head of a studio looking to develop a social impact team, or a filmmaker trying to learn how to create a social impact campaign, The State of Social Impact Entertainment is designed to help you create work that makes a positive difference in the world.

This report pulls together all of their amazing work in one place, for the first time, and is intended to serve as an accelerator as well as a resource for people looking to work in the field of SIE.

Overview of key findings

Given the state of our world today, there is an underlying assumption that entertainment, mass media and the performing arts can drive social change because they shift attitudes, shape our culture and generate empathy. However, the dynamics for each media intervention can differ wildly.

As a result, among theorists there is a broad consensus that there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to the creation of SIE, the social impact campaigns that accompany it or for the measurement of its impact.

There is a unanimous call to consider the unique context of each piece of SIE, as well as the context of the issues it seeks to address, from the outset.

Theorists also agree that defining and planning for your impact at the start of the creative process will likely maximize the potential of the given piece of content. However, maintaining a degree of flexibility is key: you have to be ready and able to adapt your plan as your project takes shape and is released into the world.

You want to make sure that your audience walks away with a clear understanding of the steps they can take in their own lives to be part of the change you are seeking to create. — Lavie & O’Cahan (p. 15)

Our Society’s Impact Field Guide & Toolkit

“The Impact Field Guide: Analysing the story environment” — Leonardo DiCaprio (p. 51)

Whether an issue is relatively known or unknown and whether there is strong and organized opposition or little resistance, are both key considerations for SIE, as well as the context of the issues your story and campaign, often need to humanize the affected communities.

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The State of SIE Five Key Considerations for SIE

1. Focus on the story

Tell the best story you can to reach your audience.

2. Know your issue

Understand as much as you can about your story and determine your intended impact at the start.

3. Find the best partners

Identify and partner with leading organizations and people working on your issue.

4. Think about distribution differently

Create a distribution plan that activates all relevant channels, stakeholders and communities of action.

5. Evaluate, learn and share

Assess what you have done and pass on key learnings.
Creating Impact Through Media
According to Deepening Engagement for Lasting Impact, a study commissioned by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, “all communications efforts are built by engaging individual people. If you want to create change at the group or systems level, it’s important to recognize the difference between getting individuals who see your media to behave in a certain way, and having those behaviors integrated on an issue, policy or social practice.”


In summary, SIE is an emergent space. It’s our hope that, by covering the funders, nonprofits, and academics that help to support them.

What is SIE?

However, the creation of SIE is more than a simple process — it’s a creative endeavor that relies on the many facets of communication in order to effect change. While no summary can do justice to the richness and depth of this report’s diverse elements, there are five Key Considerations for SIE that were continually cited by our contributors:

1. Focus on the story — Tell the best story you can or you will never reach your audience. This mantra has been repeated by all of our contributors, from filmmakers Tom McCarthy (p. 52) and Fisher Stevens (p. 56), to Participant Media’s David Linde (p. 32) and Elise Pearlstein (p. 66).

2. Know your issue — Fully understand the real world of your story and then determine your intended impact at the start. The importance of this consideration is evidenced by contributors like Joshua Oppenheimer (p. 94) and Neal Bowers (p. 98).

3. Find the best partners — Identify and partner with leading organizations and people already working on the issues you’re attempting to address. Building your social impact campaign in conjunction with these experts can maximize your potential impact, as highlighted by Wendy Cohen (p. 182) and Bonnie Alabanza (p. 138).

4. Think about distribution differently — Create a distribution plan that surrounds your work and activates all relevant stakeholders, communities and campaigns of action. Dustin Lance Black and Ciarán Tomkins explain how they did this for their respective projects (p. 110) and (p. 124).

5. Evaluate, learn and share — Assess what you have done and pass on key learnings. Doc Society’s Impact Field Guide & Toolkit and the Center for Media & Social Impact’s “Assessing the Impact of Issues-Focused Documentaries” are just two best-in-class examples of how to do this effectively.

We don’t presume to have all of the answers, however, in creating this report we have collected practical theories and personal creative insights in one place, so that we might help inform how to navigate this ever-changing landscapes.

Examples and case studies
The work of our contributors has also highlighted where SIE has been deployed with particular effect. Similar to the theories of change, each of the processes discussed is unique to the work they support, but key themes did surface. Namely, the importance of identifying issues, objectives, and tactics as early as possible — and then sharing this information with all stakeholders throughout the project — in order to build an integrated approach that influences outcomes.

As the world becomes more fractured and perilous, it’s up to content creators to tell the stories that move us forward as a species on our sacred planet.

— Ronnie Wilso (p. 128)

Given the magnitude of today’s challenges — climate change, economic inequality, forced migrations and many number of other problems — it’s easy for people to get discouraged about their capacity to make a difference in the world. But as the case studies in this report reveal, SIE can play a critical role in catalyzing significant change.

For example, the film Blood Diamond was released with a coordinated campaign to enlist audiences as citizen activists and successfully spark global consumer demand for conflict-free diamonds.

Similarly, Oscar®-winning documentary, An Inconvenient Truth helped shift global opinions on climate change, one of the most contentious issues of our time, and mobilized a new generation of pioneering environmental activists.

The documentary, Food, Inc. got hundreds of thousands of people thinking about how they could improve their diet and help protect the planet. And finally, SoulPancake’s Kid President videos engaged a new generation in the increasingly critical issue of citizenship. These projects are just a few among a growing number of powerful SIE catalysts.

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)
The most commonly applied theory in the area of entertainment-education is SCT. Most generally, SCT contends that in addition to direct, experiential learning, people learn implicitly by observing the behavior of exogenous models, such as those on television, in print, theater, knowledge, social, cognitive skills, and new styles of behavior.” 2017, p. 26.

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Participants’ Marketing and Impact: “Our process”

Issues
Identify the issues in the film and determine key individuals or groups that have the given landscape

Objectives
Determine the objectives: plan, context, issue, landscape, partners, willingness and resources.

Tactics
Determine the ideal and possible field actions given: content, partners and landscape and resources.

Outcomes
Review planned and unplanned reach.
Diversity, 시위, and ignoring such stories and audiences is no longer a viable option. Hollywood is leasing money on the table by not delivering content to these demographics — just look at the success of series like Empire, Atlanta, Black-ish, and Fresh Off the Boat, or theatrical juggernauts like Hamilton

Despite how progressive the entertainment industry may feel as a whole, in some ways it has fallen behind. Changes in consumption models and shifting demographics mean that it’s more important than ever for content to cut through the clutter in order to connect with audiences. Where is the entertainment industry taking its responsibility as a “conscious consumer.” As a result, companies need to pay attention to company’s social and environmental performance on a global scale will be very challenging, yet no less vital to our industry’s future

The business case for social impact entertainment

Study after study has shown that audiences are affected by what they watch. So, if you’re a content creator wanting to get your message across, there’s no better way to do it than through entertainment. However, the exponential changes in technology mean entertainment is no longer a silent media. Its influence is everywhere, including business, and therefore what’s good for entertainment can be good for business as well.

Contrary to old misconceptions that associating your content with a cause somehow limits your profitability, the changes sweeping across society today — particularly in terms of demographics, distribution models and consumer appetites — actually show the opposite is true: audiences are demanding content that engages with social issues. What’s the impact of entertainment? What’s the impact of entertainment? Black-ish, or Fresh Off the Boat, or theatrical juggernauts like Hamilton.

New study changes the brain

Stories that are personal and emotionally compelling capture more of the brain, and thus are better remembered than just stating a set of facts. There are two key aspects to an effective story. First, it must capture and hold our attention. The second is an effective story. It must "speak" us into the characters’ world.

Building a core competency

Many companies studying social responsibility and environmental issues

Entertainment leaders who truly invest in developing SIE as a core competency will continue to build more competitive brands that capture audiences’ loyalty and, as such, revenue for their companies. This will create more enduring, less transactional consumer relationships that in turn establish positive change in the world.

Building SIE as a core competency is the key to unlocking the future of social impact entertainment and social media.

Exactly how these changes will be implemented and how they will look depends on the company, but most will expand their social and environmental performance on a global scale will be very challenging, yet no less vital to our industry’s future as it is to that of our world.

9 The State of SIE

Means, Shares, Standard Errors, and Coefficients of Variation, Consumer appetites actually show the opposite — particularly in terms of demographics, associating your content with a cause

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What’s more, the increasing number of mobile devices and the rise of over-the-top (OTT) are driving more and more content through the Internet. Attention spans are shorter than ever, and consumers are more choosy — they have greater expectations.

SIE opportunities.

Greatest Generation

Boomers

Millennials and Gen Zers are quickly cutting their cords and interacting with content on their phone in ways that are radically different than the generations before them. At the same time, these younger audiences are seeking to align their spending with their values. In a 2017 report, Cone Communications found that 94% of Gen Zers believe companies should be addressing social and environmental issues. A further 87% stated they would be more likely to buy from a company supporting social and environmental causes than one that does not. Like never before, consumers are demanding the companies they engage with that make a positive impact on social and environmental performance.

According to the most recent UCLA Hollywood Diversity Report, in 2016, diverse audiences brought in $2.913 billion to studios’ bottom lines, an amount that is 13% higher than the average 2015 average.

Oscar® women for Best Picture, hence the need for representing the entire consumer base.

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**SIE Key Takeaways**

SIE comes in many forms. From digital short form to feature films, television series, podcasts and virtual reality, the increasing diversity of mediums allows content creators to define their impact first, and then identify the best channels through which to communicate their message. The most impactful SIE is not bound to a particular form — it uses the form to change the world.

**If you want to make an impact, start engagement and to inspire action.**

**SIE comes in many forms.**

**Effective SIE requires building strong partnerships.** It’s imperative to collaborate with key people and organizations working on your issue. These partners are often present long before you arrive and will remain long after you leave. They can therefore offer critical knowledge around which to build your work, plus access to other engaged shareholders and stakeholders working in the same space. By leveraging partnerships — and any resulting networks — you can achieve a multi-channel approach to development and distribution, which is vital to creating impact.

**Outcomes matter.** If we want the field of SIE to grow, we have to learn from our mistakes as well as our achievements. Identifying the right measures of success is essential if you want to understand your impact, replicate it, and increase it in the future. As most businesses discover sooner or later, it’s hard to improve what you don’t measure.

Embracing diversity on and off screen is key. In this highly fractured, ever-changing entertainment landscape, it is no longer just the big three networks that matter. Dealing with the key people and organizations around which to build your work, plus access to other engaged shareholders and stakeholders working in the same space. By leveraging partnerships — and any resulting networks — you can achieve a multi-channel approach to development and distribution, which is vital to creating impact.

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**SIE is not a fad — it’s the future.**

Research reveals that young audiences increasingly prefer companies, products, services and brands that make a positive difference in the world. The idea of a triple bottom line — evaluating your company’s performance from a social, environmental and financial perspective — matters in the entertainment industry too, especially at a time when delivery platforms and loyalty are in flux like never before. For companies to sustain their influence among consumers and talent alike, they must take a holistic view of what they create and what they can offer.

**Looking ahead:**

I was seven years old when the movie Star Wars came out, and I made my parents take me so many times — 16, in total — that they just started dragging me and my older brother off at the theater and having us walk home. Week after week. I just couldn’t get enough of Luke, “the hero’s journey,” and how he managed to save the galaxy.

I became so captivated by movies in general. I felt they offered me the most meaningful opportunity to make a difference in the world. Even if I never had the chance to save an entire galaxy, at least I could help tell stories that made the world a better place. And at its simplest, this remains the central opportunity of SIE.

In an era of unprecedented global challenges, our industry has an urgent responsibility to make a significant, more catalytic impact on the real world. Together, we must all rise to the challenge. May your best work, and our greatest impact, lie ahead.

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**21-30% minority cast members**

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**What is SIE?**

According to Dr. Stacy Smith, Founder and Director of the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative at USC, “A typical feature depicts roughly 68.2% white characters, 31.8% people of color, 51% male characters, and 49% female characters. Most of them aren’t lead or even secondary, roles, but rather tertiary characters speaking in one or more words. Gender stereotyping in these small parts on opening weekends.

A film with a non-diverse cast:

- $31M average opening weekend

A film with a “truly diverse” cast:

- $12M average opening weekend

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**Diversity in Hollywood**

According to the USC Annenberg School of Communication and Journalism, “If screenwriters failed to cast women as lead roles in the top 100 films, they could miss key opportunities to engage their target audience.”

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**2017**

- Male: 58.2%
- Female: 41.8%

**2018**

- Male: 56.2%
- Female: 43.8%

**2019**

- Male: 54.9%
- Female: 45.1%

**2020**

- Male: 56.9%
- Female: 43.1%

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**Enrollment Study 2017**

CBA’s definition of a “truly diverse” film is a film with a cast that is at least 30% non-white, 30% women, 30% minorities. In 2017, 4% of films supported releases that are not “truly diverse,” at the box-office as opening weekends.

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**A film with a non-diverse cast:**

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**The Hero’s Journey:**

The hero’s journey — the archetypal story pattern described by mythologist Joseph Campbell.

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**The road back**

**Approach**

**Mentor**

**Tests, trials, enemies**

**Crossing the threshold**

**Reward, seizing the sword**

**Ordal, death and rebirth**

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**Call to adventure**

**Return with elixir**

**Ordinary World**

**Special World**

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**UCS’s Hollywood Diversity Report 2018**

Fills with casts that were from 15% to 21% white, the highest median global box office receipts and the highest median return on investment, while films with the most racially and ethnically homogeneous casts were the poorest performers.

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**The State of SIE**
Milk
Pariah
Film 44
journey to map the SIE ecosystem.
We’re only at the beginning of our
discovery. For a comprehensive look at our efforts
within Narrative Film. A snapshot of the SIE ecosystem
visit www.thestateofsie.com
For a comprehensive look at our efforts
scale can have social impact at
level.
Our study made one thing clear: not only
can narrative film have social impact, it
can have social impact at scale. Period.

Narrative film — which we
define as feature-length works of
fictional or fictionalised cinema
— is the natural starting point for
this exploration. As a vehicle for
storytellers, artists and visionaries
for over a century, narrative film
has rapidly become one of the
most influential mediums of
the modern age.

in our opening chapters,
we explore what we perceive
to be the primary forms of
social impact: entertainment:
performance and screen-based
entertainment formats that are
both long-established and
well-defined, though
often still evolving.

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I’m not a morning person. To get out of bed, I need a great deal of coffee and the knowledge that what I’m doing is making a difference in the world.

It’s fairly obvious where this drive comes from. I was raised by a paradigm single mother and grew up in a Mormon home in Texas, knowing from the age of six that I was gay. People treated my mother poorly, because she was different, and I knew that if anybody found out I was gay I’d be treated badly too. I came to realize that this prejudice often stemmed from misconceptions and a lack of understanding about people of diversity.

Being a Southern boy in a religious home was a gift though, because I grew up surrounded by some of the greatest storytellers on the planet: drunk Southerners and devout Christians. This enabled me, from a very young age, to understand the power of story to change people’s hearts and minds.

Today, whenever I write, I do so in an effort to dispel those misconceptions. I try to give people a window into things they never knew about, through stories that move and entertain them. This is the cause that propels my work, because our differences are what make each of us special. If there’s one thing my experience has shown me, it’s that every single person on this planet is a minority in one way or another. There’s a whole world of stories waiting to be told.

However, most social impact stories don’t have enough capes, superpowers or fangs, so they aren’t obvious mentorship. You might be greeted with enthusiasm when pitching them, but sadly not when you need the greenlight.

When I look back at the films I’ve made, one clear commonality is that I am always in the process of learning something new about my characters. Whenever I discover something impactful about them, I try to represent that somehow on the screen. I want the things that I am learning to be at the center of the drama, as I find new details that seem important, that becomes what the movie is.

In the case of Milk, we were dealing with someone whose life was a watershed moment in civil rights and gay history. Within Harvey Milk’s story there exist so many of our own LGBTQ stories. There are echoes of us in all those members of San Francisco’s LGBTQ population who took charge of their lives and insisted on equality — people who were a major source of inspiration for me. Harvey asked that gay people living out of the closet run for office themselves, rather than simply waiting for representation by straight politicians. When he did that, he started something that began small and grew bigger and increasingly significant over time.

I think that when you’re starting out in this space, it’s vital to not overlook your own viewpoint. Catalyzing social change is a broad and intense arena, and it is also an end result, not just a general objective. If there’s one part of society that you feel you need to change, then you may have a great job to do — but I would advise that you look deep within yourself and really think about what you want to say. It can be elusive, and you may find that it lies in an unexpected place.

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In 1977, Harvey Milk was selected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, becoming the first openly gay person to be elected into a major public office in America. In 1978, he was assassinated by conservative political activist Dan White – the film charts the last eight years of Milk’s life.
As a result, you have to build a package that is attractive to studio executives in order to “show them the money,” — but in this case, the money is usually your cast list. The good news is that actors flock to socially conscious work. These stories usually have substance and the kinds of characters that many actors dream of playing.

I’d wanted to tell the story of Harvey Milk since I first heard it as a teenager, because it depicts a successful strategy for how LGBT people can win in politics.

That’s how I attracted the team I worked with on Milk. The whole project is a tale of frustration reaching a boiling point, one where as a creative I had to act, even though every single person in the business was saying, “Don’t you dare!”

I’d wanted to tell the story of Harvey Milk since I first heard it as a teenager, because it depicts a successful strategy for how LGBT people can win in politics. Warner Bros. had the option on a book about him but had failed to make a movie for decades. I tried to get the job making their version of that book, but they told me they wanted a writer with an Academy Award®.

So I went ahead and decided to do it myself, and went to war with Warner Bros. using a Capital One credit card to finance the feature. Through an amazing set of circumstances, I teamed up with Gus Van Sant and for the lead I wanted a writer with an Academy Award®. Sometimes when an idea is good enough — and that lives inside each and every one of us. No one will love your story as much as you do, no one will feel it in their bones the way you feel it, and no one will be able to fight for it and defend why it should exist as much as you will.

The things that make you different are the things that make you special, and as a writer, you earn respect. Sometimes when you show some guts, you earn respect.

I even lost my agent over it. He (probably wisely) told me it was a bad idea to make an enemy of one of the major studios. In the end, he was wrong though, because the next movie I made was with Warner Bros. Sometimes when you show some guts, you earn respect.

This is why I think it’s important for any writer to try to become a writer-producer. No one will love your story as much as you do; no one will feel it in their bones the way you feel it, and no one will be able to fight for it and defend why it should exist as much as you will.

I often ask my screenwriting students, “Why you? Why are you telling this story? Why are you the only person who should be telling this story?” They have to be able to answer these questions because it’s not just about having a personal understanding of the story. They have to be so confident in their idea that they can survive all the “no’s.”

Why are you the only person who should be telling this story? Why are you the only person who should be telling this story? Sometimes when you show some guts, you earn respect.
Narrative filmmaking offers a powerful way to depict real events. Tom McCarthy explains the opportunities and responsibilities of telling true stories.

As a filmmaker, first and foremost, my job is storytelling. For a film to have an impact, it has to play well as a movie. It has to grab people’s interest. Whenever I take on a new topic, my first job is to find a story that will engage people. If they’re not engaged, then the film ceases to do its work as a tool for social impact.

With Spotlight—a film that explores sexual abuse, institutional abuse, and journalistic practices—we knew we had a powerful subject with many layers to it. We were also dealing with a story that a lot of people thought they knew, but few did. Even the Boston Globe reporters who led the investigation had no idea of the scale of events or how many children had suffered at the hands of priests. I realized that, as an Irish Catholic who had lived in Boston, much of the story was new even to me. So the challenge was to create a film that authentically transported the audience to that time before they were aware of the scope and severity of these crimes, in order to take them on a voyage of discovery.

One of the ways to do this was to ensure that the film was as accurate as possible, so we interviewed The Globe reporters about every little detail of the investigation. Sometimes we put it in their words, sometimes our words, but we would always go back to them to make sure we were staying true to the spirit of the story. Those reporters and editors read every draft of the script we gave them. We knew we would be held up to a lot of scrutiny because of the subject matter, so we had to get the facts right.

Spotlight reaches the Vatican

In early 2016, the Los Angeles Times reported on a Vatican commission meeting on clerical sexual abuse, established by Pope Francis in 2014. Members of the commission attended a private screening of Spotlight.

Notable works:
Spotlight, The Visitor, The Station Agent

Notable awards:
Spotlight, The Visitor, The Station Agent

Tom McCarthy
Academy Award-winning writer, director, actor, and producer

Notable awards:
Academy Award®

Spotlight, 2015

Spotlight’s campaign website includes contact information for the National Sexual Assault hotline, Survivors Network for Those Abused by Priests (SNAP), and the Children’s National Child Abuse热线, as well as links to free guides and toolkits from the National Sexual Violence Resource Center for survivors, parents of survivors, and the communities and congregations affected by sexual abuse.

When you make a movie, you eventually reach a point where the studio starts thinking about how to promote it. And, ultimately, nothing helps spread the word more than having a good movie! Good movies have a way of pushing themselves out of the box and becoming must-see events. I was fortunate in working with a company like Participant Media, which has a social impact team step in to direct that conversation, allowing me as a director to focus on the story. That can be very powerful. Most studios are not set up to do this, and that’s what makes Participant Media so unique. I try to give them the best film possible, and that’s what makes Participant Media be very powerful. Most studios are not set up to be its work as a tool for social impact.

If they’re not engaged, then the film ceases to do its work as a tool to raise awareness.

The Visitor, an earlier film of mine, was entirely fictional but also had real-world concerns.

These detention centers were warehouses of human beings locked in a legal and cultural purgatory. The Visitor was able to shine a light on this and force viewers to confront how they felt about it. I tried to humanize the subject and make the story personal. In conjunction with the release of the film, the American Civil Liberties Union and Participant developed a social impact campaign that focused on the film’s themes of illegal detention, treatment of immigrants, and the legal challenges that immigrants face. They also created a website to promote the use of the film for educational purposes and within community programs. In addition, over one thousand lawyers were recruited and trained using the film and other materials on issues surrounding deportation.

While the experiences of making each of these films were different, the takeaways were similar. It’s about connection. It’s about empathy. It’s about understanding. Unless you can hook people, you’re not going to have the impact that we all so often seek. Ultimately, it’s about the story: if the story is good, it raises questions and starts a conversation that lives on past the film itself. If we can do that, we’ve done our job.

**Box Office Mojo**, 2015

© Participant Media and other respective production studios and distributors

1000+ lawyers were recruited and trained using The Visitor and other materials on issues surrounding deportation. The filmmakers teamed up with Active Voice to launch a campaign using the film to educate audiences about local policy issues, enlist them to visit nearby detention centers, and get their help on advocacy efforts. Participant and Active Voice partnered with ACLU of Michigan. 8 lawyers to train attorneys to represent detainees at bond hearings.

**Spotlight**

Fall 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domestic total gross: $98,256,776</th>
<th>Worldwide gross: $98,256,776</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening weekend: $295,009</td>
<td>Limited opening weekend: $295,009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widest release: 1,227 theaters</td>
<td>In release: 182 days/25 weeks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Visitor**

Winter 2008

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Domestic total gross: $48,000,000+</th>
<th>Worldwide gross: $48,000,000+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Widest release: 1,000+ theaters</td>
<td>In release: 120 days/25 weeks</td>
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© Participant Media and other respective production studios and distributors

There are many such films, but they’re not always easy to make. These films often begin before the firing of the gun, as the writers and directors work with their team and their subject matter to get into the story. It’s often a long process, but one that’s worth it in the end. When it’s done right, the film can have a profound impact on the culture and on the people who see it. It can inspire audiences to learn about the cultures of the region. It can raise awareness around the issues.

When I got back to New York, I spent a lot of time in the Arab community, and the film’s characters started to take shape. At the time, people weren’t really talking about immigration, but that was when I started hearing about detention centers. I got an opportunity to visit one and I knew immediately I had to take on this story.

It is a story about a lonely middle-aged man whose life changes after an encounter with a young immigrant couple in New York. This came about after a few trips I took to the Middle East. I was very affected by the people and way of life there, and it struck me that we were going to war in that part of the world, yet most Americans didn’t understand the cultures of the region.

Walter Vale, a lonely college professor, travels to New York City to attend a conference and finds a young immigrant couple living in his apartment. Vale’s encounter with the couple forces him to grapple with issues of identity, immigration, and cross-cultural communication.
The Power Within

Terry George and Don Cheadle discuss chronicling the stories of our real-life superheroes — ordinary people who transform society with acts of courage and bravery.

Don Cheadle
Academy Award®-nominated actor, film producer, director, and writer

Notable works:
Hotel Rwanda, Swingers: Infinty War, Ocean’s Eleven

Hotel Rwanda marked the beginning of the intersection of my filmmaking and social impact work.

After the success of the film, I was invited to join a congressional delegation to Sudan along with John Prendergast of the Enough Project and Paul Rusesabagina himself. I was quickly pulled into the current of work happening around trying to prevent the atrocities being committed in Darfur. These experiences led to the founding of Not On Our Watch — a humanitarian organization dedicated to raising awareness around international crises.

After Hotel Rwanda I was offered a lot of socially conscious roles and was asked to be a spokesperson for different causes. I felt privileged to help “turn the camera” toward issues and the amazing people dedicated to tackling them.

With Hotel Rwanda we always knew we didn’t want to make a “genocide movie.” We wanted to make a movie about people. We wanted to humanize the issue, because when you can make audiences empathize with something that they initially felt isn’t relatable, that’s the first step toward change. After that, you have to follow up with something actionable — something they can do to make a difference — otherwise it’s a missed opportunity.

There’s a lot of emphasis right now on big-budget tentpole superhero movies. They’re a lot of fun. I’m even in some of them (those are especially fun). But smaller films — like Get Out, Sorry to Bother You, even The Florida Project — are demonstrating the increasing value of exploring the intersection between entertainment and social impact. This value is reflected tenfold when large studio films have those same considerations; just look at the success of Black Panther. I think studios need to recognize that there’s a big market out there for these kinds of stories. It’s my hope that they start to put some real muscle behind them, not only because the issues need that kind of exposure, but also because the audiences are out there, ready and waiting!

These people are doing the tough work on the ground, and movies can contextualize the problems they’re attempting to solve. They can help audiences understand what an issue is, what it looks like, and in some instances move them to take action.

Terry George
Writer and director

Notable works:
Hotel Rwanda, In the Name of the Father, The Promise

Because of my background, I tend to lean towards political and humanitarian stories. I grew up in Belfast, Northern Ireland, during “The Troubles” in the late 60s and 70s. It was a time of political madness in the world, so my personal experience, my community’s experience, and my worldview set the agenda for my particular interests. This became the basis for the first three films I made with Jim Sheridan: In the Name of the Father, Some Mother’s Son and The Boxer.

My background, along with my spell as a freelance journalist in New York, gave me a set of tools that I then applied to making these kinds of stories.

I have always preferred nonfiction or fiction set in real-world events. Those were the films that most appealed to me. Feature films allow you to explore in a different way the inner thoughts of the main characters and the impact of political and humanitarian events upon them. You can deconstruct, crystallize, and present the emotions and actions of the characters in a very intimate way that documentary often does not allow.
Many times we talked about the film — obviously the process of developing a film like this takes a long time, and with every passing month, I’d say to him, ‘Are you sure you still want to do this? Because we could just donate the money to charity — that’s what you’ve always done.’ And he said, ‘No. We can make the movie and donate to charity. We want to do both.’

— Eric Esrailian on Kirk Kerkorian

That intimacy is vital and one of the most important ways of conveying a story or issue. For example, there’s no question that the Holocaust is viewed by many people through the experience of watching Schindler’s List. The same goes for the Cambodian genocide and The Killing Fields. Being able to stimulate the emotions of an audience is such a powerful gift. A feature film takes people beyond an event and allows them to relate to ordinary people who face extraordinary circumstances and become heroes — whether it’s Oskar Schindler or Paul Rusesabagina in Hotel Rwanda.

To engage an audience like that is social activism itself. We didn’t expect Hotel Rwanda to play at more than a few festivals, given the film’s bleak subject matter. Yet it caught the zeitgeist, earning almost $31.9 million worldwide and picking up three Academy Award® nominations. It became a motivating factor for the campaign against genocide in Darfur — including the creation of the Not On Us Watch, founded by Don Cheadle, George Clooney, and several other stars — and even played a key role in influencing policy at the White House, where it was watched twice by President Bush. Even though the film was set in a small country in the middle of Africa that most people knew nothing about, because it was a universal story, it helped educate a great many people on the genocide.

To me, this was not only proof that the medium had the power to affect change, but that the universality of a story is what draws people in. I always look for “nobility,” and what I call working-class heroes: the ordinary people with all their flaws who overcome their fears to find humanity and strength. This is the overall theme that triggers me. The next is, how do you make something entertaining, how do you make people pay their hard-earned dollars to sit through a film for a couple of hours and come out with all their emotions stimulated, feeling empathy, anger, inspiration, sorrow, joy?

I meet people around the world who tell me that Hotel Rwanda was the first real education they had about Africa.

The Promise — a love story with fictional characters set during the real events of the Armenian genocide — was written in the blueprint of David Lean films, weaving a great triangular love story against the huge political events of the time. This film was a totally unique situation where every dollar of the proceeds — not profits — was donated to human rights and humanitarian nonprofit groups. This was a condition of the film’s funding by businessman Kirk Kerkorian and producer Eric Esrailian, an incredible one that I would like to see replicated again and again.

Unfortunately, the marketplace has now overtaken the philosophy of filmmaking and studios are more devoted to box office numbers than ever before. I wish there were a lot more philanthropy and heart in our business. Social impact entertainment is so important and capacity to educate of the films we made have had a big impact on our perception of what was taking place in Northern Ireland at the time. The Irish films we made have had a big impact on people’s perception of what was taking place in Northern Ireland at the time. The Armenian diaspora around the world can point to The Promise and say, “Here’s what happened to our people.” To have it there as a record is a wonderful thing. So, maybe you’re not going to live up to the bravery of Paul Rusesabagina, or Gerry Conlon in In the Name of the Father, but I present stories where that is a possibility. And just maybe, these stories will inspire people to try.
The Day After Tomorrow

Roland Emmerich’s blockbuster put climate change on the map, but did it change the beliefs and behaviors of moviegoers? Yes, and at scale, says Anthony Leiserowitz.

The study

In 2004, soon after completing one of the first studies of American views on climate change, I started to see trailers for The Day After Tomorrow (TDAT). Immediately, I could see that it was going to be a Hollywood blockbuster that millions of Americans would watch, and it was going to describe climate change in a completely new way for the public.

At the time, a large part of the US population thought of climate change as a slow, incremental, linear process that might be a danger in the distant future. Recent climate science suggested this might not be the case; the climate system is highly sensitive and can reorganize abruptly, with consequences as potentially disastrous as the shutdown of the Gulf Stream. Interestingly, this premise was going to be envisioned in TDAT, so I immediately thought that this could be an amazing natural field experiment.

I received support to conduct three national surveys: one, a week before the film’s release; another three weeks after; and a third four months later to see if there were long-term effects. We wanted to see if the film would have an impact on people’s beliefs, attitudes, policy preferences, and behaviors, and whether it would alter their perceptions of the risks of climate change.

We found that the people who saw TDAT were affected by it. Our results found that the film had a significant impact on the climate change beliefs, risk perceptions, policy priorities, behavioral intentions, and — by seemingly casting the Bush administration in a negative light — even the voting intentions of moviegoers.

The results

Our study made one thing clear: not only can narrative film have social impact, it can have social impact at scale. Period.

Even after controlling for demographic and political factors, people who saw the film became more concerned that climate change was real, become more worried about it, changed its conceptual model of how climate change actually works, became more supportive of climate policy, and became more willing to say that they at least intended to change their behaviors.

To cite a few results: 83% of moviegoers said they were concerned about global warming compared to 72% of non-watchers; more than 80% of moviegoers responded that global warming is likely to produce more intense weather events over the next 50 years, versus 72% of non-watchers; and perhaps most telling, moviegoers were more likely than non-watchers to believe that global warming could lead to a shutdown of the Gulf Stream current or a new ice age — two underlying premises of TDAT.

The power of story

Let me underscore this, because I can’t say it strongly enough: stories are one of the most powerful forms of communication that humans have invented. TDAT is, first and foremost, a story; stories provide us with an interpretation of reality and they are an incredibly powerful means to communicate ideas in an emotional way. Empathy and narrative transport helps people identify with characters, see through their eyes and share their experiences — and this is what makes stories such an effective tool for helping people to understand issues like climate change. Humans have always used narrative in this way, passing on essential, substantive news stories were entertainment stories.

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The Day After Tomorrow box office

Domestic total gross: $281,742,799

Widest release: 3,464 theaters

Foreign total gross: $185,740,799

In release: 161 days/23 weeks

Opening weekend: $68,743,584
Furthermore, empathetic and vicarious experiences are one of the real opportunities social impact entertainment. We love these experiences so much that we watch films spent $40.6 billion in 2017 to put ourselves in dark rooms with strangers to watch them unfold! These stories shape our lives, they shape how we think about the world, and they can shape our identities.

The power of image
Perhaps more important than helping people experience the immediate threat of climate change was that TDAT provided people with images to actually imagine how climate change might impact us. For the first time, audiences had powerful, concrete images of the potential impact of climate change on American iconography. We weren’t just listening to someone talk about rising sea levels, we saw a tidal wave sweep through Manhattan. We didn’t just hear someone discuss extreme weather, we watched tornadoes rip apart LA.

One of the ideas underpinning our study was the cognitive-experiential self theory (Cest), which was largely developed by Seymour Epstein and then furthered by other academics. In simple terms, Cest found that humans have two systems for processing information: the analytic and the experiential. The analytic is slow, deliberate, and rational, while the experiential – which is much closer in evolutionary terms – is fast, intuitive, and emotionally driven. For many years Western science regarded the two systems as opposites, but by the time I began to study TDAT, we’d started to understand that they’re actually intertwined, informing each other.

When a piece of entertainment speaks to the cultural and social dimensions of an issue it’s possible to change social and cultural norms.

The teachable moment
Naturally, TDAT spurred a lot of viewers to seek out further information. Many organizations tried to leverage the film to advance the cause of tackling climate change, setting up websites to assist moviegoers who might have questions after seeing the film. Audiences did have questions, but most websites only launched on the day the film came out.

In a later study on what we called “the teachable moment,” we showed that an event planned for a specific release date (like a movie release) will generate increased information-seeking behavior before the event itself arrives. There is a specific period in the weeks prior to a film’s release where this ramp-up of public attention is at its peak, and this teachable moment is a critical time for people or organizations to strike while the iron is hot, before attention is diverted elsewhere. Naturally, it follows that filmmakers and organizations seeking to create maximum impact should have their outreach strategy in place well before the film’s release. For TDAT, in particular, we found that the teachable moment spanned from 10 days before the release date to 19 days after.

TDAT was among the first films of its kind. While one film alone may not be enough to change the opinion of the entire public, it can certainly drive change at scale and help initiate or accelerate a culture shift, one where the momentum is continued by other projects. The audiences for TDAT accounted for 1.5% of the US population, and as we’ve seen, it had a quantifiable impact on people’s perceptions of climate change. However, it’s arguable that the film could have had even greater impact if change organizations had launched their websites in advance of the film, making the most of this teachable moment. By extension, this study emphasizes the importance of taking the right approach with social impact campaigns, tailoring your conversation to specific goals where possible, and engaging audiences at the most opportune moments before, during, and after release.

When a piece of entertainment speaks to the cultural and social dimensions of an issue it’s possible to change social and cultural norms — the unwritten rules of how people are supposed to behave — and thus effect big shifts in politics, policy, and society at large. That’s one of the real powers of popular culture and media: it can engage people in social issues in a way that is often more powerful than all the data, statistics, and scientific reports combined.

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Spotlight on:
The Teachable Moment

Many environmental leaders and organizations described the release of The Day After Tomorrow (TDAT) as a “teachable moment” — an opportunity to use its themes and ideas as a springboard to educate the public about global warming, and perhaps even change policy.

Philip Solomon Hart and Anthony A. Leiserowitz’s paper Finding the Teachable Moment… explored how, if at all, the release of TDAT changed the information-seeking behavior of the public regarding “global-warming related websites.”

According to Hart and Leiserowitz, “In preparation for the ‘teachable moment,” many environmental organizations created these websites based on the premise that TDAT and related media coverage would increase public information-seeking behavior.”

The team collected web-traffic data from six global-warming related websites from April 1st to June 30th 2004. The six were selected to represent a “variety of sources that provide information and/or advocate for specific policies to address climate change.” They included: a Johns Hopkins University website (EcoHealth); a website operated by the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS); another operated by the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF); a website operated by the Global Exchange, Rainforest Action Network, and the Ruckus Society (RAN); a website operated by National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC); and one operated by the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute (WHOI).

Media coverage data of TDAT was gathered via a LexisNexis search between April 1st and June 30th 2004. The search was “limited to coverage from news sources, and included television, radio, prestige newspapers and major metropolitan newspapers.”

Of the websites studied, three (UCS, EDF, and RAN) were active throughout the duration of the study. The other three (EcoHealth, WHOI and NSIDC) launched on, or nearer to, the actual release date of TDAT (May 28th 2004).

For the first three sites, there was a clear spike in web traffic between May 12th and June 11th (Figure 1), clearly supporting the team’s hypothesis that “web traffic on global warming related websites increased during the release period of The Day After Tomorrow.”

The latter group comprising the three sites that launched closer to the release date of TDAT (EcoHealth, WHOI, NSIDC), showed similar results to the first group (Figure 2). However, the data also suggested that “by waiting until the movie release date to launch their respective The Day After Tomorrow websites, WHOI and NSIDC, in particular, missed the first week of heightened global warming related web activity that occurred during the ‘teachable moment’.”

Hart and Leiserowitz’s study and findings show that, despite being a fictional representation of the dangers of climate change, TDAT created a teachable moment of heightened public concern and increased information-seeking behavior. More specifically, as Leiserowitz and Hart write, “a ‘teachable moment’ of elevated information-seeking activity was found to extend from 10 days before the release date of The Day After Tomorrow to 19 days after the movie release date.”

Finding Our Purpose

Through purposeful storytelling, Participant Media wants to change the world. David Linde explains how to extend your impact beyond theaters, and why SIE is aligned with society’s needs.

David Linde
Chief Executive Officer, Participant Media

Notable works: Roma, BlacKkKlansman, Y Tu Mamá También

Throughout my career, and prior to joining Participant Media in late 2015, I always gravitated toward telling original stories about extraordinary people doing courageous things — from Roma to Brokeback Mountain to Arrival.

So, when I became CEO of Participant, a company that was founded by Jeff Skoll with the belief in the purpose and power of its content to make the world a better place, it couldn’t have been a more natural fit.

Since 2000, Participant Media has been producing social impact entertainment that inspires and entertains audiences while educating and motivating them to engage in social change. It’s what we do and why Participant is aligned with the world’s finest filmmakers, storytellers, and changemakers. Our partners include some of the world’s finest directors and producers, such as Ava DuVernay, Alfonso Cuarón, Tom McCarthy, Steve Jobs, Laura Poitras, and Joshua Oppenheimer.

Much of our award-winning content, like Spotlight, has chronicled the brave struggles of individuals fighting for the truth against tremendous odds. Other films, like An Inconvenient Truth, BBG and Contagion, tell stories that speak to the contemporary zeitgeist. With all of our content, we seek to leave an impact that can be extended long after the credits roll. Participant content should inspire and invite audiences to want to act, and our social impact team empowers them to do so by providing tools and connecting them to the social impact campaigns, the changemakers, the NGOs, and our other impact partners already working on the relevant causes.

To try and ensure this happens, we’ve adapted a three-part process, steeped in understanding the tremendous value in partnerships, for making social impact entertainment effective.

1. Storytelling: To even think about engaging audiences around an issue, we need to tell them a story that moves them.

2. Engagement: For us, it always starts with the story. To even think about engaging audiences around an issue, we need to tell them a story that moves them. That’s why we focus on partnering with great artists who want to act, and our social impact team empowers them to do so by providing tools and connecting them to the social impact campaigns, the changemakers, the NGOs, and our other impact partners already working on the relevant causes.

3. Impact: We seek to have an impact that can be extended by partnering with some of the world’s finest storytellers, changemakers, and our other impact partners to amplify the stories we tell.

For us, it is always about the story. To even think about engaging audiences around an issue, we need to tell them a story that moves them. That’s why we focus on partnering with great artists who understand these issues and who do see around the corner on the world’s most pressing issues.

It’s also the reason we make so much content: up to six narrative features, five documentaries, three TV series, and over 30 hours of digital short form content every year. Audiences and all our partners need to know that they can rely on Participant as a consistent source for powerful, purposeful content.

Participant Media

Since 2004, Participant Media has been producing social impact entertainment that inspires and entertains audiences while highlighting some of the most pressing issues of our time, and most importantly, giving those same audiences the means to take action. Our belief in the capacity of storytelling to spark and contribute to social change — instilled by Jeff — is baked into our DNA. It’s what we do and it’s what makes us unique, and what importantly, gives those same audiences the means to take action.

Participant Media is the first company that was founded by Jeff Skoll with the belief in the purpose and power of its content to make the world a better place, it couldn’t have been a more natural fit.

To try and ensure this happens, we’ve adapted a three-part process, steeped in understanding the tremendous value in partnerships, for making social impact entertainment effective.
The State of SIE

Citizenfour, Food, Inc., He Named Me Malala, The Look of Silence, 

Three years after its release, a ripple effect created by the film and its impact campaign would lead to the declassification of US State Department files related to the mass killings—a historic achievement and the primary goal of Participant’s social impact campaign for the film. Meanwhile, with Wonder, released in 2017, the main messages of the film—compassion—was consistently more nuanced. Based on The New York Times bestseller, Wonder tells the story of how August Pullman, a boy born with facial deformities, becomes his school’s unlikely hero. We believe a film like this can still help create positive impact because compassion has a universal relevance. If we don’t have compassion for each other, how can we even attempt to address important global issues like those in The Look of Silence? If a story engages us and has the potential to create change, we’ll consider it even if it doesn’t fit perfectly into a specific category or cause.

Wonder made more than $27 million in its first weekend. For us, the financial success of our films, as well as the accolades they garner, is proof that there’s a real hunger for social impact entertainment. The notion that stories can entertain, enthrall, and contribute to social change in a meaningful way is quickly gaining traction in Hollywood and beyond.

This is what made Jeff’s vision for Participant so prescient. His belief that storytelling is a powerful tool for social change is perfectly aligned with the rise of Gen Z, which represents the new “conscious consumer.” This demographic already yields $4 trillion in buying power and is predicted to comprise 2.6 billion people by 2020—or roughly 32% of the population. People’s expectations of what they should get from the money they spend has changed. The Wall Street investment community is waking up to this fact, and the CEO of BlackRock, Larry Fink, stated in January 2018 in an open letter to global CEOs that without a sense of social purpose, no company can achieve its full potential. We’ve also seen a surge of “purposeful” advertising trying to connect products with causes. These shifts are happening because consumers are demanding them across all areas of business, the entertainment industry included. And because our mission is unambiguous—to change the world through storytelling—we have been able to refine and adapt to an industry that is undergoing profound transformation.

The idea that there is real value in supporting films that are able to do good in the world is not a one-off, singular mentality, nor are we alone in this thinking. In recent years, others have moved into this field—a fact that we welcome as it has always been a goal of Jeff’s to see the field grow, because well-told stories can change the world. This has always been the heart of Participant Media, and we’ve never wavered from this focus.

The world is seeing stories and waking up to the incredible work done by impact partners. This means that together we have a real opportunity. And this really means everyone, from individuals and groups of friends, to brands and corporations.

By creating powerful content that inspires audiences, we are forging amazing connections to make lasting and sustainable contributions to some of the world’s most pressing issues.
At 21st Century Fox (21CF), social impact grew out of some pretty forward-thinking sustainability promises that we made back in 2007.

Deciding to become carbon neutral was a revolutionary moment for us. It allowed what was then a decentralized collection of businesses to begin to organize around shared values. Eventually, the company’s focus on sustainability evolved into a more comprehensive social impact practice, which now includes, but aspires to transcend, a traditional corporate social responsibility (CSR) mode. We understand that our focus in this area can be more than a core competency — it can be a competitive advantage. As a result, we’ve developed our social impact work in a much more holistic fashion across the entire organization and now — whether you work for Star in Mumbai or National Geographic in Washington, D.C. — all 21st Century Fox companies know they are part of a bigger picture.

Liba Wenig Rubenstein
Senior Vice President of Social Impact at 21st Century Fox

I’ve been working in this space for a dozen years, long enough to have both helped drive and respond to the staggering growth of consumer and workforce demand for companies to demonstrate values and purpose. Having some kind of cause is swiftly becoming the lowest common denominator for all brands; the real value lies in standing out through the substance and impact of your work.

As well as handling more traditional elements of CSR and sustainability, my team acts as an internal cause marketing and impact campaign consultancy. That means we partner with companies across 21CF when they produce films, TV shows, and other programming that...
contains pro-social messaging. In some cases, the program may not have social impact at its core — but contains a character arc, storyline, or even just a passionate lead actor or producer who wants to leverage the platform of the program for good. Last year, for example, when the end of the 11th season of The X-Files aired during Women’s History Month, we decided to commission a report from the Geena Davis Institute to validate “The Scully Effect” — the impact of Gillian Anderson’s character upon a whole generation of young women, inspiring them to begin careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Indeed, it holds up: of the 2,000 viewers surveyed, nearly two-thirds (69%) of respondent women who work in STEM fields said Dana Scully served as their role model, and women who regularly watched The X-Files were 50% more likely to work in STEM than less frequent/non-watchers.

Having some kind of cause is swiftly becoming the lowest common denominator for all brands.

Most often, we work with films and shows that have social impact very clearly at their core — like the recent film Battle of the Sexes and Love, Simon or National Geographic’s show, One Strange Rock. Where my team brings value in cases like these is in amplifying the pro-social message, increasing access to the story, manifesting the message in contemporary real-world impacts, and channeling the inspiration that audiences will inevitably feel when they see the film into some concrete action.

A prime example of this is our ongoing work supporting Hidden Figures, 2016’s cinematic retelling of the true story of female African-American mathematicians in the Space Race. With this film we knew that the pro-social message was so ingrained in the story that the two couldn’t really be separated, and as the film became such a passionate phenomenon we allowed ourselves to pursue multiple opportunities to tie it to impact.

Our first campaign was a partnership with PepsiCo and the New York Academy of Sciences called “The Search for Hidden Figures.” This scholarship program awarded $200,000 in grants to young women working in STEM areas and attracted nearly 8,000 submissions nationwide. Then we facilitated a screening at the White House, where Michelle Obama invited students to a preview event and panel discussion. We also hosted nearly 10,000 young women from schools across Los Angeles at an event organized by the LA Promise Fund as part of its Girls Build LA initiative. Both events helped raise excitement for girls to get involved with STEM. These kinds of ancillary campaigns amplify the film’s impact as well as word of mouth to driver viewership.

By combining a tight social impact campaign with the right partners and an opportunistic streak, we were able to reach our target audience and beyond.

Some of the best work we did with Hidden Figures was unplanned. We were thrilled to discover communities around the country were launching crowdfunding campaigns to take their communities and organizations to see the film in local theaters, so we stepped in and worked out a deal with AMC Theatres to set up free screenings across the cities for Black History Month. We then opened up a process by which schools, community groups, and nonprofits were not served by these Ti events could apply for their own screenings, through which we received over 7,000 applications and ultimately distributed 3,500 tickets to folks who might not have been able to see the film otherwise. When a film’s core message is in itself impactful, sometimes the best thing we can do is just expose that film to as many relevant audiences as possible. When done well, this serves to keep the film in the public awareness at the same time.

Another unexpected opportunity around Hidden Figures came via the US State Department. First, they reached out to us in response to an unprecedented demand from US embassies and consulates abroad, for which we ultimately arranged over 7,100 screenings of the film. Building on the success of these events, the State Department created “HiddenFiguresNo boundaries” — the first exchange program inspired by a narrative feature — to bring 50 women working in STEM fields from 50 countries to visit the US for three weeks. As part of the International Visitor Leadership Program, the participants traveled to cultural and educational institutions, discussing and exploring topics on female leadership, the power of storytelling, and the roles played by science and technology in the entertainment industries. The program has been adopted as a flagship initiative by the State Department, and is part of the very long tail of inspiration we know this film will continue to have for years to come. We look forward to the day when we will have enough enough audience reach to impact scale as we were able to do for “The Scully Effect.”

By combining a tight social impact campaign with the right partners and an opportunistic streak, we were able to magnify the impact of these projects and reach our target audience and beyond. The work we did also enabled the content to have a longer lifespan, thereby magnifying impact, and, potentially, profit. The opportunity to leverage inspired storytelling into concrete positive outcomes like this is one of the reasons we love what we do.
Love & Basketball

Awards.


Notable works:
Love & Basketball, The Secret Life of Bees, Shots Fired

Gina Prince-Bythewood
Writer and director

My journey as a filmmaker has been one of fighting to tell the stories I want to tell. Those fights sharpen, harden and embolden you. They give you the confidence and courage to go after what you want, despite the track record of who, historically, gets to tell the stories. I love action and superhero films, for instance, and I’ve fought to be able to tell those stories despite the fact that women — especially women of color — rarely have the opportunity to do so. I’m excited to be making The Old Guard, a film based on a graphic novel series by Greg Rucka and Leandro Fernández about two incredibly badass women and their group of mercenaries. It’s great to be able to put these characters out into the world.

When you have a platform as big as TV or film, it shouldn’t be wasted on just entertaining. Up until this point in my career I’ve tended to direct screenplays I’ve written, so the story is always my starting point when I’m considering a film’s impact. When you have a platform as big as TV or film, it shouldn’t be wasted on just entertaining; you can absolutely entertain and have something to say at the same time. The show Shots Fired, which my husband and I created, is a great example of that. It looks at the range of perspectives resulting from racialized shootings in a small town, but it’s also a really compelling mystery.

Love & Basketball is another example of balancing entertainment with social impact. I wanted to make a love story as iconic as When Harry Met Sally, but with a black cast. I wanted people to look at Love & Basketball and see a universal love story, but at the same time it was important for

Love & Basketball
Love & Basketball is a true epic, the story of the love between Monica (Sanaa Lathan) and Quincy (Omar Epps), as they grow up together, both prodigiously talented basketball players, but Quincy’s prospects are brighter than Monica’s. There’s a professional league for him to dream of playing in, and his father, Zeke (Dennis Haysbert), was himself a pro player. And Monica’s already-dim prospects are endangered by her temper.


Love & Basketball box office

$27M+

Worldwide gross

Domestic total gross: $27,459,615
Foreign total gross: $268,503
Opening weekend: $8,139,180
Widest release: 1,245 theaters

Love & Basketball awards

Nominations

1

Independent Spirit Awards

3 1

Humanitas Prize

5 2

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Stories Worth Fighting For

Director Gina Prince-Bythewood opens up about the personal importance of Love & Basketball, its lasting impact and how she has managed to push past the “no’s” that all too often greet female filmmakers.
me to make a film with black characters at the center. Back in 2000 that was dangerously rare in Hollywood and in many respects it still is.

It was also important for me to get this film made because so much of it was my personal story. I wanted to see myself represented on screen because for most of my life I felt ignored by the mainstream media. I am still humbled by the lasting impact of the film. I hope that men consider the character Monica, an athlete, their romantic ideal. I also believe that women and girls can look at her and be proud of their athleticism.

That impact might not have been possible without the help of the Sundance Institute, which was instrumental in getting Love & Basketball made. When I first sent the idea out, every studio passed. Two days after I got the final pass, Sundance called and said they wanted to meet me. I was invited to bring the script to their lab. It was an incredible experience.

I got to work with amazing mentors like Scott Frank and Paul Attanasio, writers for whom I have the utmost respect. The Institute also put on a live reading of the script which resulted in Spike Lee’s company coming aboard as producers, and the finished film screened at the 2000 Sundance Film Festival.

Out of a total of 100 film directors who were associated with the top 100 films of 2017, 89 were male while only 11 were female. None of the female directors had appeared previously in the top 100 films across the 11-year timeframe investigated.

% of US population belongs to a minority group

Institutions like Sundance are vital because they actively look for disparate, yet equally important voices in our industry. This work is essential because the diversity stats in film are horrifying. Only four black female directors, including myself, have worked across the top 1,100 movies between 2007 and 2017. Of the 1,233 directors of those 1,100 films, only eight were women from any underrepresented racial or ethnic group. Though equal numbers of women and men go to film school, only 4% of the top-grossing US films are directed by women.

When you take a look at some of the most successful films of the past couple of years, however, you can notice a seismic shift. Films like Black Panther, Girls Trip, Get Out and Crazy Rich Asians are proving that films focused on people of color have their own audience and can reach mainstream audiences too. It seems clear that moviegoers are bored with the status quo, of looking up at the screen and seeing only white characters. I hope that we continue to not just have more black characters on screen, but to see them appear in a wide range of genres as well.

As a filmmaker, it’s important to allow your passion for creating social impact push you past the “no’s” you’ll encounter. While it’s hard to produce work that says something important, or focuses on characters that aren’t seen often, it’s so important to bring that work to life. The more we do it, the more normal it becomes. In this way, I think art can absolutely change the world. I am completely optimistic about that. You should never have to apologize for using your art to make impact.

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I want my films to make a difference in the world. As I see it, there is only one way to do that effectively: through an incredibly entertaining film where the social impact is seamlessly woven into the storytelling.

Marshall was a tough movie to make because people thought they already knew the story. They'd already seen films about the civil rights movement, they'd already seen the black cinema, seen those three films. So with Marshall, we had to say things that had never been said before. We had to make a movie that resonated with audiences today.

Marshall offered a fresh take on issues that were relevant and complex. It examined the nuances of racism — between the North, which is traditionally perceived as more liberal, and the South. It also contrasted the victimization of black men with that of white women. These are weighty subjects that aren’t always the easiest to engage with. Similarly, Thurgood Marshall himself is a towering icon of American history, so we had to try and take him off the pedestal to make him relatable. Marshall was a hero but not a saint; he smoked, drank, loved to joke and wasn’t scared of a fight. Seeing his swagger really opened up a lot of kids’ eyes. They realized you could be a cool, well-dressed player, and also the smartest guy in the room — any room.

Movies have the power to make both dangerous narratives and empowering histories into reality. Reginald Hudlin considers the role and responsibility of filmmakers and how, if you want your film to have an impact, balance is key.

Reginald Hudlin
Producer and director

Notable works:
Marshall, Django Unchained, House Party

The first movie to be shown in the White House was D.W. Griffith’s racist epic, The Birth of a Nation. After the screening, President Woodrow Wilson declared that he had been watching “history written in lightning.” That film should not be called “history,” but the president’s response was apt in other ways: it hit upon the new medium’s ability to bring myths to life, to make them seem real in the most powerful ways possible.

While our elementary schools take the most exciting stories of our collective past and manage to make them boring, movies do the opposite. They pump the excitement back into these stories. They make people care and remember. The mere act of making a movie elevates a topic that may otherwise be lost to the general public.

The Birth of a Nation
Portraying the Ku Klux Klan as heroic underdogs, silent epic The Birth of a Nation (1915) is widely considered to be the most controversial film of all time. As one of D.W. Griffith’s greatest artistic achievements and one of the most abhorrent racist artifacts, it becomes more shocking with every passing year.

From Myth to Reality

Opening weekend: $10,000,000
Widest release: 827 theaters
In release: 98 days/14 weeks

$10M+
Domestic gross

2018 Selling on self-reflections after watching TV
In a 2018 survey of almost 400 black and white boys and girls, researchers found the only demographic that didn’t experience lower self-esteem after watching TV was white boys.


The State of the U.S.

The Birth of a Nation
From Myth to Reality
How do you strike that balance between the storytelling and the message, between entertainment and social impact?

Night of the Living Dead. It can even be instructive to compare films that tackle the same subject, like Fast & Safe and Dr. Strangelove. Both are about nuclear war, but which was better at changing people’s views?

Looking ahead, I’m cautiously optimistic for black cinema, though it does seem to go through boom-and-bust cycles. The blaxploitation movement of the 70s gave us films like Shaft, Superfly and Foxy Brown that still resonate with pop culture today. The movement faded, and the 80s yielded only two black movie stars, but they were superstars: Eddie Murphy and Prince. The 90s brought a new crop of filmmakers — Spike Lee, John Singleton, me and many more. Today there’s a wider range of black films making more money than ever before. And in television, the dominant medium of the time, black representation in front of and behind the camera is even more encouraging.

There’s another important shift happening right now too, and one that’s sometimes overlooked: the ever-increasing access to production and distribution. Today, you can take a cellphone and shoot a movie that can be shown in theaters or downloaded in homes all over the world.
Documentary Film
Documentary film is arguably the leading form of SIE. From journalistic endeavors to more poetic meditations, documentaries have long been a platform for activists and artists alike. With the emergence of new technologies, innovative distribution models and over-the-top media services, the question of what constitutes a documentary — and indeed who can make them — is constantly shifting. What is clear, however, is the form’s ability to raise awareness and change minds.
The State of SIE

A Wave of Change

The release of Before the Flood reached a record 60 million people around the world. Leonardo DiCaprio and Fisher Stevens reflect on the innovative release strategy that made it happen.

Fisher Stevens
Actor, director, and Academy Award® winning producer

Notable works:
Before the Flood, The Cove

A lot of people say that when you’re making social impact entertainment, you have to start with the issue you’re trying to change. This is only part of the equation. I believe that first and foremost, in order for your film to have the most impact, it must be a film that people will want to watch. This means making the best film possible and not necessarily beating the audience over the head with the points you are trying to make. Let the characters reveal the change you’re trying to drive through their personal discoveries. Let the story unfold and dictate how you will strategize your impact.

One example of this is The Cove, which was actually my first social impact documentary. I’ve always been a big scuba diver, and in 2004 I went on a dive with Netscape founder Jim Clark. I visited a spot he’d been to over 10 years ago and it had completely changed: all of the coral had died or been bleached and all of the fish were gone. I’d briefly heard of global warming or climate change, and I didn’t understand the impacts that CO2 had on the planet until Jim explained that it was a huge issue facing Earth that no one was talking about. A few years later, Jim asked me to help produce a film he was financing. It was supposed to be about coral bleaching, but halfway through filming we encountered the tragic stories of dolphin hunting in Japan and made the very risky decision to shift the focus of the film completely. That movie eventually became The Cove, which won numerous awards including Best Documentary Feature at the 2009 Academy Awards®. Even when you’ve found your story, making films on complex issues that resonate with people is often a real challenge. There’s a line at the beginning of Before the Flood that says, “Try to make change happen.”

Leonardo DiCaprio
Actor, director, and activist

Notable works:
Blood Diamond, Before the Flood, The Revenant

I believe in the power of film to inspire people everywhere to be part of a global solution to climate change. I always wanted Before the Flood to be solutions-oriented. When Fisher and I set out on our visual storytelling journey, we didn’t just want to show the effects of climate change on our polar ice caps and low-lying regions, or shine a light on the destructive forces of mining and logging in the rainforests: we also wanted to highlight what individuals, communities, and grassroots movements are doing to protect their lands and way of life for future generations.

The idea was to promote widespread individual action. We wanted to show that when we understand we share a common planet, and when we set aside our differences to work together, there is hope. That’s part of the reason why working on Before The Flood was an extremely positive experience for Fisher and me.

I think it’s important for documentary filmmakers, especially those just starting out, to keep an open mind so that you are capturing as broad a perspective as possible when it comes to the solutions available to your audience. This is especially true for driving positive social action. You want to make sure that your audience walks away with a clear understanding of the steps they can take in their own lives to be part of the change you are seeking to create.
7.1M
52 The State of SIE
personal. I tried to draw that aspect out of Leo in
I also believe that you have to make films like this
material was veering in that direction, we’d cut it.
In tandem with him. That made everything far
became our tour guide for the issue, and he was
Having Leo as our main character meant that he
knew a lot about climate change — because it’s our
we wanted to tackle, and that we’d try to do this
commercial-free on multiple digital
languages, the film was released
Before the Flood
1,500
countries
171
languages
16M
views on the
Nat Geo Channel
1,500
prints screening events for
colleges, religious institutions,
and other organizations.
>7.1M
views on YouTube.

Once you have the film the way you want it, the next step in creating social impact entertainment is to get it in front of the right audience. With Before the Flood, we were in a desperate state because the 2016 election was rapidly approaching. This became a core part of our deal with National Geographic: we said we would basically give them the movie for nothing if they got it in front of as many people as possible before the vote. That was really important to us — the movie had to hit a lot of eyeballs at the right moment in time.

To accomplish this, Courteney Monroe at National Geographic had the idea to give it away free for the first 10 days, hosting the film on YouTube, iTunes, Facebook, and many other platforms and VOD services. The board agreed with her plan and the success of the release far exceeded our expectations.

Before the Flood was available in 145 languages across 171 countries, eventually reaching an audience of more than 60 million people worldwide. It’s gone on to surpass 1 billion minutes of viewing time across multiple platforms, making it one of the most-watch ed documentaries in history and the most-watched Nat Geo film ever. The film was also used to launch Nat Geo’s “Earth Week” and to connect viewers to our social impact campaign. The campaign prompted viewers to take action through the use of tools like Snapchat geofilters for film screenings, hashtags and branded Facebook mentions. For every use of the social assets, National Geographic and Nat Geo Channel donated one dollar to Protect Seas and the Wildlife Conservation Society, up to a total of $50,000 for each organization.

While making Before the Flood, we realized we had to do something about our carbon footprint. We joined up with Daniel Nadler who designed the CarboTax app, which helps you contribute to reforestation campaigns to offset your carbon footprint through a voluntary carbon tax. That had a really positive effect — it gave us a practical step we could take and was also an action we could communicate to viewers. In the end, this raised over $15 million to help reforest places that were featured in the movie.

The impact work does not stop once you’ve released the film — in fact, you could say, that’s when it really begins. Never in our wildest dreams could we have imagined that the Trump administration would have rolled back all of the progress made by President Obama. All of our deepest fears have come true. So this movie is now more important than ever. You always need someone to pick up the cause and be dedicated to its impact, and the social impact campaigns you’ve started, long after you’re gone. I’ve found it helpful to have partners involved at every stage possible so I can get back to making the best films I can. Because for me, that’s where impact has to start: with a great movie.

Ultimately, there are a million causes and a million movies — so nothing’s easy. But this is a great time to be making documentaries. There’s so much to fight for and so much to fight against. You’re going to see a lot of amazing creativity come out of this time from documentary filmmakers.
Shock of the Familiar

By finding humanity in even the darkest moments, Joshua Oppenheimer challenges viewers to look beyond the superficial.

Joshua Oppenheimer
Academy Award-nominated director

Notable works:
The Act of Killing, The Look of Silence

For a film to generate positive social impact, it needs to hold up a mirror to the audience.

That’s because the shock in great art and great storytelling is always the shock of the familiar, when you encounter something about yourself in a work.

Often, journalism and news media only provide a snapshot of an issue, but documentary film lends itself to telling deeper stories about people, stories that can touch the core of our being. With The Act of Killing and The Look of Silence, I wanted to tell a deeper story about the Indonesian genocide by exploring the impunity of the perpetrators.

When working on a film, I always start with what troubles me or what I can’t look away from. This requires looking within, beyond the superficial. In the case of The Act of Killing and The Look of Silence, it was the boastfulness of the perpetrators that captivated and disturbed me. I felt there was something performative in the way they were describing the atrocities as a genocide carried out by people who still remained in power.

When working on a film, I always start with what troubles me or what I can’t look away from.

My crew and I devised ways to explore this impunity by setting up new situations that made this performance visible. In The Act of Killing we asked the perpetrators to dramatize their memories of murder and how they felt about participating in a genocide. In this way, we created a new reality by helping our protagonist Adi confront his brother’s killers.

This kind of work is never easy, so you need to cultivate the right environment on the shoot in order to evoke these new realities. It’s about establishing a safe space and being transparent, since your crew and participants will be pushed beyond their comfort zone. You are creating an intervention. This is the task of the artist: to create new pieces of the world that force us as viewers to reflect on and recognize things that we were unable to speak about previously.

While I knew this work was disruptive, I didn’t think that The Act of Killing would have an immediate inflammatory impact and explode in the way that it did. It became a touchstone of discussion, leading to a swift transformation in how the Indonesian media was talking about the past. Just three weeks after the first press screenings, the media shifted from talking about the “heroic extermination of the communists” — or more vaguely “the troubles of the 1960s” — to describing the atrocities as a genocide carried out by people who still remained in power.

There was a real hunger for The Look of Silence too. It was screened 850 times in 36 cities in 34 of Indonesia’s 34 provinces. Numerous public screenings were held in Medan, which is the city where both films were made. Not every organization that screened the film could report on how many people attended, but we know that at least 53,000 people went to screenings held by universities, film clubs, NGOs, religious organizations, and community groups. We made the film available for free online and it has now been streamed or downloaded tens of millions of times in Indonesia alone.

As a result, young people started demanding the truth. Survivors of the genocide organized an international people’s tribunal, and Indonesian teachers’ unions created an alternative history curriculum so that they wouldn’t have to continue to teach the false, official version. Initiatives in visual history, theater, art, and human rights sprang up across the country, many of which are still active today.

Historians demanded that the Indonesian and American governments open up their archives to shed light on the role the US played in the genocide, and we supported them by hosting screenings at the White House. Then, on December 10th 2014, Senator Tom Udall (D-NM) — who screened The Act of Killing to Congress earlier that year — introduced a Senate resolution demanding that the US declassify all documents pertaining to America’s role in the genocide, and that it apologize for America’s part in the slaughter.

To the Act of Killing awards

Nominations

Prize

The Act of Killing

Academy Award®

Samsung Awards®

Gotham Awards

The Look of Silence

Academy Award®

Samsung Awards®

Gotham Awards

The Look of Silence wins

Nominations

Prize

The Look of Silence wins

Nominations

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The Act of Killing wins

Nominations

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On October 18th 2017, the US government released official documents on the mass killings in Indonesia in 1965–1966. The released documents revealed that US diplomats and their State Department counterparts in Washington, D.C. had full knowledge of the events. They detailed tens of thousands of killings of suspected Communist Party members and ethnic Chinese, as well as trade unionists, teachers, artists, and artists. These killings were committed by the Indonesian military, paramilitary groups, and Muslim militias.

The State of SIE

We made the film available for free online and it has now been streamed or downloaded tens of millions of times in Indonesia alone.

If you want your film to have a real impact, I think it has to force people to see that the world cannot continue in its present form. Many documentaries simply present us with the violence committed will never happen again.

The Act of Killing distribution and reach

The Act of Killing premiered at the Telluride Film Festival in 2012. It went onto screen at 57 different countries.

21 countries distributed to in Europe, Asia, and Latin America.

53 awards and accolades.

1.5M+ Views on the online trailer.

22K+ Impressions across the film’s Facebook, Twitter, and other social accounts.

1,000+ DVD’s

118 cities

29/34 Indonesian provinces

116 screenings

32/34 Indonesian provinces

53K+ people attended screenings

The Indonesian media investigates

The Indonesian media investigates after watching The Act of Killing, Indonesia’s premier news magazine, Tempo, decided it would assemble its own investigation team: Tempo, theactofkilling.com/reactions-3/.

47 articles re-examining the genocide.

More than 600 new Indonesian press articles have been built. No film, or any other work of art for that matter, has done this more effectively than The Act of Killing.

The Look of Silence distribution and reach

Not every organization that screened the film informed the filmmakers how many people attended, but US$3,000 people are recorded as having attended screenings held by universities, film clubs, NGOs, religious organizations, and community groups.

2,200+ screenings

75 pages of testimony

600+ new press articles

The result:

If we are to transform Indonesia into the democracy it claims to be, citizens must recognize the terror and repression on which our contemporary history has been built. No film, or any other work of art for that matter, has done this more effectively than The Act of Killing.

— The National Human Rights Commission of Indonesia


The most comfortable explanation for the stories told in The Act of Killing is that these men are monsters, because it is predicated on the assumption that “If I, the viewer, am not a monster.” Instead, I tried to present the audience with human beings who were smiling with guilt. I started to see myself in them, and the film asks viewers to do the same. That’s a profoundly uncomfortable position and one that a significant number of people will reject. But those that are prepared to look in the mirror will ask themselves the important questions: why do we do these things and how can we live with them?

That’s why the end of the film is possibly the darkest happy ending in documentary history. You realize that even a man like Anwar, one of the leaders of the death squads back in the 60s, is fundamentally a human being. If that’s the case, then we ought to be able to find ways of living together that ensure the unthinkable violence committed will never happen again.

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Doc Society is a nonprofit organization that enables the creation of great documentary films. We award grants, host convenings and celebrate achievements in the space, providing filmmakers with the support to reach new audiences and make a greater impact with their work. From day one in 2005 we have worked to empower artists to make the best version of their films possible, in order to unleash the power and potential of documentary.

One of the ways we try to do this is by consolidating expertise and knowledge and sharing it with the entire field. One of our most groundbreaking resources is The Impact Field Guide & Toolkit, a detailed online publication that amalgamates the wisdom and experience of countless amazing filmmakers, all in one place. It is the largest and most significant publication of its kind.

Our support for filmmakers is hands-on and reactive to their needs. The Impact Field Guide takes readers through a five-part methodology designed to help artists who want to make real change with their film. It begins with the messages that arise from the film’s narrative, and provides a strategic framework to enable planning and delivery of impact and engagement work with the film, ending with an evaluation of the film’s impact. Each stage of this process is conveyed in an easy-to-read, accessible format and is available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic. To date, it has had over 50,000 unique users. There are also over 20 in-depth case studies accompanying The Impact Field Guide, as well as downloadable materials such as a budget template and a tool called “My Impact Plan,” where you can save the output of the methodology.

Documentary has the power to get inside a person and do something amazing. Jess Search discusses how Doc Society unleashes its power and potential.

© Jeff Gilbert / Alamy Stock Photo

Jess Search (left) and Beadie Finzi (right) encourage young voters in London, 2015

exercises we provide. When we were creating The Impact Field Guide we concentrated on looking at the bigger picture, the trends within the field and best practices. We knew this information is incredibly valuable to filmmakers, but they are often too busy focusing on their own work to collect it and share it themselves.

Doc Society exists to do collective work on behalf of busy film teams. Filmmakers can accurately report the problems they encounter during the course of their projects, but they’re not always in a place to analyze it and propose solutions. That’s where an organization like ours can play a vital role, analyzing the landscape and clearing a path to help everyone move forward. When we discover that numerous filmmakers are having similar issues, we try to create systems or tools that give them what they need to overcome these obstacles. This systemic work is, by its nature, iterative. Doc Society doesn’t do much long-term planning as our support for filmmakers is hands-on and reactive to their needs.

As an art form, documentary film has a near outsider experiences.

The majority of young people are more engaged by documentary films than by fictional stories. And they are more likely to remember the content and provide teachers with materials that are relevant in their everyday lives.

These initiatives aside, the process of making a documentary remains a difficult one. There’s certainly no right or wrong way to go about it, and no good film is ever made without a huge amount of self-doubt. But for teams that also want to create social impact, planning, a committed team and an impact producer embedded in the whole program as early as possible can definitely help. It’s important to have clarity on what you’re trying to do, but that’s different than having a single, set goal; you still need to be flexible. Just as Doc Society is iterative in its methodology, the filmmakers who achieve the most are open and able to adapt quickly too — especially when their films are released into the world and people, communities, and institutions start reacting to them.

We think evaluation of that reaction is incredibly important. You need to understand your film’s impact so you can learn how to deepen and replicate it. If you can’t tell the story of your film’s effect, you’ll struggle to learn from it, you’ll struggle to build upon it, and you’ll struggle to attract the resources and partners that you need for your future projects and for others that come after you. This is why evaluation is a responsibility, not just a nice thing to have.

It’s exciting and a privilege to be contributing to a field that’s developing so rapidly. Documentaries is a broad church — events, podcasts and live events can complement the whole.

Documentary has the power to get inside a person and do something amazing. We all know films that have really changed us, changed who we are and who we want to be. That’s the magic of it. Doc Society works to harness that magic.

Doc Academy

Doc Academy is the school program of Doc Society, providing free resources for UK secondary school teachers. The online platform offers award-winning documentary films for use in classrooms, and is used in up to quarter of all UK secondary schools.

The films are bolstered by curriculum-linked lesson plans and activity guides to help teach real issues.

You need to understand your film’s impact so you can learn how to deepen and replicate it.
Case Study

Chasing Ice

Chasing Coral

From changing minds in Ohio to capturing the attention of world leaders at the UN — Samantha Wright walks us through the evolution of impact across Chasing Ice and Chasing Coral.

Exposing the issue

The challenge with telling stories around big, complex subjects like climate change is getting beyond the reports, numbers, and graphs. You need to make it visually coherent so people can connect the dots and understand the issue. My role at Exposure Labs is to empower people to do that: to be visual, to experiment, and ultimately, to help expose those difficult, entrenched issues. To do this we use an iterative approach, allowing ourselves to make mistakes, to learn, to grow, and to change.

At Exposure Labs we have a simple but ambitious mission: to solve problems through film. We think one of the biggest issues in the US right now is a lack of political will to act on climate change at the speed we need. In response, we make films that highlight specific aspects of the much larger problem — from the melting of the northern ice caps in Chasing Ice to the destruction of coral reefs worldwide in Chasing Coral. Then, through strategic, local partnerships, we arm audiences with images that help them break down these complex issues. This allows the films to instigate change at a local level. If you try to address a global audience about this type of issue, a lot of the message can be lost. By focusing on a region, a state, or even just an individual lawmaker, you can get real-world results that can then be scaled up to make a big difference.

Chasing Ice, driving change

We learned a lot from Chasing Ice. The 2012 documentary initially sought to simply show viewers what was happening in the Arctic Circle, but we were overwhelmed with the response and it became the centerpiece for a much more dynamic campaign.

This was when we began to focus on the hyperlocal. We learned hearing that there were elected officials across the US who believed in man-made climate change, but lacked the political cover to go public with their views. Representative Bob Inglis (R-SC) was unseated in 2010 for just this reason. We knew that if we were going to shift skeptical policymakers we would have to convince their voters. So, we decided to micro-target one district and one congressman (Pat Tiberi), a climate change denier in Ohio. We had this idea that 50 screenings in one place...
in one community, could go so much further than 50 around the world — and this proved to be right. After six weeks, Congressman Tiberi in Ohio ultimately shifted his position acknowledging that climate change is a man-made problem, and eventually joined the bipartisan Climate Solutions Caucus, working with other representatives to address the risk of climate change.

As we supported Chasing Ice in communities around the world, our screenings became more than just basic Q&As. At the end of the film campaign tour, the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report was released. Organizing for Action, the Charleston County School District, using the film as a launchpad for an entire semester of learning and posters to build support for the state’s following solar energy plans. By encouraging constituents to post messages on a dedicated website we set up, we were able to hold Republican representatives accountable to support clean energy policy in the legislative session.

As we supported Chasing Ice in communities around the world, our screenings became more than just basic Q&As. In key test audiences, we also requested. Of the more than 130 Congresspeople present the report. Statements from their offices were also included in a balanced manner, on as wide a front as possible. At the end of the film campaign tour, the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report was released. Organizing for Action, as well as the Charleston County School District, using the film as a launchpad for an entire semester of learning and posters to build support for the state’s following solar energy plans. By encouraging constituents to post messages on a dedicated website we set up, we were able to hold Republican representatives accountable to support clean energy policy in the legislative session.

Chasing Coral, building on success

The approach to engagement for Chasing Coral was based on our learnings from Chasing Ice. After evaluating the successes of the campaign, and where things could have been done differently, we decided to change it up a little. With Chasing Ice our effort was centered around the one experiment we ran in that district in Ohio, so for Chasing Coral we focused on a water area in the Southeast. Again, we were driven by a desire to iterate, to try new things and see what worked. But whereas before we had just one experiment, now the plan was to run a whole series of them across the region, varying our approach from screening to screening.

For our 2018 work for Chasing Coral, we ran three local campaigns, each targeting different layers of systems-level change: mobilizing voters, inspiring young people, and shifting policymakers. In Atlanta, Georgia, we mobilized voters in time for the 2018 midterms, using screenings across the city to get to hard-to-reach audiences. In South Carolina, we partnered with the Charleston County School District, using the film as a launchpad for an entire semester of learning that inspired young people to take ownership of our impact on the environment. A separate campaign toured South Carolina across nine state house districts, using screenings to address climate change skepticism among the state’s representatives to address the risk of climate change.

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Chasing Ice audience attitude shifts

All at the end of the Chasing Coral film campaign tour, the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report was released. Organizing for Action, as a nonprofit, had volunteered to go to the office of every 150 Congressperson who denied climate change and asked them to sign a pledge to support and vote for pro-environment legislation. Our team also requested. Of the more than 130 Congresspeople who denied climate change, only Congressman Tiberi’s team responded.

A global problem requires a global solution. An effective solution requires that all countries agree to participate together. I would like to see us address climate change in a balanced manner, on as broad a front as possible.

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The Chasing Ice Ohio Tour saw the team at Exposure Labs concentrate their change efforts in one district: Ohio’s 12th. The aim was to galvanize the public — through events, screenings, and by striking up local partnerships — and push Congressman Pat Tiberi away from his stance as a listed climate change denier, and toward accepting the reality of the issue.

According to the team orchestrating the campaign, the strategy was to flood the district with "Chasing Ice screening events, press and climate education for the public" with the goal being to "support the Congressman through his constituents and provide him with everything he needed to understand and embrace climate change science."

At the screenings in particular, local residents were afforded a platform to discuss the issues and, if they so wished, reach out to Congressman Tiberi to ask him to reconsider his stance on climate change. The campaign team asked attendees to write any statements, messages or questions to the Congressman to be shared on the web (and eventually on a dedicated website: www.DearCongressmanTiberi.com).

The team spent close to three months planning and developing the tour, which included "writing proposals, researching Congressmen and congressional districts, developing educational language, creating a new constituent call to action, building a new website, and designing marketing and media materials."

The concerted effort and hyperlocal focus paid off.

After laying this groundwork, they traveled to central Ohio where their plans were put into action. They "booked screening events, built local strategic partnerships throughout the district with over 70 local groups, developed press and media connections, held meetings with the Congressman, and continued to develop the call to action in order to support the Congressman."

The concerted effort and hyperlocal focus paid off: on April 24th 2014, Congressman Tiberi released a statement acknowledging that climate change was an issue that needed to be tackled.

91 screening presentations hosted by the Chasing Ice team.
9,440 Ohio residents reached through screening and marketing events.
300+ messages from Ohio residents to Congressman Tiberi.
35+ press articles or event announcements were released about the Ohio Tour between April-May 2014.
70+ partnerships with local venues/organizations.
662 Ohio residents signed up to stay involved with the Chasing Ice Ohio Tour.

Telling a Good Story

Elise Pearlstein elaborates on the importance of using stories to connect with audiences on an emotional level to take them someplace where they wouldn’t otherwise go.

Jeff Skoll founded Participant Media on his belief that a good story, well told, can make a difference and drive people to do good in the world.

Our approach to documentaries echoes this view and aligns with the organization’s overall reason for being: to create entertainment that inspires and compels social change.

There is a misconception that in social impact entertainment the issue must always come first, but when it comes to making documentary films, we always put the story first. Why? Because we look to stories to connect with audiences on an emotional level and take them someplace where they wouldn’t or couldn’t otherwise go. Entertainment and storytelling are key components of our work, and as such our documentaries strive to offer all the elements that would expect from a great narrative: characters, drama, conflicts, and stakes.

Typically, the pitches Participant receives are from people with clear visions, strong points of view, and an idea of the impact they want to have. We’re benefiting from the opportunity to tell an in-depth story over time. We’re not looking for breaking news or stories that are going to feel outdated in six months. We’re looking for projects that are ideally going to hit a zeitgeist 18 months from when they are first pitched to us.

Jeff Skoll founded Participant Media on his belief that a good story, well told, can make a difference and drive people to do good in the world.

A good story, well told, can make a difference and drive people to do good in the world.

Audiences do not need or want to be hit over the head with a message. Impartial and engaging documentaries often provide a personal entry point that connects with audiences. Audiences do not need or want to be hit over the head with a message, but rather to discover the issues at play through authentic storytelling.

So, we look for representatives who will be the best people to tell the story. In Food, Inc, Eric Schlosser and Michael Pollan, a pair of investigative journalists, took the lead in steering the audience through the narrative, but every issue we explored within the food industry was also represented by someone who was grappling with that issue themselves. Carole Morison was a chicken farmer so disillusioned with the way she was forced to treat her animals, she risked her livelihood to expose the truth. Mike Perr was a seed cleaner whose principles brought him into a devastating legal battle with Monsanto: the agricultural giant sued him for encouraging soybean farmers to save their seed, a traditional practice that contravened Monsanto’s patent. By allowing your audience to be with these characters at this crucial time in their journey, the storytelling is much more compelling. There’s a sense of immediacy as people connect with the issues you’re exploring, and this ultimately means that your documentary can have a greater impact.

A lot of our films feature people who are proactively engaging in meaningful ways. In Food, Inc, Eric Schlosser and Michael Pollan, a pair of investigative journalists, took the lead in steering the audience through the narrative, but every issue we explored within the food industry was also represented by someone who was grappling with that issue themselves.

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Alongside the filmmakers and our colleagues in social impact, we try to ensure that our films offer a range of ways for audiences to engage with the topics they explore.

We believe that opinion change can be a precursor to behavior change further down the line. At a base level, we hope they will raise awareness of an issue, and inspire audiences to think differently, we believe that opinion change is a form of action in itself. Besides, some might want to engage at some level, especially if they believe they can directly do much about the issue of widespread invasions of privacy by the government, but our impact goal was to start a conversation on a timely, and incredibly important topic. At other times, where possible, we provide our audiences with simple but impactful, great stories and pure hard work, social impact entertainment demands a delicate balancing act.

Impact is clearly important to us from day one, but once we greenlight a project, we believe in letting filmmakers work as they see fit. They have the best understanding of the issues, the entertainment demands of their audience, and the execution of a social impact campaign. Their ideas range from simple, specific steps like driving less and using renewable energy sources of energy, all the way up to more involved actions, such as voting for leaders who pledge to solve climate change or buying a hybrid car.

Beyond unique ideas, great stories and pure hard work, social impact entertainment demands a delicate balancing act. Your film and your social impact campaign are artforms in and of themselves, yet they are also two halves of the same whole. These elements must be equally well-executed and it must work in harmony with each other if you want to have not only a successful film, but also an impactful one.
Imagination is key when it comes to social change.

We have to be able to imagine what a different and better world could look like in order for it to be realized. If you can spark people’s imaginations with great work, you can guide them in the direction of behavior change. That’s why our vision at the Sundance Institute is to advance independent artists to become a global, cultural force.

When he founded Sundance in 1981, Robert Redford was looking for an alternative channel for the independent voice in film. He was trying to enhance freedom of creative expression and get work made that wasn’t seen as commercially viable by the studios at that time.

Today, we work to discover, support, protect, and amplify independent artists working in film, theater, and emerging technologies. I see our role as providing nutrition for the soil where these filmmakers can sprout and develop to become strong on their own. Since 2002, our Documentary Film Program has supported nonfiction filmmakers across the world. Whether it’s our residential labs, festivals or year-round artist support, everything we do is about trying to create a catalytic space for imaginative possibility. As of December 2018, we awarded $1.4 million in targeted Documentary Fund grants to support nonfiction storytellers. 70% of our supported projects were helmed by women, 36% originated outside the US, and 23% were from first-time feature filmmakers.

I believe impact is almost synonymous with audience and distribution.

Over the course of Sundance’s three-and-a-half decades, culture has shifted. I don’t attribute that entirely to us of course, but the Institute has

Tabitha Jackson
Director of the Documentary Film Program at the Sundance Institute

Tabitha Jackson argues that in order to create a different future, we must first be able to see it.
from four to 24 days.

Each artist is given critique, mentorship, media, and episodic content (TV/online).

Each year, the Institute’s residential labs support more than 1,000 independent artists working in film, theater, new media, and emerging platforms.

The Sundance Institute’s artist programs provide support at every stage of the creative process for individuals with distinct voices in film, theater, film-composing, episodic storytelling, creative distribution, short film editing, and more.

I’m trying to understand what the world is on my journey to imagining what it might be.

The use of art and metaphor can express deep truths about the human condition, as while one film might not necessarily be able to change the world, it can certainly help make sense of it. That’s why at Sundance, we want to sustain artists who describe the world accurately and honestly, in all its complexity. We look to support artists whose work holds power to account and, particularly at this moment in time, helps build a shared discourse.

Those artists need to be responsible too; we live in a visual culture and as such, images wield power. This means filmmaking can be a positive force for change, but it also comes with responsibility — not to unthinkingly perpetuate a history of racist imagery, for example.

The role and responsibility of the artist is to be truthful, independent, and to let their individual voice come through. Raoul Peck’s I Am Not Your Negro, one of the documentaries supported by our program, exemplifies the power of a story told with authenticity. The film envisions novelist James Baldwin’s unfinished manuscript, Remember This House. The book was intended to be a personal account of the lives and assassinations of Baldwin’s friends, Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The film is something very different but still richly poetic and political.

Peck’s film confounded the industry box office predictions which, given the work’s African American subject matter and historical, biographical nature, were pessimistic. I Am Not Your Negro blew everyone’s expectations out of the water because it provides a fierce, unapologetic commentary about the way we live now. The film asked questions and that’s what a documentary should do. Rather than provide all the answers, nonfiction film is an invitation to think, feel and participate.

I believe there are transformative films and transactional films. With the latter, you go to the cinema to see something that confirms what you already know. You pay your money, reinforce your liberal sensibilities and go on your way without being troubled by any doubt or question as to where your opinions come from.

Transformative films move us emotionally and make us question ourselves. Joshua Oppenheimer’s The Act of Killing, which exposes the mass executions of accused communists in Indonesia, forced me to find my own moral compass because it didn’t give me any answers. Now I see the world slightly differently because I was forced to do that imaginative work.

Ultimately, I want to be changed after emerging from seeing a work. That’s why I love being questioned. For me, the questions and the possibilities that allow for imaginative intervention will always be more interesting than someone just telling me the answers.
My interest in social impact filmmaking had a uniquely personal start. After surviving two liver transplants in the early 90s, I re-emerged with a stark awareness that there were many myths and misconceptions surrounding organ donation that were impeding broader acceptance of life-saving procedures. As a result, I founded the James Redford Institute for Transplant Awareness to educate, engage, and inspire a wider acceptance of organ donation. It was this mission that inspired me to make The Kindness of Strangers, my first HBO documentary, and led to the start of my work on social impact campaigns.

The Kindness of Strangers was made on a budget of just $600,000. We told the story without narration, just following the experiences of people on either side of the process — donors, recipients and their families. Looking back, the project was at the leading edge of a shift in public acceptance of organ donation. The most rewarding aspect of our impact campaign was the family that saw the film shortly before a tragic accident left their son with a fatal brain injury. After seeing The Kindness of Strangers, they donated his organs and, as a result, saved seven lives.

That experience encapsulates the mission I’ve adopted: I want to transform information into inspiration, using my love of film to drive positive change. I spent 20 years writing screenplays for feature films and, thanks to that experience, I also know that to make this change you need to find relatable and inspiring subjects. This is the strategy we embrace at The Redford Center, a nonprofit co-founded by my father and I in 2005 that supports impact-driven documentaries. We are focused on solutions-based storytelling in the environmental space. The last decade has seen the proliferation of important and powerful documentaries that bring attention to environmental challenges — particularly the challenges of climate change. However, the plethora of doomsday narratives has had an unintended effect: denial and disengagement.

Social impact documentaries can offer hope amidst a landscape of doomsday narratives and despair. According to James Redford, they can quite literally save lives.

Frankly, if the overarching message is one of hopelessness and despair, denial seems a reasonable response. So, while the films we make and support deal with environmental problems, we try to offer solutions as well. For example, in Happening: A Clean Energy Revolution, I take a very personal journey into the clean energy revolution. Redford raises awareness about this serious issue.

For us, documentary films are a core component of a much larger vision to produce effective social impact campaigns.
space to see how it’s creating jobs, turning profits and affecting communities across the US.

This solutions-based strategy is also echoed in the work of KPJR Films, a production company I co–founded with producer Karen Pritzker. KPJR’s take on this approach is to take challenging social issues and to break them down in a way that people can understand. As with The Redford Center, we see documentary film as a tool for positive change. For us, documentary films are a core component of a much larger vision to produce effective social impact campaigns for use by those working at the frontline of social action. We enjoy supporting those who have boots on the ground, working hard to better our lives.

When developing our projects, both The Redford Center and KPJR Films seek guidance and input from the communities whose outreach efforts could benefit from high-quality media tools. While we often partner with HBO, we also focus on community screenings that trigger dialogue and open doors to action at the local and occasionally national level.

For example, KPJR’s campaigns for Paper Tigers and Resilience – films conceived to address the health risks of adverse childhood experiences – have become textbook examples of the power of stories to drive community engagement. We consulted the global pediatric and public health communities early and often as we planned the films. We wanted to make sure we produced films that met the needs of those already working so hard in the space who could use them to drive better practices and policy.

It’s important to invest in long-term relationships with a sincere, open heart. Too many NGOs get used for access to stories and characters and are then promptly forgotten, which can not only burn bridges but also prevent progress.

Three years after the start of our social impact campaigns for both films, we are a part of a great community that supports and helps each other. The results speak for themselves: there have been over 40,000 screenings of Resilience and Paper Tigers worldwide, resulting in changes in policy in a number of US states as well as Scotland. All of this without a traditional broadcast deal, and all of it big word of mouth and direct grassroots marketing.

For some documentary filmmakers, not being central to the entertainment industry might feel problematic, but if your goal is truly to make a difference, this shouldn’t be an issue. With the advent of new and flexible platforms for distribution, I see impact docs as an emergent genre that will expand over the next decade. Some films will have crossover entertainment value, but most will become the third leg on the stool of social–environmental impact and education. In this increasingly audio-visual world we live in, social impact entertainment will continue to spread and grow. There is the demand, there is the market — and that’s good for those of us that believe that the right story can move mountains.

The Redford Center

The Redford Center is a 501(c)(3) organization co–founded by Robert Redford, northeasterner handsome James Redford. Drawing on the family’s multi–generational expertise in filmmaking and action, the nonprofit produces, funds, and publicly screens impact–driven documentaries that showcase stories of individuals taking action to protect the planet.

It collaborates with dynamic–growing organizations to develop community–engagement campaigns that spark conversation and lead to action.

Redford Center Grants

In 2016, The Redford Center launched a second cycle of Redford Center Community Trust. The program welcomed applications from filmmakers working on feature–length documentary films focused on environmental issues and solutions in the U.S. Each–threatening team chosen received the following support: a $20,000 development grant to create a short proof–of–concept film; a six–month fellowship that provides mentorship and outreach, and production of their feature film; a travel and lodging grant to attend a Story Development Summit at the Sunshine Mountain Resort.

Paper Tigers

Paper Tigers follows a year in the life of an alternative high school that has radically changed its approach to discipline by students instilling a sense of purpose and a promising model for how to break the cycles of poverty, violence, and disease that affect families.

Resilience

Resilience: The Biology of Stress & The Science of Hope chronicles the birth of a social movement among pediatricians, therapists, educators, and communities, who are using cutting–edge brain science to disrupt cycles of violence, addiction, and disease.
Case Study

Food, Inc.

Social impact entertainment can be an incredible force for change. However, for that change to be quantified and proven, it’s essential we understand how to measure impact, explains Johanna Blakley.

Johanna Blakley
Managing Director of the Norman Lear Center, based at the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California

The genesis of the study
Since its inception in 2000, the Norman Lear Center at USC has provided students and scholars with the means to study and research the social implications of entertainment and media. One of our inaugural initiatives, Hollywood, Health and Society (HH&S), embodies the type of work we do — connecting television showrunners with medical experts and resources to help inform health-related storylines. HH&S ensures that while being entertained, audiences also learn and are provided with accurate and potentially useful medical information.

The Lear Center developed an innovative survey instrument that would assess the impact of Food, Inc. on its viewers while considering these issues of self-selection bias. We used a method called propensity score matching (PSM) to help determine whether the different results that we saw between viewers and non-viewers were associated with watching Food, Inc., rather than pre-existing differences between these two groups. Simply put, PSM allowed us to say, with a much greater degree of confidence, whether the differences between viewers and non-viewers in knowledge, behaviors and attitudes were attributable to the film.

Sure enough, the differences we uncovered between viewers and non-viewers (or the exposed group and the control group) suggested that watching Food, Inc. had an impact on those who saw it, but it was our job to prove it.

The Media Impact Project — also housed within the Lear Center — collects, develops and shares methods for measuring impact. It was founded as part of our effort to expand to platforms beyond TV. When we first started, we knew that we wanted to work with Participant Media because of their incredible presence in this space, so we were thrilled when they asked us to measure the impact of one of their titles.

Food, Inc. was the perfect candidate for many reasons. It prompted viewers to make simple behavior changes in their everyday lives and it encouraged them to effect broader social change by engaging local school administrators and policymakers. It had an extensive social impact campaign, the Hungry for Change outreach effort organized by Participant’s digital arm, and it had a director, Robert Kenner, who had been traveling with the film and engaging communities of action across the US.

There was already a real belief that this film had an impact on those who saw it, but it was our job to prove it. When setting out to study the film’s impact, we knew that we would likely be working with a highly self-selected sample. Respondents to the survey answered our call because they had already signed up to Participant’s email newsletter, or had engaged with Participant on social channels. Naturally, this population would be more likely to say that they engaged with and non-viewers (or the exposed group and the control group) of Food, Inc. were already signed up to Participant’s email newsletter, or had engaged with Participant on social channels.

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Sure enough, the differences we uncovered between viewers and non-viewers (or the exposed group and the control group) suggested that watching Food, Inc. had a very, very powerful effect on its viewers and non-viewers. There was a very, very powerful media intervention. We found that it was more likely that people who had seen the film were shopping at farmers’ markets or had engaged with Participant on social media.

Controlling for self-selection bias
Media effect studies have long suffered from not having control groups. I really think that they should be institutionalized as a best practice in all media impact evaluations, and our study of Food, Inc. is a clear example of their value and importance.

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Food, Inc.

much" about issues ranging from agricultural policies to food safety, 79% of viewers agreed that Food, Inc explained what they could do to help solve the problems addressed in the film, and 80% said that, having watched the film, they would consider joining a social movement to reform agribusiness. This last statistic became even more impressive when we noted that only 37% of respondents actually considered themselves to be politically active.

The self-reported impact

This is not to say, however, that nothing can be learned from self-reported changes in knowledge or attitudes. Over two-thirds of respondents said they learned “a lot” or “very much” about issues ranging from agricultural policies to food safety. 79% of viewers agreed that Food, Inc explained what they could do to help solve the problems addressed in the film, and 80% said that, having watched the film, they would consider joining a social movement to reform agribusiness. This last statistic became even more impressive when we noted that only 37% of respondents actually considered themselves to be politically active.

As part of the Hungry for Change campaign, Participant’s digital team built a robust website where people could find out more about the huge environmental impact of the food industry, from pesticide usage to factory farming. There were links to petitions they could sign to combat these issues, and detailed information about the steps they could take to reduce their own tacit support of an industrialized food system. There was also information about how to arrange local screenings of the film and downloadable discussion guides to help stimulate conversation in the community. These two resources in particular helped to build a strong grassroots activism component around the film.

Theorizing change, measuring impact

Measuring impact is never going to be easy, but I think there are three categories of data that, if collected, can allow us to make very convincing arguments about what a piece of media can lead people to do.

The importance of “scaffolding”

Documentary is clearly a powerful tool for motivating social change, but it may not be enough on its own. You also need a supportive infrastructure outside of your media intervention—a social impact campaign, for example. This “scaffolding” will offer ways to carry on the conversation after watching the film, channel audience energies and bring people together to take action, both online and off. Without this, you’ll be left with a motivated but disappointed population—eager to act, but unsure of what to do. This scaffolding should already be in place before audiences see the film.

The second is exposure and engagement data. If the media is available on a digital platform, we can gather data about who was exposed to the content and how they interacted with it. Did they watch the whole thing? Did they share it? We always encourage content creators to provide opportunities for people to take further action on the same platform, such as donating or joining a mailing list, so that we can draw a clear connection between exposure and taking action.

The third is survey data. If we want to know whether media content produced changes in awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and offline behavior then we need to gather survey data. Ideally, these surveys can be administered on the same digital platform where people consumed the media content. Then we have a very clear picture of what content people consumed, how they engaged with it and what potential impact it had.

It’s clear that much of the data we need to measure impact is out there, and we have the chance to do this work better than ever before. But there’s a growing (and completely warranted) concern around the misuse and abuse of data that could stymie our progress on this front. I think it will be difficult for academics, institutions, and organizations to win back people’s trust in this regard, but we have to — especially because we’re finally waking up to how crucial an impact media is having on our society.

Media Impact Project survey for Food, Inc.

The Media Impact Project survey, offered a wealth of qualitative and quantitative data on the impact of Food, Inc. 20,000 respondents took the survey.

Food, Inc. viewer demographics (based on survey respondents):

- Female: 73%
- Caucasian: 26%
- Did not have a high school diploma: 12%
- Obtained some college: 35%
- Obtained a graduate school degree: 16%
- Worked in the food industry: 18%
- Worked in media/alternatives: 12%
- Worked in government: 12%
- Income $25,000 or more: 79%
- Income $50,000 or more: 95%
- Income $75,000 or more: 99%

Food, Inc. viewers’ political views:

- 26% said they were not politically active
- 31% said they were unsure
- 36% said they were very much
decided to political affiliation

Food, Inc. viewers’ self-reported changes in knowledge and attitudes:

- 28% said they learned “a lot” or “very much” about issues ranging from agricultural policies to food safety
- 16% said they were strongly supportive of social and environmental causes
- 34% said they were strong supporters of social and economic causes
- 78% stated “This film explained to them what they could do to solve the problems addressed in the film.”
**Spotlight on:**

**Propensity Score Matching**

By and large, the majority of people choose the films they see based on personal taste and interests. As such, researchers looking to study the impact of a given title will almost always have to deal with a certain bias. The research done at USC’s Lear Center was no different. To try and overcome this bias, however, they developed a unique survey instrument: propensity score matching (PSM).

“In this study, propensity score matching (PSM) techniques were used to control for self-selection bias among survey respondents. PSM helped identify factors that predict the likelihood of a person seeing Food, Inc. The Lear Center’s research team performed a statistical analysis of survey responses from all the respondents who watched Food, Inc., and determined what personal characteristics increased their likelihood — or propensity — to see the film.

We used these characteristics to generate a propensity score for survey respondents who had seen the film, and those who had not. People with all 17 of these characteristics received the highest score and those with the fewest received the lowest. However, just because someone has a high score does not mean that they have seen the film — it just makes it more likely that they have seen it. Therefore, a person with a very high score may not have seen the film yet, and a person with a very low score may have seen it despite themselves (for instance, a teacher may have screened the film in a class where students with low scores saw it).

Once scores were assigned, we created two groups: people who had watched *Food, Inc.* and those who had not. Next we compared the range of scores in each group and then performed ‘one-to-one matching,’ which allowed us to use an automated method to remove subjects from each group until both groups were composed of the same number of respondents with the same range of propensity scores (e.g., each person who saw the film was paired with a person who did not see the film, but was equally likely to see the film based on their propensity scores). The salient difference between the two groups was whether or not they had viewed *Food, Inc.*

This method allowed us to create something similar to an experimental study design where subjects are randomly assigned to a control group and a treatment group. Here, the "treatment" group is comprised of those who had seen *Food, Inc.*, and the "control" group is comprised of those who had not seen the film but were equally likely to. By making these groups completely parallel, we were able to examine whether differences in knowledge and behavior are attributable to exposure to the film.

**Viewers with a high propensity to watch Food, Inc. shared 17 characteristics:**

**Demographics:**
1. No child
2. Not working in the media industry
3. Slightly more likely to work in education

**Media exposure:**
4. TV
5. News websites
6. Radio
7. Visited the Hungry for Change website

**Ideology and taste:**
8. Democratic affiliation
9. Believes that sustainable agriculture is important
10. Supports organized efforts to improve food safety/sustainable agriculture
11. Frequently watches social issue feature films
12. Frequently watches social issue documentaries
13. Individual attitudes
14. Individual behavior
15. Media coverage
16. Watched *An Inconvenient Truth*
17. Watched *Fast Food Nation*

Television
Since its creation in the mid-20th century, television has become one of the most versatile and widely consumed forms of entertainment media. For social impact storytellers, TV offers a means to bring powerful ideas directly into people’s homes.

In the digital age, the rise of over-the-top content providers has had a dramatic, transformative effect on how TV shows are made, distributed, and watched. Yet this upheaval also presents unique opportunities for makers of SE.

The changes the industry is experiencing make it an exciting time to be working in development. Television is embracing voices that are new, distinct, and authentic.

— Marie O’Reilly
Pat Mitchell discusses the vital importance of public broadcasting in highlighting inequality, and its role in communicating the need for change.

When I started out in television in the early 1970s, the country had just emerged from a turbulent time of social change. The civil rights movement had, in part, led to the creation of an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which required media companies to start to hire new women and people of color. Yes, there were quotas, and they had an impact on what was seen on television and the programming that was produced.

So, I trace my interests in social impact programming to my own hiring as part of a social movement’s impact. I believed that if we applied a social justice lens to our work, women and underrepresented populations could make a difference in media. I put that belief into practice immediately after getting my first job in television, first as a producer, then as a news reporter and anchor, and later a talk show host. Whether running my own production company or creating and hosting my own programming, I always approached everything from the perspective of what difference the report, show, documentary or special would have beyond the broadcast.

As one of the first women in network television on the frontlines of the women’s movement, I faced the challenges of being the “first” or the “only.” 

During my early years in Boston, Washington, and Los Angeles, I sustained my commitment to impact programming, focusing — when possible — on women’s stories. Frustrated with the limitations of network programs at the time, I left a job to set up my own company and produce a daily series for national syndication. The Woman to Woman series featured conversations among carefully curated groups of women who shared stories, challenges, and ideas. The series won the Emmy® for Best Daytime Talk Programming in its first year, and our success proved to me that programming intended to have impact could be more popular than the diet of soap operas and game shows that were being offered to women audiences at that time. I believed that if we applied a social justice lens to our work, women and underrepresented populations could make a difference in media.

I also witnessed the growing impact of documentary films, and by partnering with former UCLA professor and author, Dr. Diana Goldberg-Meehan, launched a nonprofit division of a very successful Hollywood production company, Ubu Productions. Our mission was to produce films with social impact campaigns, and our success proved to me that programming designed to produce films for social impact campaigns could be popular or make money, and there were far more women and underrepresented populations involved in the history-making show Yes, We Can! — pictures of television programs about women, for women, produced and hosted by women. The television women’s fair was organized by Boston’s Channel 4 and attended by some 30,000 women. Participants included Helen Reddy, Gloria Steinem, Julia Child, Leeza Gibbons, Betty Friedan, Jane Fonda, Morgan Fairchild, Kitty Carlisle Hart, Alfre Woodard, and Margaret Haddix. The special telecast was created and supervised by Rogers Brink and the WBZ-TV reporters included Soggy Hamlin and Pat Mitchell.

Pat Mitchell

The Revolution Will Be Televised

Yes, We Can! 84

I trace my early days of impact programming back to one-time-only events, but it was — we proved the impact that women’s programming could have on a community. This was a one-time-only event, but it convinced me of the power of the television medium to be transformative, and I became committed to using every media platform I could access to tell stories with impact.

The Revolution, Yes, We Can!

Notable works:
Woman to Woman, Yes, We Can!

I believed that if we applied a social justice lens to our work, women and underrepresented populations could make a difference in media.
he acknowledged that it was Ted Turner’s documentary work during this period that had, in part, inspired him.

After the Time Warner/AOL media merger, there was no longer support for social impact work at Turner Broadcasting. Ted was fired and I decided to leave, too. I stepped into my next big opportunity for impact by becoming president of PBS. PBS’s mission is to serve, not sell, and it’s the only major media company with national reach and impact — it’s connected to local communities through 359 independent public television stations. PBS doesn’t have the profit motive of other media companies, and even though the funds have to be raised every year, they are from the public, who values their PBS station. PBS’s programming is mission-driven and less accountable to sponsors or shareholders. It’s not a perfect model for impact because there are built-in limitations to what PBS can do, given its mission to serve the local stations. Also, what they see as positive impact varies greatly, and there is always the threat of government disapproval of an impact agenda — even though government support is less than 20% for more public television. However, I feel good about the impact programming PBS was able to commission and distribute, and I remain a big proponent for a better-funded public media enterprise in a democracy. For me, the next position was to lead the Policy Center for Media, and use that platform of an organization that served all media and technology companies. I had an opportunity to approach social impact from the perspective of what was changing in the entire media ecosystem — changing at cyberspace — and the increasing globalization of media as a powerful force connecting the world, as well as exposing the dangers of media concentration of ownership. Soon all broadcast networks and cable companies will be owned by less than seven companies, and local stations are being bought up by media conglomerates, further narrowing the focus of programming and diminishing the commitment to provide accurate information and news and entertainment that uplifted or informed as well as entertained.

This kind of content has never been more needed to strengthen and sustain a democracy.

We produced 400 hours of documentaries, most of which had social change agendas attached from the beginning — partnering with National Geographic for conservation awareness, or telling the untold story of women’s contributions to the 20th century, or exposing the threat of nuclear annihilation. Ted never hesitated to tackle controversy or to advocate for a more sustainable, peaceful world, and he used the power of his media companies to promote this agenda. Many years later when Jeff Skoll set up Participant Media, I knew this was the kind of content that was needed.

I’m SO, by Ted Turner approach. Ted Turner about producing a Century of Women, a 90-hour series that she documented the history of women in America. Turner convened Mitchell to join Turner Broadcasting as President of Turner Digital Productions and later CNN Productions. It was there that Mitchell executive produced hundreds of hours of documentaries and specials, which earned 23 Emmy Awards and 5 Peabody Awards.

Women to Women Distinguished Achievement Award
Women in Media Center’s First annual Lifetime Achievement Award 2001 Senator Dianne Feinstein Award for Leadership Honored by the Center for the Advancement of Women Awarded Buckhead Medal From the Buckhead University at Oxford University Appointed by Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, Chairwoman of the Commission on the development of a plan to build a National Women’s Museum in Washington, D.C.


Media is one of the single biggest forces in our world today.

Today, most local media outlets are staggering under a burden of unrealistic financial pressures. In terms of impact, local media serves as a counterpointing force against the present determination of both the quantity and the quality of news coverage, and the production of compelling content intended to compel social change. This kind of content has never been more needed to sustain a democracy.
To fully portray an issue requires understanding the people who actually live it. Neal Baer discusses television’s ability to affect the lives of its viewers through its depiction of characters.

Neal Baer
Creator, writer, producer, and social activist

Television as a medium has the potential to dramatically influence people’s understanding of health issues. During my first season at ER, the New England Journal of Medicine published an article that lambasted representations of CPR on television. This was an important milestone for me: it made me realize that people got their healthcare information from TV, and that as a consequence, we had a duty to be as accurate as possible. We put so much effort into making our shows look real because we wanted people to believe these were real doctors doing their jobs, so the issues we were presenting had to be equally authentic.

Unlike with film, TV can explore themes repeatedly over years or even decades. We did that on ER with Gloria Reuben’s character, who was diagnosed with HIV early on in the series. In year 14, she was brought back to the show so viewers could see that she was doing well and living a healthy life, to give closure to this character and to say something important about how people can live and thrive with HIV.

This kind of storytelling has a measurable impact on audiences. A 2003 study by the Kaiser Family Foundation revealed that 53% of ER’s regular viewers learned about important health issues from the show, and 51% revealed they also...

To be a good physician, you have to know your patients. You have to understand their stories in order to help them.

The more you are exposed to people, the more you realize that health is intimately tied to issues of social justice. Wealthier people have better food, better healthcare, and less violence. It was my understanding of and passion for these issues that led to my career in television. I wanted to explore these complex ideas through long-running, relatable characters that audiences not only loved and trusted, but also hopefully learned something from.

Notable works:
ER, Law & Order: Special Victims Unit

“The Joyful Heart Foundation
When Law & Order: SVU featured the rape kit backlog in the third episode of its 12th season, “Behave,” the Joyful Heart Foundation hosted a screening event in Los Angeles. It was attended by key members of the LAPD and city leadership, who were asked tough questions about the backlog program.

—*Update on the Rape Kit Backlog in Los Angeles.*

HIV infection is a crisis in Southern states, which, as of 2014, accounted for 54% of all new HIV diagnoses.

The South is also home to 21 of 25 metropolitan areas with the highest HIV prevalence among gay and bisexual men.

In 2014, nearly 3,000 people in the Deep South died with HIV as an underlying cause.

Among black men in this region, the rate of HIV-related death was seven times as high as that of the US population at large.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that only 50% of black gay and bisexual men effectively suppress the virus with consistent medication and the numbers are even lower for these men in their late teens and 20s.


There’s a reticence to tackle subjects that are loaded, even taboos — topics like abortion, HIV, and gun control. HIV is still a real problem in the US who were living with HIV, but we haven’t seen that reflected on screen. It’s the same problem with abortion, which we tackled in season six of SVU with “Match Made in Heaven.” The episode received a lot of attention, but now the issue is rarely mentioned on TV.

On the other hand, I couldn’t get much press interest for the 2008 SVU episode we did about rape in the military, but now SVU is a more widely discussed topic. Likewise, on SVU we did the first show about a transgender youth taking hormone blockers around 2005, and today there’s a much more open discourse around gender and identity. Either way, times have changed, and so has the television landscape. Our episodes may have paved the way for a dialogue around certain issues, but they’re one part of a larger cultural shift in entertainment.

I do believe that networks are willing to listen if you show them the data behind the issue you want to explore. You have to start the conversation and — through multifaceted characters struggling to cope with complex issues — lay the groundwork, even if it’s not the right moment for that particular topic. Television is an extremely powerful tool for influencing people’s understanding of public health, and there are so many great writers out there who are passionate about these issues. If given the opportunity, they can tell stories that will really make a difference.

I’m really proud of the impact that our show has had on certain issues, but I’ve also learned that it can often take a long time for change to happen. Sometimes an issue is too fresh or the audience isn’t ready. I’m happy that ER is streaming on Hulu, and that SVU is in perpetual repeats, so that these shows are seen over and over. They’re great boosters of social issues, and serve to keep the message in people’s minds.

There’s a lot of talk about this being the golden age of television, but I’m not so sure. There may be more violence and nudity, but networks and cable companies are very conservative as they try to retain viewers in a world with endless options for entertainment. There are shows now that are beautiful and are spending huge amounts of money, but in terms of social issues I think there’s so much competition that there’s a fear of offending audiences. Times have changed, and so has the television landscape.

I spoke with family and friends about the health issues addressed on the show. People trust what they see on TV, but you can’t just preach about complicated social issues, and that’s where the art of storytelling comes in. In 2000 we aired an episode of Law & Order: SVU that was inspired by a woman who spoke at a fundraiser for the Joyful Heart Foundation, which was started by SVU star Mariska Hargitay in 2004. The Foundation — which sheds light on issues that affect sexual assault survivors, like the backlog of rape kits — has served more than 15,500 survivors and healing professionals, effected policy changes, and connected more than 3.9 million people to help and resources.

At the fundraiser, we learned that the police had never even collected Love Hewitt’s rape kit. Our episode of SVU starred Jennifer Love Hewitt as a sexual assault survivor who’s afraid to leave her house, and it became an emotional springboard for existing and new survivors to come forward with the backlog of untested kits. Thousands of rape kits have now been processed, leading to investigations, convictions, and the identification of serial rapists via the CODIS and NDIS DNA databases.

After Cheryl Avery (Katherine Lahti) joins detectives Stabler (Mariska Hargitay) and her transgender boyfriend’s brother, is arrested for a DUI, however the detectives find the evidence to put the perpetrator away despite ‘long’ rape kit being improperly handled and even accidentally destroyed. ‘Retracing Family Path’ concludes this SVU episode, where the detectives are able to solve the 15-year-old cold-case crime.

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Miura Kite discusses why television is the best medium when it comes to inspiring social awareness and behavior change around key issues.

Television has an incredible power to inspire social awareness, understanding, and behavior change around key issues.

The best thing for any project is when it joins the public zeitgeist. If press coverage of a show moves past the entertainment section into op-ed and other arenas, it’s a sign that it’s made it into the larger cultural discussion, not just the economic, but also coming back around.

The best thing for any project is when it joins the public zeitgeist. Even when not a hit, if it makes it past the entertainment section into op-ed and other arenas, it’s a sign that it’s made it into the larger cultural discussion, which is helpful not only for the economics, but also in getting the messaging out. However, this is not something that’s easy to engineer. You could try to develop a social impact project based on the big headlines in today’s news, but by the time it makes it to air, you’ll often find the world has moved on. This means you have to try to look into the future to identify the themes that will dominate public discourse a few years from now. As SVP of Television at Participant, I’m responsible for trying to address these considerations when building Participant’s narrative television slate.

Central Park Five
Ava DuVernay is working with Participant Media, Harpo Films, and Tribeca Productions to bring the notorious story of the Central Park jogger case of 1989 to Netflix, for premiere in 2019. Based on a true story that gripped the nation, Central Park Five will chronicle the case of five teenagers of color who were convicted of a rape they did not commit.

The four-episode limited series will focus on the five teenagers from Harlem — Antron McCray, Kevin Richardson, Yusef Salaam, Raymond Santana, and Korey Wise. The series will span from the spring of 1989, when each were first questioned about the incident, to 2014 — when a settlement was reached with the City of New York.

Television has an incredible power to inspire social awareness, understanding, and behavior change around key issues. Every year, Participant produces a wealth of content across a range of formats: narrative film, documentary, digital short form, and episodic television. The process for projects starts with a search for stories that excite and inspire us. We then option the intellectual property in a variety of forms: completed scripts, treatments, novels, existing films, life rights, podcasts, and so on. Participant’s approach means that when we option a piece of intellectual property, we’re not always sure of the form it will ultimately take. This allows projects to migrate from one internal team to another during the development process. If it ends up being narrative television, the project goes on my slate, and I oversee securing the high-level talent to create the pilot.
As an example, Central Park Five was originally meant to be a two-hour film, but swiftly became a limited TV series when filmmaker Ava DuVernay realized she had more than two hours’ worth of material. This kind of flexibility is a wonderful thing. It means that the content can determine the format and ultimately, its impact, rather than vice versa.

Central Park Five really showcases some of the strengths of scripted television as a format. The true story behind the series — the scandal of five young men of color wrongly convicted of rape — had already been the subject of an incredible documentary by Ken and Sarah Burns, which used some amazing archival footage. However, a scripted television version is able to dramatize real events that may not have been captured on film at the time the event actually happened.

Television also allows you to follow more characters and explore more plotlines than a feature film at the time the event actually happened. It means that the content can determine the format and ultimately its impact, rather than vice versa.

Now, networks can aim to hit one audience with a given show, and to hit it really well.

We usually begin assessing the potential social impact of a project as soon as it comes to us. Our social impact team helps us identify the partner organizations whose work can be highlighted during a resulting social impact campaign. Broadly speaking, an impact campaign for a television show could have a longer lifespan than one for a feature film, which has a single launch window.

Central Park Five (unfortunately and sadly) a perfect case study for social impact because systemic issues within the police system, the legal system, the penal system, and the post-incarceration system contributed to a marginalization of the boys at every step along the way. When you pair this limited series with Ava DuVernay’s documentary 13th, you get a pretty good sense of some deep-rooted problems that need to be assessed.

It’s clear that the right type of social impact project can resonate powerfully with audiences. However, we have yet to see how the evolution of today’s various streaming platforms might inform this relationship between viewer and content. What is clear is the impact the rise of this over-the-top (OTT) entertainment is having on viewing habits. A recent study showed that 2.6 million US consumers cut their cable TV subscriptions in the first nine months of 2017, which is a steep increase from the overall figure for the previous year, when 1.7 million consumers did the same. Meanwhile, the audience base for Netflix rose from 130 million to 137 million subscribers worldwide in the third quarter of 2018.

Streaming platforms like Netflix have clear advantages for content creators and consumers alike. Audiences can consume shows whenever they want, and in full if they wish. Meanwhile, the show’s creators are no longer tied to a five-act structure that must accommodate ad breaks. The only minor downside is that this flexibility has sacrificed something of the communal nature of television watching. When all of the episodes of a series of TV are released at the same time, people will watch at their own pace rather than on a set schedule, so there may still be value in staggering the release of episodes. This is more likely to create those “water cooler moments” that an audience will watch and discuss simultaneously, and which can ignite broader discussions of themes and key issues.

The changes the industry is experiencing make it an exciting time to be working in development. Television is embracing voices that are new, distinct and authentic. Networks are realizing that previously underserved audiences have real financial power and are galvanizing themselves to use it. Once, the leading strategy was to try to create content that appealed to all four quadrants — female, male, over 25, under 25. Now, networks can aim to hit one audience with a given show, and to hit it really well. This revised approach to finding audiences has resulted in an increasingly diverse array of content.

While our commitment to social impact entertainment has remained constant, its place within and importance to society and culture has been growing and changing. The world needs TV shows that are created for these underserved demographics, that engage with the biggest issues of our time, and that inspire people to take action. We have never been more committed to making them.
Will & Grace was a seminal television moment. Edward Schiappa explores the impact one show can have on the attitudes and actions of viewers.

**Case Study**

**Will & Grace**

Edward Schiappa
Professor and Head of Comparative Media Studies/Writing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, John E. Burchard Chair of Humanities

The study: can one TV show make a difference?

The prejudice people feel toward minority groups is so often fueled by ignorance. That’s why the relationship a viewer has with characters on television, whether fictional or real, can be a tool for increasing understanding of different groups, even if it’s one-sided. In 2002, as a professor at the University of Minnesota, my team set out to prove that through the power of the kind of indirect contact known as “parasocial interaction,” a TV show like Will & Grace could transform people’s attitudes toward gay men.

Our research is an evolution of an existing psychological theory known as the contact hypothesis. Proven through hundreds of studies, the theory states that one way to reduce prejudice between majority and minority group members is for there to be sustained interpersonal contact between them. However, there are certain conditions that must be met for this contact to be productive, such as ensuring that the participants feel of equal status or that they share a common goal.

We set out to prove that in the case of Will & Grace, despite the characters being fictional, the show provided an opportunity for people who had little or no contact with openly gay men to gain a greater understanding of people in the gay community. When actual contact under the conditions mentioned above is not possible, parasocial contact is often the next best way of getting people to feel an affinity for and to develop a more positive perception of minority group members.

Challenging prejudice with Will & Grace

Airing between 1998 and 2006, the Emmy® Award-winning TV show Will & Grace challenged stereotypes about gay men in its depiction of the friendship between gay lawyer Will Truman and straight interior designer Grace Adler. They were often joined by their gay friend Jack McFarland, a struggling actor, and socialite Karen Walker. Will & Grace was one of the first TV shows to portray openly gay characters in major roles; in fact, only 0.6% of all characters appearing on television in 1995 were gay or lesbian. Today, the percentage of LGBTQ series regulars on broadcast primetime scripted programming is up to an all-time high of 8.8%, according to the 2018 GLAAD report.

There were some early suggestions that Will & Grace actually reinforced heteronormativity. However, these claims were based on a conceptual idea of what the show was rather than on actual interaction with the content and its real impact on viewers. Once researchers talked to audience members and gathered data on how the viewing experience actually influenced people, they found the opposite to be true.

Working with Peter Gregg and Dean Hewes, I launched an empirical investigation while the show was still on air to see whether it (and other shows like it) could reduce prejudice.
The results
It was our feeling that both the quantity and quality of viewing consumption was important in order to change attitudes, and we came up with a hypothesis that had two parts. First, we posited that the more people that watched the show, the lower their reported prejudice toward gay men would be. Second, we suggested that if a viewer reported feeling a sense of affinity with the characters (or “parasocial interaction”) the lower their prejudice would be as well.

Our results proved both parts of this hypothesis. Of those we surveyed, Will & Grace was shown to reduce prejudice toward gay people. When asked if “heterosexual relationships are the only ‘normal’ sexual relationship,” 63% of respondents agreed that the show led to positive perceptions of gay people, and 71% of those surveyed agreed that the show had reduced their prejudice toward gay men.

Also, having two very different gay characters represented by Will and his friend Jack allowed viewers to learn at least something about the diversity of gay men in general, and the more viewers learn, the less likely they are to perpetuate narrow stereotypes based on ignorance.

Reaching the tipping point
Through expert storytelling on complex social issues, entertainment can play an important role in opening people’s minds, but it’s hard to say that it can drive social change by itself. Shows like Will & Grace are always part of a more complicated social and political reality that is influenced by the wider social and political landscape.

However, when it comes to societal attitudes toward gay men, I believe the show did help us past a tipping point of sorts. We found that 81% of those we surveyed agreed that the show was “an important step forward in television sitcoms because it features gay men in major roles.” The sitcom, which ran from 1998 through 2006 and be in reruns for years, presented America with a perspective that was atypical representations of the gay men in major roles.

These results were so strong that we did a series of other studies that were increasingly more sophisticated in their experimental design. The subsequent research provided additional evidence that the more a viewer learns about a particular group of people as depicted in a positive way, in the media, the greater the reduction in prejudice. We published these findings in a paper entitled The Parasocial Contact Hypothesis.

The importance of engaging stories
In order to influence people, positive representation of minority groups needs to be encased within a great story.
The paper described and tested the PCH in three studies: two involving parasocial contact with characters in series depicting gay men — analyzing *Six Feet Under* and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* — and one involving parasocial contact with self-identified transgender comedian Eddie Izzard. 

In all three studies, parasocial contact was associated with lower levels of prejudice. As Schiappa, Gregg and Hewes note: "In all three studies, parasocial contact was associated with lower levels of prejudice. Moreover, tests of the underlying mechanisms of PCH were generally supported, suggesting that parasocial contact facilitates positive parasocial responses and changes in beliefs about the attributes of minority group categories."

Parasocial contact facilitates positive parasocial responses and changes in beliefs. There is now a substantial body of scholarship around the world that attests to the power of positive mediated representation to reduce prejudice toward minority groups. Though obviously not all of these studies are indebted to the The Parasocial Contact Hypothesis, it was one of the first works published that documented this phenomenon.

**Spotlight on:**

The Parasocial Contact Hypothesis

As formulated by Gordon W. Allport in 1954, the contact hypothesis states that interpersonal contact is one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice between people, specifically "minority" and "majority" group members. Two years after Allport’s book, *The Nature of Prejudice*, was published, Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl argued for studying what they dubbed parasocial interaction.

They claimed that "one of the most striking characteristics of the new mass media — radio, television and the movies — is that they give the illusion of face-to-face relationship with the consumer." In Edward Schiappa, Peter B. Gregg and Dean E. Hewes’ follow-up to the *Will & Grace* study (entitled *The Parasocial Contact Hypothesis*) the team described a “mass communication equivalent to Allport’s Contact Hypothesis” that they termed the “Parasocial Contact Hypothesis (PCH).”

It was the trio’s feeling that “if people process mass-mediated communication in a manner similar to interpersonal interaction” as Horton and Wohl suggested, “then the socially beneficial functions of intergroup contact may result from parasocial contact.”
Theater
With a heritage that dates back to ancient Greece in the sixth century BC, theater is undoubtedly the oldest form of social impact entertainment. With its emphasis on live spectacle and a shared physical space between the performer and their audience, theater is notably distinct from the major screen-based forms of SIE.

Social discourse has been an integral element of theater since its inception. Modern dramatists continue to honor this tradition, using performance to explore complex human concerns — from sexual identity to racial and political discrimination.

Theater is always political. Newspapers tell us the facts; plays tell us the emotional truth.

— Paula Vogel
I have always thought of theater as a radical church — a holy space in which we come together to think and feel deeply about the things that really matter to us.

All my working life, artists and audiences have been educating me about the power of this space. I was thrilled when the Skoll Center told me that my play The Vagina Monologues is regarded by them as a model of how art can lead to social change — and it made me think back over what I have learned in the 20 years the play has been occupying that holy space across the world, in spaces from Paris to Pakistan, from Manhattan to Mumbai.

As a playwright I’m biased, but my hunch is that theater is the most transformative of all art forms — for three reasons.

Theater is one of the only forms that’s happening in the present tense. It is literally alive, in front of you, at that moment. Where other art forms like film or novels have been frozen ahead of time, theater will always be unpredictable and unexpected because it depends on the people in that particular room on that particular day. This is true of the actors, of course — but it’s also true of the audience. One audience can be silent at the precise moment when another audience fell into raucous laughter — and that response transforms the performance, which in turn transforms the response of the audience, and so on. Every work of theater is a co-creation with the audience. As an audience member you get to respond to a film; but with a piece of theater, you get to create it, in that room, with those people, in that moment, which will never be repeated in the same way again.

That produces danger and surprise. You don’t know what will happen. Maybe the set will fail to open, and the actors will find themselves stuck in front of gorgeous scenery the

The Vagina Monologues has been translated into more than 48 languages and performed in over 140 countries. Playwright Eve Ensler reflects on the immediacy and importance of political theater.
You need to crawl into the basements and minds of people you don’t agree with so you can allow that point of view to be fairly and clearly communicated. As an author, you fear that what you believe won’t come through if you channel yourself into your characters. I learned you have to trust it will come through. The paradox of art that wants to produce social change is that the less you try to persuade people to change, the more successful you will be — you have to tell a deeper emotional truth, and be funny, and you will find that those connections produce the change you want.

I wrote my play The Vagina Monologues because one day I was speaking to an older feminist I admired and I was startled when she described her procreation of vaginas as “dead,” and spoke of it with real contempt. Realizing that as women, we were taught to be silent about our vaginas, I became interested. So I gathered together in 1993 a few women, and asked them how do I use this play, which is connecting with so many people, to end violence against women and girls, and to set us free? Soon, we had established a group named V-Day. Every 14th of February, women all over the world held readings of the Vagina Monologues, and I met women who were so excited they knew what they wanted to do — and we are in fact facing horrific forces of misogyny rising once again (alongside a new feministic resistance). In dark times, art can move us beyond the binaries of good and evil, left and right. It can offer us new energy and activate our imaginations. It can inspire empathy and a much-needed compassion. It can bond us in community and offer us solidarity and protection. It doesn’t become a luxury that we turn to when we fear that what we believe won’t come through. The paradox of art that wants to produce social change is that the less you try to persuade people to change, the more successful you will be — you have to tell a deeper emotional truth, and be funny, and you will find that those connections produce the change you want.

The Vagina Monologues have been released with each subsequent edition of the book, including 2018’s Out of My Grit, In My Flow. These monologues are sourced from a series of interviews with transgender women.

If you are writing about social issues, your characters can never go back into that silence. They Beat The Boy Out Of My Girl...Or So They Thought. Monologues dedicated to the Second World War. The women who faced sexual violence in the workplace and in their homes. The women who faced sexual violence in the workplace.

I started to feel like the keeper of these extraordinary secret stories — of joy, of grief, of love — and I felt like it was unethical to keep them stored away, inferring only me. So I gathered together in 1993 a few extraordinary women, and asked them: how do I use this play, which is connecting with so many people, to end violence against women and girls, and to set us free? Soon, we had established a group named V-Day. Every 14th of February, women all over the world began to perform The Vagina Monologues in their communities, with the proceeds going to feminist causes.

Art has the power to transform thinking and inspire people to act. Lasting social and cultural changes originate when ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

Local women know what their communities need, and can become articulate leaders.

We must look at the interaction of class, race, environmental catastrophe, gender, imperialism, discrimination, poverty, violence, and war to understand violence against women.

In dark times, art can move us beyond the binaries of good and evil, left and right. It can offer us new energy and activate our imaginations. It can inspire empathy and a much-needed compassion. It can bond us in community and offer us solidarity and protection. It doesn’t become a luxury that we turn to when we fear that what we believe won’t come through.

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V-Day global reach

V-Day events

My first and most important piece of advice is always — don’t take yourself too seriously.
All the World’s a Stage

From Angels in America to Shakespeare in the Park, Oskar Eustis works on the front line of exploring social dynamics through theater. He highlights how empowering the right voice can make a difference.

Oskar Eustis
Artistic Director of The Public Theater and a Tony Award®-winning producer

Notable works:
Fun Home, Hamilton, Sweat

In your 2018 TED Talk you called theater the “essential art form of democracy.” Could you please elaborate on this? What role do you see theater playing in society at large?

There are a couple of aspects to this. One is that the art form itself is a training in democratic citizenship. By that, I mean that it assumes, as a form, that the truth is dialectical: truth is not monolithic or singular but can only emerge in the conflict between different points of view. That’s true about the world, but I think it’s also terribly essential for a democracy: people have to believe that the debate between different points of view will produce a better result than a monolithic imposition of one person’s will or one party’s will.

The other thing that I think is key to theater is that it requires an imaginative leap of empathy. In order to enjoy a piece of theater, you have to put yourself into the story of America. When people laugh together, it’s not simply their personal reactions — it’s a collective response. We don’t have many places in culture where we can feel that sense of sharing a communal experience with people who are not pre-selected to share our ideological beliefs.

We applied for a commissioning grant for Angels in America and got it, and the play ended up going beyond our wildest dreams. It was the first high-level American artistic artifact in which gay people were not only openly gay, completely gay, totally secure in their gay identity, but were also struggling with what it meant in the world. These characters were asking their claim to speak for America itself. They were saying that their experiences were in no way marginalized or reduced because they were gay. Prior Walter is an American everyman, and being gay is central to that identity but in no way limits the size of his identity. I think that is something that the theater does particularly well — to take the experience of people who have previously been marginalized and say no, this is actually central to the story of America.

Tong was a great writer, and that was obvious just from the writing, but he also cared about the same things that I did. Up until that point I had been despairing over whether I’d ever be able to have a life in the American theater where I would be surrounded by people who embraced the kinds of social, political, and historical issues that I cared so passionately about. I was an odd baby and was raised by Communist parents — and most red diaper babies didn’t go into the theater, so I had felt very lonely.

In order to enjoy a piece of theater, you have to put yourself in the shoes of the characters on stage.

We had even opened. The Producers won the 1993 Pulitzer Prize for Drama before its first Broadway performance had even opened.

Tong's plays included Angels in America: Millennium Approaches, a play by Tong-Kushner, and Angels in America: Perestroika. The Producers cast Lin-Manuel Miranda, the play Hamilton, and the play Sweat. In 1985, when Tony was still a student at NYU, I saw a staged reading of one of his very first plays, A Bright Room Called Day. By the intermission, I knew that if my life was about to change. Part of it was reaching that moment in your professional life where you think, this is it, this is the reason I do this: that moment in your professional life where something is about to change. Part of it was reaching that moment in your professional life where something is about to change. Part of it was reaching that moment in your professional life where something is about to change. Part of it was reaching that moment in your professional life where something is about to change.

In 2015, Hamilton, an American Musical in a surge and rap that incorporated hip-hop, R&B, rap, soul, traditional-style show tunes, and conscious writing of non-white action as the Founding Fathers and other historical figures. Hamilton was a hit, and the play ended up going beyond our wildest dreams. It was the first high-level American artistic artifact in which gay people were not only openly gay, completely gay, totally secure in their gay identity, but were also struggling with what it meant in the world. These characters were asking their claim to speak for America itself. They were saying that their experiences were in no way marginalized or reduced because they were gay. Prior Walter is an American everyman, and being gay is central to that identity but in no way limits the size of his identity. I think that is something that the theater does particularly well — to take the experience of people who have previously been marginalized and say no, this is actually central to the story of America.

While working at the Eureka Theater Company you commissioned a groundbreaking work of American theater: Tony Kushner’s Angels in America. What was it like to see in Tony Kushner that made you want to fight in his corner?

In 1985, when Tony was still a student at NYU, I saw a staged reading of one of his very first plays, A Bright Room Called Day. By the intermission, I knew that if my life was about to change. Part of it was reaching that moment in your professional life where you think, this is it, this is the reason I do this: that moment in your professional life where something is about to change. Part of it was reaching that moment in your professional life where something is about to change.

Tong was a great writer, and that was obvious just from the writing, but he also cared about the same things that I did. Up until that point I had been despairing over whether I’d ever be able to have a life in the American theater where I would be surrounded by people who embraced the kinds of social, political, and historical issues that I cared so passionately about. I was a red diaper baby and was raised by Communist parents — and most red diaper babies didn’t go into the theater, so I had felt very lonely.

In order to enjoy a piece of theater, you have to put yourself in the shoes of the characters on stage.
citizens who in many ways were deeply ashamed of what our country had been doing, really for its entire existence — because this beautiful bastion of democracy was built on a legacy of slavery and genocide. Many of us were desperate to feel there is an idea of an America which is fundamentally democratic, fundamentally inclusive, fundamentally meritocratic. Not only by telling the story of Hamilton, but by costing the way he did, Lin managed to unleash that patriotic lust within parts of the audience, and it’s been wonderful to watch that happen.

Could you please tell us about some of the programs you run at The Public Theater, and how they highlight the theater’s philosophy?

Shakespeare in the Park is our gold standard. We’ve been doing it for more than 60 years with Shakespeare in the Park, our gold standard. Shakespeare is the gold standard. Shakespeare in the Park is our gold standard. We’ve been doing it for more than 60 years at The Public Theater (Off-Broadway). Shakespeare in the Park is our gold standard.

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It’s been so powerful and astounding because it’s a completely simple idea. We put on fantastic productions by the world’s greatest writer, you get to see them without paying — and the idea is contained in the title! We almost never have an empty seat at Shakespeare in the Park — we have 2,000 people come out all summer to see these shows. The quality of the productions is very high and people are passionate about them, so you can feel the sense of connectivity in the audience.

The Mobile Unit, which takes Shakespeare to community centers, prisons, and homeless shelters, is the only program we have where the demographics of the audience precisely matches the demographics of New York City. There’s no difference between the populations that see our mobile Shakespeare and those that make up the city, and that’s thrilling for us. There was a lesson from this that we incorporated into our recent mobile, national tour of Lynn Nottage’s Sweat: if you want to make sure you reach people that you wouldn’t normally go to them. Don’t make them come to you; go to where they are.

What advice or key learnings would you pass on to people who are just starting out in the world of theater — particularly those who would like to create social impact through their work?

First, there is not a single play or program I’ve done that has had real impact that didn’t feel impossible when I started thinking about it.

It is almost the definition of something that is going to break ground. Perhaps it’s because it’s never been done before that it seems like it’s not possible, and you have to actually go to school yourself to suppress your own doubts. You must continue to ask questions, to try to solve the problem you think is most worth solving, even if you think it can’t possibly work. Of course, sometimes it doesn’t work, sometimes you can’t do it. But what I’ve found is if you don’t give up, it’s astonishing how much of what seems impossible becomes possible. It just means you have to have your values pretty clear, and you have to be willing to pursue them pretty ferociously.

The second thing is that 95% of the success of my work has been because I have identified people of great ability, talent and vision, and then did everything I could to empower them. In this way you support the artists and visionaries that need that support, but also you support the artists. They are the ones who decide what’s important, what the audience is about, what the work, what you’re supporting, me and Tony, me and Lin-Manuel. The geometric progression of an idea — whether that’s a play, a new program, or a new way of reaching audiences — never happens by you being just that smart and you have figured out how to do it. It happens because you are gathering around you the people with the abilities, the talents, the drive, and the ideas to help make it real.
Theater of the Moment

Dustin Lance Black discusses his use of theater as a means of generating an instant impact and emotional engagement in making the case for marriage equality in the United States.

Dustin Lance Black
Academy Award®-winning filmmaker, writer, and social activist

Notable works:
Milk, 8, When We Rise

Throughout my career, most of the work I’ve created has been for the screen. I decided to use theater to try to make a significant impact on the issue as quickly as possible, because we couldn’t wait around for something to get written, shot, and distributed. We needed to get it out there almost as soon as I’d hit “save” on the final draft, and only theater would let us move at that speed and scale.

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8 tells the story of the plaintiffs as they fought to win marriage equality. As I was one of the four founding members of the American Foundation for Equal Rights (AFER), the organization that brought the case to court in the first place, there was a more urgent need for 8 than anything I’d ever done before. It was written purely to make the case for marriage equality in the United States, making it one of the most impact-focused works of my career.

At the time, most material on the subject of same-sex marriage was presented in pamphlets or on TV. This context simply schooled the subjective views of the people who made it. During the trial, the argument took place in a different arena, with different rules. For the first time in the debate, both sides had to raise their right hands and promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. What happened in that courtroom was incredibly emotional and dramatic; it was hard to sit there and not feel like banning same-sex marriage was inherently wrong. I wanted to use theater to transport people into that courtroom, so that they could feel that way too. The challenge was to do this without the opposition being able to dismiss my version of events. I needed to be able to say: “This is what...”

8-play-youtube_n_1319379.html.

The Huffington Post
Prop. 8 Play Online.”

Lance Black’s Prop-8 Drama To Hit The Airwaves-20120503.

The Los Angeles Times
Brad Pitt Reading of ‘8’ Comes to CD —

Potts, Kimberly. “Dustin Lance Black —

The livestream reading of 8 featuring George Clooney, Brad Pitt, Martin Sheen, Kevin Bacon, Jane Lynch, Kevin Spacey, and Jennifer Garner, directed by Rob Reiner, attracted 200,000 viewers.


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happened in court, and if you don’t believe me, go and check the transcripts.6 So that’s where I started. Every time I got on an airplane I took a binder of court transcripts and just started redacting, cutting things down. The final script that I wrote wasn’t verbatim, otherwise it would have been a three-week-long play, but I still wanted it to be authentic and full of specific detail that would pique the audience’s interest. In short, it would make them feel like they’d sat through the entire trial in 90 minutes.

Emotional engagement is one of the key things that makes theater an effective tool for creating empathy, and through that, impact. People go to the theater to feel things, and at one point in the writing process I realized I needed to make it more personal. So I interviewed the plaintiffs and their kids, and added interstitial scenes where we could meet these characters outside the courtroom. This was essential, because when you really get into the details of how people live their lives under circumstances that are very different from your own, you start to see the light of universality. You start to see humanity.

To maximize our reach, the performance was also streamed live on YouTube and later released as an audiobook.

The Supreme Court’s final ruling was going to affect every state in America, so I wanted it to be performed in as many of them as possible. We knew that the judges didn’t live in bubbles; they read newspapers, watched television shows, and were aware of public opinions, so if there was anything we could do to make this decision simpler for them, it was worth a try.

My friend Richard Socarides — whose father, Charles Socarides, was the psychiatrist who came up with the entire notion that being LGBT was a mental illness — encouraged me to write a show titled Peter Pan, but I didn’t think it would be enough. This project was a way of saying, if we can get the public and the judges to see something about us, we might have a chance.

So the Supreme Court’s final ruling was going to affect every state in America, so I wanted it to be performed in as many of them as possible. We knew that the judges didn’t live in bubbles; they read newspapers, watched television shows, and were aware of public opinions, so if there was anything we could do to make this decision simpler for them, it was worth a try.

No matter which medium I work in, I strive to write stories that will correct the misconceptions we have about people of diversity. It’s my firm belief that if we can clear out all that still divides people today, we can start to see what we have in common instead. This is yet another reason why detail is simply crucial for a good story — because in detail lies authenticity, authenticity cultivates curiosity, and curiosity can help you to build the audience that these works deserve.

Between the show itself and donations from online viewers, the Wilshire Ebell performance raised a further $2 million for our cause.

The show ended up traveling far beyond the US; the last time I checked, the play had also been performed in eight other countries — notably in Australia, where it was recently used in support of another national battle for gay marriage equality. In the end, the most triumphant impact of the show was in the US where we eventually won our battle. The US Supreme Court legalised same-sex marriage in June 2015, making gay marriage a reality across the entire nation.
Reading Between the Lines

Art and activism can go hand-in-hand. Shirley Jo Finney talks about her most impactful projects and explains why now, more than ever, we must learn to trust in art.

People have always learned about themselves through storytelling. What an artist does is study human behavior — our wants, needs, and desires. Since the beginning, humanity has had to understand how to navigate our everyday existence by seeing nature and ourselves within it. I became involved in the Black Arts Movement in the late 60s, while still in college. The nation was in crisis and the civil rights movement was exploding, pulling the scab off the historical wound of systemic racism in this country. The artists of the time were fearlessly telling our narratives with a sense of urgency. Black theater companies emerged throughout the country. It was a time of reclamation, of breaking from Western storytelling. They reintroduced ritual improvisational storytelling, embracing the diaspora and ancestral spirituality that is unique to the African American experience.

Facing Our Truth

In response to the George Zimmerman verdict, The New Black Fest commissioned the following six plays about Trayvon Martin, race and privilege:

- Colored by Winter Miller
- Night Vision by Dominique Morisseau
- Drowning by Nia More Mosace and Tal Manassah
- No More Monsters Here by Monica Groffley
- Some Other Kid by A. Rey Pamatmat
- The Ballad of George Zimmerman by Dan O’Brien and Quetzal Flores

Facing Our Truth: Ten Minute Plays on Trayvon, Race and Privilege.
The Movement and the stories being produced were transformative, daring, and political. It made audiences aware and uncomfortable. It was theater and art-as-activism. I call it “edutainment” — where the audience is being educated and entertained.

Nelson and Winnie Mandela believed the artists of South Africa helped to dismantle and expose apartheid to the world. We are witnessing another artistic revolution which is addressing the political unrest of our day. Once again, the artists of our time are answering the call for what is right and just.

Trayvon Martin’s assassination was a moment that tore and broke through our psyche. For my generation it was seeing the Vietnam War, the assassinations of leaders, and pictures of Emmett Till on television; for this generation it’s Trayvon Martin. In New York City, in early 2015, Keith Josef Adkins brought six writers together to express the rage and frustration of people following the George Zimmerman verdict. Facing Our Truth — a series of six, 10-minute plays — captured their reaction to Martin’s assassination and many others of the black male body. The plays became part of the national conversation on race and privilege. Theaters across the country took up the call, producing the play in different venues. I directed the Los Angeles production for the Center Theater Group at the Kirk Douglas Theater. We held public talks and conversations after the performance — to give voice to their emotions. They needed an opportunity to express that in the room. That means feeling safe enough to dig into your own experience — that’s the challenge. My way of working is totally organic. I never want my actors to act; I want them to identify what they’re feeling and then express that in the room. That means feeling safe enough to dig into your own experience — that’s the challenge. My way of working is totally organic. I never want my actors to act; I want them to identify what they’re feeling and then express that in the room. That means feeling safe enough to dig into your own experience — that’s the challenge.

Claudia Rankine’s Citizen: An American Lyric is told through a variety of perspectives, and by narrators seeing themselves in the shared experience of systemic racism. It can make privileged audiences uncomfortable, but it’s important that those audiences see how they interfere with our lives. For the audience member of color, they find it cathartic to have the moments they have kept to themselves out in the open. It is language that pulls moments into reality. This show, like Facing Our Truth, demanded an audience talkback. The audience needed an opportunity to have a conversation about what they had just experienced. The audience needed an opportunity to give voice to their emotions.

Claudia wrote Citizen for white, middle and upper-class privileged people to examine everyday microaggressions towards black people. Citizen is told through a variety of perspectives, and by narrators seeing themselves in the shared experience of systemic racism. It can make privileged audiences uncomfortable, but it’s important that those audiences see how they interfere with our lives. For the audience member of color, they find it cathartic to have the moments they have kept to themselves out in the open. It is language that pulls moments into reality. This show, like Facing Our Truth, demanded an audience talkback. The audience needed an opportunity to give voice to their emotions. They needed to have a conversation about what they had just experienced.

Adaptation of Claudia Rankine’s Citizen: An American Lyric — a multiple award-winner, Sachs wrote the stage adaptation of Claudia Rankine’s Citizen: An American Lyric, the winner of the 2016 Stage Raw Award for Best Stage Adaptation, put on by The Fountain Theatre and Kirk Douglas Theatre in Los Angeles and PURE Theatre in South Carolina.

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At one point, the show traveled to Charleston, South Carolina. The theater was just around the corner from the church where Dylann Roof murdered nine black parishioners. I was walking in newly dug up soil; the community and the actors had suffered that experience just a year before my arrival. It was as emotionally raw as working with the USC students. In the post-show talkbacks, the first question I asked was not “What did you think?” but “How did you feel?”

Two years later, I directed another production of Facing Our Truth with students at the University of Southern California. Several more shootings had happened in the intervening period. The students were 18 to 22 years old — the same age as many of those murdered. There was a tangible reaction in the rehearsal hall. The sound was raw and immediate. It was important for them to have a place, through story, in which to channel their emotions and feel empowerment. I recalled my passion and how I felt so many years ago, and how that drove me to actively participate in a movement.

When directing social impact theater, it is important to create a safe space. Most of the time the work that is being performed is immediate and living — it’s personal. I never want my actors to act; I want them to identify what they’re feeling and then express that in the room. That means feeling safe enough to dig into your own experience — that’s the challenge. My way of working is totally organic. I leave the intellectual meaning to the writers; my challenge. My way of working is totally organic. I never want my actors to act; I want them to identify what they’re feeling and then express that in the room. That means feeling safe enough to dig into your own experience — that’s the challenge.

In every era, theater has had a social and emotional impact on people. Artists have a responsibility as storytellers to research the culture, politics, and music around their stories because they can affect the energy and temperament of the people. You also need to trust your work. Trust yourself, your impulses, trust your feelings, then trust those working around you. Even now, I’m still learning to trust my art.

The audience needed an opportunity to give voice to their emotions.
Digital short form doesn’t need to fit into a traditional slot or platform, and that’s one of its greatest strengths.

— Dannie Saunier

Over the past two decades, technological progress — and the arrival of the Internet in particular — has given rise to a wide array of new entertainment forms. These have been seized upon by social impact artists, over keen to find new ways to tell stories that drive essential change.

While there are many of these emerging forms of SIE, our inaugural report focuses on two of the most exciting examples: virtual reality (VR) and digital short form.
Creating Soulful Content

Shabnam Mogharabi
General Manager of SoulPancake

Notable works:
Kid President, My Last Days

We are bombarded with a dizzying amount of information every single day. The average American spends 35–45 minutes per day on Facebook; 500 million tweets are sent every 24 hours, and 300 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute. At the same time, our attention spans are shrinking — a study by Microsoft found that our average attention spans had dropped from 12 seconds in 2000 to 8 seconds in 2015. That’s one second less than a goldfish. So it makes sense that our consumption habits have evolved to favor short-form and social content. Social platforms cater to our shrinking attention spans, and short-form content allows us to maximize the time we are spending on entertainment. Short-form content takes advantage of the five, 10 or 20-minute “micropockets” of time that we now program our days with.

For Shabnam Mogharabi and Rainn Wilson, the future of all content is in digital short form. The question is, how do we give that content purpose, meaning and soul?

Rainn Wilson
Actor, writer, co-founder of SoulPancake and Haiti-based educational initiative Gide

Notable works:
The Office, Kid President

In 2008, when my friends and I began talking about the idea that would eventually become SoulPancake, there was very little positive content on the web.

And it was there that we found our first big hit and really homed in on our voice.

But does this type of content work to communicate a social impact message? I believe it does, and I have a theory why. If you’re familiar with Abraham Maslow’s “hierarchy of needs,” from your psychology class, humans must progress through five stages of needs, each being fulfilled.

The real potential in this medium lies in giving youth hope: hope that they matter, hope that they can make a difference. This young, tapped-in, influential audience has the potential to change the world, but they don’t want content that lectures them. They want to be inspired and to find their own path towards change. They want content that compounds their voices in the heart and the gut. And content creators? We have the biggest responsibility here. As the world becomes more fractured and perilous, it’s up to content creators to tell the stories that move us forward as a species on our sacred planet. I hope that SoulPancake can continue to serve the world by making content that ignites a fire toward positive change.

Microsoft Attention Span Study

Addictive technology behaviors are evident, particulary for younger Canadians. A 2013 survey asked participants how often they use their phones to find some entertainment. This content is often immediately shareable, unlike traditional television and film, so it can reach huge audiences in a short amount of time — something that was unthinkable 10 years ago.

Consumers are looking to use the Internet to find a sense of meaning, purpose, and identity.

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The State of SIE

Maslow, A.H. “A Theory of Human Motivation.” Psychology Review 1943, pp. 370-396, psychclassics.yorku.ca/Maslow/motivation.htm. This is where I see SoulPancake and our parent company, Participant Media, fitting in. As storytellers, it’s our job to help people find a common sense of purpose and meaning. This doesn’t always mean direct social action; this is where I see SoulPancake and our parent company, Participant Media, fitting in. As storytellers, it’s our job to help people find a common sense of purpose and meaning. This doesn’t always mean direct social action; it can infect an audience, not focusing on getting a viral hit. That way, if and when you do have an organic breakthrough hit, you can capitalize on the momentum of that one video by having a library of content for viewers to engage with that helps sustain views and engagement during the inevitable post-viral drop.

After its viral success, we continued to focus most of Kid President’s weekly videos on being entertaining, inspiring, and meaningful. Only two or three times a year we would ask viewers to engage at a more significant level. For example, the annual Socktober campaign — which aimed to prove that even the smallest acts of kindness, like donating a pair of socks, can make a difference in the lives of the homeless — was a prime example of using these asks sparingly, but to great effect. Over time, something fascinating happened: our viewers started asking Kid President for more ideas on how else they could make a difference. These viewers — SoulPancake’s target audience — epitomize what I like to call the optimistic millennial and the altruistic Gen Zer. These generations believe that humans are generally good, there is hope for the future, and they have the power to make a difference. A big part of that is by using their dollars as consumers to show what they stand for. Given the choice between brands, millennials and Gen Zers will often opt for the brand that stands for something. In fact, a recent study by Cone Communications suggested that 89% of Gen Zers would rather buy from a company that’s addressing social or environmental issues over one that is not.

In early 2018, Larry Fini, chairman of BlackRock, the world’s largest asset manager, sent a letter to the CEOs of the company’s holdings. In it, he explained that it was essential for businesses to have a social purpose, or else risk losing consumers and the support of BlackRock. This was a clear signifier that even Wall Street is starting to pay attention to the demand for social responsibility and consequential impact, and if that is happening, then it’s a trend everyone needs to start embracing.

The next generation, powered by social networks, mobile technology, and the drive to find meaning, will change the way the world works, and for the better. Ignoring that will be an obstacle to progress and success. The change is already happening; it’s just up to us to engage with this new culture.

Kid President began when 11-year-old Robby Novak and his brother-in-law Bo Burnham started posting their videos online. The videos cover a range of topics but all center around the simple premise that the world can be more perfect, and that all kids deserve to be heard. Since its inception, Kid President videos have included notable guests — such as President Obama and Beyoncé — and garnered more than 100 million views. As of the end of 2018, SoulPancake had been releasing the Kid President videos once a week for six months prior to their “Pep Talk” video that has now garnered more than 43 million views in less than one week. Kid President certainly had a viral moment, but because of the deep vault of content already in place, it wasn’t a one-off sensation.

SoulPancake’s target audience epitomize what I like to call the optimistic millennial and the altruistic Gen Zer. These generations believe that humans are generally good, there is hope for the future, and they have the power to make a difference. A big part of that is by using their dollars as consumers to show what they stand for. Given the choice between brands, millennials and Gen Zers will often opt for the brand that stands for something. In fact, a recent study by Cone Communications suggested that 89% of Gen Zers would rather buy from a company that’s addressing social or environmental issues over one that is not.

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The next generation, powered by social networks, mobile technology, and the drive to find meaning, will change the way the world works, and for the better. Ignoring that will be an obstacle to progress and success. The change is already happening; it’s just up to us to engage with this new culture.
Storytelling can drive public awareness of big issues in a way that conventional philanthropy can’t match.

The emotional bond generated from compelling content, partnered with information that empowers people to do something about it, is the key to real, positive change. Our mission at Vulcan Productions is centered around five pillars — technology, data, policy change, philanthropy, and storytelling — and how these tools help us to create content that builds awareness and drives engagement. The work we do ranges from production to campaigns and outreach, but all of it aims to generate impact through information-rich storytelling.

Two of our most successful digital short-form projects are We The Economy and its follow-up, We The Voters. Both aimed to de-mystify big, thorny issues of a lot of people remain uninformed about throughout their lives. We The Economy arose from shocking insights gathered on how the average American struggles to understand the fundamentals of the country’s economy. We commissioned 23 digital short films with a totally uncommercial agenda, allowing 20 directors to produce content that explained an economic topic they felt needed unraveling — such as how the global trade system works, or why healthcare is so expensive. The creative freedom we gave them meant that the films took all shapes and forms: documentary, narrative, and even ones that is told through dance! We partnered with more than 70 distributors online and with landmarks Theatres across the country — all of which resulted in 18 million views across various platforms.

We wanted to reach younger voters and those harder-to-reach, traditionally disengaged groups.

With We The Voters, the impetus was instead the imminent 2016 US presidential election. We were discovering, as with the economy, a lot of Americans were trying to make sense of the political system and voting process. Again, we commissioned 20 films — about topics like student debt, lobbying, and immigration — to break down the issues and inform diverse audiences. We wanted to reach younger voters and those harder-to-reach, traditionally disengaged groups, so we chose our platforms based on targeted demographics. We also partnered with PBS Learning and 10 national educational organizations where our content was used by 2 million teachers, with 13,000 downloads of our films.

The films continued to provide fact-based, non-partisan information to help well-informed discussions of issues brought up during Trump’s presidency.

Carole Tomko explains how digital short form has become this generation’s go-to format, and why, when tackling the big issues, the shorter the better.
accompanying curriculum. The films alone had 20 million views — with the social media campaign, generating a staggering 13 million views immediately after the release, as people were trying to work out what the heck had just happened.

Digital short form corresponds neatly to the technological and generational shifts we’re seeing in how we consume media. Quick to produce and quick to consume, digital short form corresponds neatly to the technological and generational shifts we’re seeing in how we consume media. A lesson we learned between We The Economy and We The Voters was that viewers wanted even shorter content, so while We The Economy films were 5–8 minutes, We The Voters films were 3–5 minutes. Digital short form doesn’t need to fit into a traditional slot or platform, and that’s one of its greatest strengths — it’s always the right size for what you want to convey, and using it with social media means you can micro-target audiences. Not only will this allow you to reach people who wouldn’t normally see a documentary, but audiences feel like it’s a consumable and entertaining nugget versus a more mission-driven documentary. Additionally, the agility you get with online streaming means you can test different themes of change in a responsive, immediate way. The only downside of the medium is it’s hard to track actual behavior change or overall impact beyond views, likes and shares. That’s still a challenge to be tackled and one the greater SIE space faces as well.

A more sustained example of what Vulcan Productions does is the short-form content that was commissioned in concert with the release of the documentary Racing Extinction, which Discovery Channel premiered worldwide within a 24-hour window. The feature premiered in December 2015, but Vulcan’s social impact work continued long after with a campaign featuring additional short films to help grow the community of advocates. We also created a website that is regularly refreshed with content, and we launched a public challenge and campaigned for policy change. We partnered with more than 75 NGOs to drive viewership, petitions, and support for bills. We even partnered with the Vatican and the Vatican’s environmental initiatives. We were able to drive video views and a social media campaign, and deliver impactful results. All this generated 24 million views of the short-form videos associated with the project. It has driven 1.3 million unique visitors to the website, and reached people in 195 countries. The responsiveness and ease of production you get with digital short form allows you to really extend a project’s life. We haven’t even finished with the Racing Extinction campaign yet and our community of activists is at 400,000 and growing. Those kinds of numbers are a real thrill.

We’ve learned a lot by working in digital short form over the past five years. Habits are changing and so are mindsets; 30 minutes used to be considered short form, now it’s more like seven or less. Beyond this, it’s increasingly apparent that millennials are loyal to program styles and brands they believe in rather than specific broadcasters, and that demographic is one of the biggest consumers of media. So, if I were to give one piece of advice, it would be this: to find your targeted audience and drive impact you need to diversify your content, your platforms, and produce content that is both entertaining and delivers a strong takeaway.

Racing Extinction winners

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<th>Award</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cinema for Peace Awards</td>
<td>Best Feature Documentary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academy Awards®</td>
<td>Best Documentary (Short Subject)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emerald Awards</td>
<td>Feature Film for Sustainability</td>
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Racing Extinction awards

1. Award for Sustainability
2. Award for Wisdom
3. Award for Courage

Racing Extinction and #StartWith1Thing

The #StartWith1Thing campaign launched in support of Discovery Channels’ debut of Racing Extinction. The #StartWith1Thing pledge simple lifestyle changes that can add up to big benefits for endangered species, the environment and humankind itself.

Discovery leveraged its additional platforms, including custom-branded content, digital social media, virtual reality and Discovery Education, along with its partners to ignite curiosity and global action. People can take the four areas illustrated here.

- Fight wildlife trafficking
- Reduce carbon emissions
- Support green oceans
- Eat less meat
Imagine that you are walking down the street when you see somebody hit by a car. You could go home and describe your experience, you might even be able to show photographs or a video of the aftermath — but nothing would do justice to the visceral experience of having been there on the scene. Virtual reality (VR) is the closest we can get to communicating an exact sense of being physically present at an event.

This is why as a research fellow at USC in 2010 I wanted to apply the VR medium to social impact stories. I’ve always been driven by a desire to connect people to these topics: I’ve worked as a Newsweek correspondent and created documentaries such as the HBO investigation Death on the Job. But a two-dimensional screen can be distancing. Concerns like poverty or war can fail to resonate or feel relevant when we see them as flat images on the news, as if these things are somehow separated from our day-to-day lives.

For people to feel empathy about a specific story, they need a sense of “being there.” They need to understand what a situation feels like to connect with the issue. VR is the perfect tool to create this sensation and, by extension, to create social impact. That’s why I decided to use VR to change public perception around the issue of food insecurity, wherein poverty deprives people of adequate access to food.

Hunger in Los Angeles recreates an actual scene using real audio in which a man collapses into a diabetic coma while waiting in line at a food bank in California. The viewer is placed on the street when he is hit by a car.

Nonny de la Peña discusses the promising present and bright future of virtual reality, and why it’s the perfect medium for creating social impact.
Street when the diabetic man falls to the floor and starts to convulse, while other on the scene stand around helplessly waiting for paramedics to arrive. The experience, which launched in 2012, was the first VR piece to be featured at the Sundance Film Festival, and ultimately helped to set the vernacular for the space, coining the term "immersive journalism." It went on to inspire directors and artists like Chris Milk, Adrian Grenier, and Alejandro González Iñárritu, the latter of whom in 2012, was the first VR piece to be featured at the festival. We have seen many users become so immersed in the experience of Hunger in Los Angeles that they actually crutch down to try to help the fallen man.

The empathetic power of VR goes beyond the anecdotal, as evidenced by a 2018 study by Johanna Blakely’s team at the Norman Lear Center. The Lear Center studied participants’ reactions to After Solitary, a VR piece created in partnership with the documentary series FRONTLINE that takes users inside a solitary confinement cell. Ex-prisoner Fanning says with you, explaining exactly how the experience drove him insane. Walking around the cell yourself, you get a physical sense of the claustrophobia; the impact of those four walls is felt mentally. The study proved that participants felt both transportation (the feeling of being absorbed into a story) and spatial presence (the sense that they could carry out actions in the virtual environment). Furthermore, the vast majority of respondents said they were “likely” to seek out further reporting on the issues of prison conditions and solitary confinement. It’s important to note that VR isn’t just about communicating on an existing, finished story — it can contribute to or even change a narrative that’s still unfolding. For example, my piece One Dark Night brought new evidence to light in the case of the shooting of Trayvon Martin. Here we used architectural recreations of the surroundings and recordings from the actual funeral call to put people in the immediate vicinity of the crime, moments before the shooting. During the creative process, I took these recordings to a forensic audio specialist who worked on sound. After re-creating the audio, the specialist said he would testify that George Zimmerman covered his gun as he got out his car. It turned the VR piece into a breaking news story.

VR isn’t just about narrative development, either. The technology of the medium is also constantly evolving, and we’re helped to create some real breakthroughs. We created code for Google VR and The Wall Street Journal that enabled a live feed of the stock market to be explored in both a virtual environment and in augmented reality. Despite this, it’s an ongoing struggle to secure investment. As a woman, I’d say it’s the biggest challenge I face. For example, in 2017, $858 billion was invested by venture capitalists. All-female teams received just $1.9 billion of that money, 2.2% of the total pot. Meanwhile, all-male teams received roughly 79% or $65.9 billion.

Soon you’ll be able to experience VR on your personal device wherever you are.

Funding challenges have forced me to work on shoestring budgets — I’ve even had to finance some of my own projects myself. And VR isn’t a cheap medium to be working with! The setup costs are huge, particularly as you have to create dedicated, freeway-like environments in order for people to view your work. This also limits how widely your content can be distributed and how many people can be impacted by the stories you’re telling.

Another challenge is that right now, 2D video is the only way to promote your work. Needless to say, this hardly represents what the experience is like when you’re there and how it engages the whole body. You lose the essence of that making an impact so effective, which is beyond frustrating!

Thankfully, I think many of these challenges will dissipate once our phones and headsets are merged. We’re getting closer to this happening due to advancements in technologies like edge computing and 5G mobile Internet. Soon we will enable us to create more seamless experiences for less and allow for much wider distribution. At that point there’ll be no need for the “fairground” spaces — you’ll be able to experience VR on your personal device wherever you are. We’re also making great progress towards making volumetric experiences accessible through web browsers in a platform we are calling BEACH, and we’ve been making simple tools to not only eliminate our reliance on 2D video for promotion, but to open the space for everyone.

VR is becoming ever more mainstream. The number of consumers using VR increased from 1.6 million to 14 million worldwide between 2015 and 2016, while startups raised $3 billion in investments in 2017 across 28 AR and VR categories, breaking previous records. In short, it’s inevitable that our digital world is going to “go spatial.” There’s no reason for Center VR to not be considered simply another tool in our internet toolbox when our real surroundings are dimensionless. It’s a no-brainer that this change will happen, and it does the opportunities for engaging social impact content will increase dramatically.

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**How can Virtual Reality be used in journalism?**

Virtual reality is a tool that can be used to immerse the audience in a story, allowing them to experience it as if they were actually there. This can be particularly effective in reporting on sensitive or emotionally charged topics, as it allows the audience to connect with the story on a deeper level.

**What are some of the challenges facing virtual reality in journalism?**

One of the main challenges is the cost of creating and distributing virtual reality experiences. This can be particularly prohibitive for journalists and news organizations, which may not have the resources to invest in high-end virtual reality equipment or to create and maintain complex virtual environments.

Another challenge is the limited distribution of virtual reality content. While virtual reality has the potential to create a sense of immersion and empathy for the audience, it can be difficult to reach a wide audience due to the limited number of devices and platforms that support virtual reality.

Despite these challenges, virtual reality has the potential to revolutionize journalism by providing a new way to tell stories and engage with audiences. As virtual reality technology continues to evolve, it is likely that we will see more and more journalists using this tool to create compelling and immersive stories.
Content creation is an integral part of SIE. But in order to fully understand this space, it’s vital that we also look to broader points of discussion.

In this section we explore three notable trends in the entertainment industry: the effective use of SIE by international change organizations; the increasing value and importance of social impact campaigns; and Hollywood’s ongoing efforts to improve diversity and inclusion.

Gestures toward diversity just won’t cut it. We need diverse creatives who have the sensitivity and perspective to produce the type of content that audiences are increasingly demanding.

— Dr. Darnell Hunt & Dr. Ana-Christina Ramón, p144

"A total of 4,583 speaking characters were assessed for gender across the 100 top fictional films of 2016. A full 68.6% were male and 31.4% were female, which means viewers will see 2.18 males for every 1 female character on screen. The prevalence of female-speaking characters has not changed meaningfully across the 9 years evaluated. The difference between 2007 and 2016 is only 1.5%!"


Read online at thestateofsie.com
Participant Media understands the power of content. Chief Impact Officer Holly Gordon tells us how storytelling can spark the inner activist.

As Chief Impact Officer at Participant Media, I lead the team that develops the social impact campaigns that are launched alongside our film projects.

In simple terms, my job is to use our content to make a difference — to help it become a catalytic tool for leaders working to address key social issues around the world. The overarching vision for our work is set by Participant’s founder, Jeff Skoll: we strive to create a more sustainable world of peace and prosperity.

Social impact producing, the work of driving impact through content, is experiencing a moment of growth and transformation. As the world shifts to new structures of power, accelerated by the digital revolution we are experiencing across society, content and storytelling have a new potency as a tool for change. I am passionate about the opportunity that exists today to harness that storytelling to make a difference in the world. There has been a lot written about how an increasingly connected world is impacting society, and one book I love is New Power, written by Jeremy Heimans and Henry Timms. Whereas old power is hierarchical, structured, and formalized, like a traditional company, new power is open, flexible, and informal in its distribution. While old power delivers a product from the top down, new power asks for enrollment and participation in engaging with a product or an idea, building support from the bottom up.

Content is an incredible new power tool. At Participant, we build our social impact campaigns from this fundamental perspective — we are creating frameworks for open, networked collaboration amongst people who share a vision or values that are in alignment with the stories we tell. We endeavor to build “armies” of support for ideas whose time has come, and to use art to galvanize activism around the opportunities and pathways for those citizen-leaders to step into the arena and experience the transformational power of personal “agency.” The more people our films reach, the greater the opportunity for impact.

It is worth noting that a consistent theme across Participant’s films is that of leadership. All of our films tell stories of everyday citizens who stand up to speak truth to power. These heroes and heroines provide visible role models for audiences of what it looks like to lead change. Every great advancement in society begins with a leader, a story, and an engaged audience. This is a belief that is at the center of Participant’s core theory of change.

At Participant, we apply a social impact lens to every project we consider. Before a film is given the green light, we ask ourselves a set of questions which include the scale of an issue, the opportunities and pathways for those citizen-leaders to step into the arena and experience the transformational power of personal “agency.” The more people our films reach, the greater the opportunity for impact.

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How to turn audiences into activists: five lessons in social engagement from Participant Media

1. Become a hub for the existing social action community and super-fans.
2. Give people tools to act locally.
3. Provide incentive for action.
4. Create content around the content.
5. Let the message take on a life of its own.
the film tackles, the timeliness of whatever issue the film focuses on, and the clarity of the film’s message. We consider whether the message is a targeted or more of a diffuse idea.

We seek to understand the issue context and history, and to identify opportunities for change.

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Once the film is greenlit, we assign a social impact team to the project. Each campaign starts with what we call a listening tour during which we reach out to leaders and organizations who are working to solve the challenges our film is addressing. During this period of learning, we seek to understand the issue context and history, and to identify opportunities for change. Our goal, in every case, is to be of service to the leaders and organizations who have dedicated their life’s work to making progress. In contrast to these life-long advocates, our timeline is usually short and so it is important that we recognize, and plan for, our finite, but potentially powerful, contribution to accelerating change. As a result of this consultative process, and in partnership with issue leaders, we compose a framework that describes the impact opportunity and describes a theory of change for that particular film.

I am often asked whether there is a specific audience for impact work, and the answer is yes. At Participant, we focus on reaching a particular subset of a film’s general audience, a group I call “super-fans.” These are most often activists or leaders who are already engaged in the change that the film speaks to, and for whom professionally created content, that supports their vision for change, is an invaluable tool. Our job is to help these super-fans find innovative and powerful ways to use our content to engage with their own audiences, at a local, regional, or national level.

As a social impact entertainment producer, you’re most likely not a “resident” of the space affected by the issue you’re exploring. For this reason, it’s essential to approach every partnership from a place of humility, curiosity, and learning. You’re trying to build trust with folks who have been in this space before you — and who are going to be there a long time after your campaign is done. In short, you are an invited guest to someone else’s revolution, so it’s important to listen carefully and see what you can provide to help capture hearts and minds for social good.


© Participant Media and respective production studios and distributors

On the Basis of Sex, 2018

New Power values

Informal, opt-in decision making; self-organization; networked governance

Open-source collaboration, crowd wisdom, sharing

Radical transparency

Do-it-ourselves, “maker culture”

Short-term, conditional affiliation; more overall participation

1. Old power works like a currency. It is held by few. Once gained, it is jealously guarded, and the powerful have a substantial store of it to spend. It is closed, inaccessible, and leader-driven. It downloads, and it captures.

New power operates differently, like a current. It is made by many. It is open, participatory, and peer-driven. It uploads, and it distributes. Like water or electricity, it’s most forceful when it surges. The goal with new power is not to hoard it but to channel it.

Fortune Favors the Prepared

What’s the secret behind a successful social impact campaign? For Bonnie Abaunza it’s all about collaborating with the right partners and — perhaps more importantly — giving yourself enough time to do so.

Storytelling has the power to mobilize people around the world to affect positive change.

Collaboration is vital right from the beginning. First, you have to define the issue that you want to highlight to the public and then create specific initiatives that will help individuals take action. It’s critically important in any social impact campaign to define those initiatives, metrics and goals in partnership with the people doing the work on the ground, on the policy side, and in agencies and governments who have the power to effect change.

Bonnie Abaunza
Founder of the Abaunza Group

It’s important to give social impact campaigns a long runway.

Storytelling has the power to effect change. And in agencies and governments who work on the ground, on the policy side, partnership with the people doing the initiatives, metrics and goals in any social impact campaign to define time to define your impact goals and come up with a plan of action for how to achieve them.

You also need to address the naysayers or the people who are on the fence in order to bring them over to your side to take action. In doing so, you have to take into account the fact that some people are going to question you or point to competing arguments. You need to be prepared for this, and with the right partners, you will be.

Building a strong coalition behind a movie takes time, partly because securing NGO support requires many levels of approval before sign-off to support a film. This is one reason why it’s important to give social impact campaigns a long runway. If you truly want to make an impact, a minimum of four months lead-time before the movie is released is what I would recommend — but eight months to a year is preferable so that conversations can start even during the production of the film. This allows the impact producer to see the film far enough in advance to start coordinating effectively, and for NGOs to harness their networks of influencers, press contacts and begin to mobilize their members. Plus it gives you time to define your impact goals and come up with a plan of action for how to achieve them.

Some distributors are often reluctant to allow that much time for social impact campaigns because they are concerned about “politicizing” a film that is not necessarily political in nature. They need to understand that the public is engaged and interested in the issues raised in the movie, and that it’s not fair or feasible to only allow a short window of, say, four weeks to raise awareness of the film and then mobilize people before a film’s theatrical release. If you’re able to work with ample lead-time, you’ll be able to make the most of your partnerships.

For example, during my tenure at Amnesty International as Director of the Arts for Amnesty Program, I worked on Terry George’s 2004 drama Hotel Rwanda. One of the most strategic decisions that the studio MGM-UA made was to engage Amnesty International eight months before the theatrical release of the film. As a result, we were able to build a campaign for a film about the Rwandan genocide that was, somewhat counter-intuitively, released during the Christmas holiday.

Social impact campaigns can create value long past the film’s theatrical life.

With time on our side, we were able to work closely with the MGM-UA marketing team on a joint campaign that targeted people within and beyond the activist and human rights networks. We promoted the story as one of a heroic man trying to save his family and community, as well as a film about the Rwandan genocide. With the engagement of Amnesty staff, including the organization’s directors of Africa Advocacy, Human Rights Education, Membership Mobilization, Social Media and Communications, we were able to come up with a really effective, multi-tiered marketing campaign that appealed to a wider demographic.

In terms of budget, a social impact campaign for a studio feature film can cost between $300,000 and $500,000 (depending on number of initiatives, events and whether the impact campaign has a domestic and/or international focus). Documentaries and indies will cost less, perhaps between $150,000, and $150,000. When the filmmakers are negotiating these deals with potential distributors, they should consider the fact that these campaigns can bring many additional benefits to a film’s release. When you have a strong social impact campaign in place, you can — in addition to affecting the issue — activate new audiences, new press opportunities, and create social media buzz for the film. These campaigns can also create value long past the film’s theatrical life. They can continue to increase DVD sales, drive viewers onto streaming platforms and raise viewership on cable.
The long lifespan of these films can allow them to become part of the fabric of society. Take Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering’s documentary The Hunting Ground, for example, which brought the issue of sexual assaults on college campuses into the national spotlight.

One of the film’s social impact campaign partners was the It’s On Us Campaign, which was created by President Barack Obama’s administration to raise awareness about sexual assault and to encourage students to stand up for their peers and take action if they witness assault.

We then had to come up with concrete ways to effectively mobilize the public.

We first had to come up with ways to effectively engage audiences around this incredibly complex issue of conflict diamonds, having Amnesty International and Global Witness on board — both experts on the issues of war zones to finance conflicts. For our campaign, Warner Bros. and director Ed Zwick worked closely with Global Witness to finance the conflict-diamond campaign.

The film was produced — proved essential. The Hunting Ground was the #1 movie at theaters, for example, which brought the issue of sexual assaults on college campuses into the national spotlight.

We created a downloadable, easy-to-use guide — and most importantly, we had a very powerful music video. With our experts, we were able to effectively engage in a very public battle that ensued over the film.

To this day, people continue to ask jewelers whether the diamonds they are buying are conflict-free. Beyond educating consumers, we also needed to challenge the romantic imagery perpetuated by the phrase “diamonds are forever.” So we decided to fight symbolism with symbolism. Looking back, we were ready to go to battle with this campaign because we had such confidence in the cause, in our film, and in our partners. Our grassroots campaign became a juggernaut against goliaths with millions of dollars at their disposal. We fought a good fight, and I like to think we won.

When the movie was nominated for five Academy Awards®, we decided to drive our message home on the red carpet. We created a special pin for people to wear on Oscar® night and gave them to the Blood Diamond cast as well as other celebrity activists. It received huge press attention and helped combat the established narrative.

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A degree of positive change is evident in the fact that there are now more people of color working in front of the camera and in television. This is partly because the number of original scripted shows has exploded with so many different platforms creating original content. While previously there were only so many jobs available, the increased demand for content has forced executives to consider new talent.

The industry is losing out on profit opportunities by failing to produce content that aligns with what people want.

The same white male creatives can’t make everything. In this respect, these new platforms have opened up opportunities for diverse and unique voices.

The title of our most recent report sums up where we are now: Five Years of Progress and Missed Opportunities. Despite the minor improvements, the industry is losing out on profit opportunities by failing to produce content that aligns with what people want. Audiences are becoming more diverse every year. In the US, people of color bought the majority of the tickets for half of the top 10 highest-grossing films in 2016.

Of course, the business argument isn’t the only reason why Hollywood should diversify. There’s a considerable amount of research showing the impact images have on people’s identities and sense of self. The MPAA conducted a study which showed that 45% of movie theater tickets are bought by people of color, even though this demographic accounts for about 39% of the US population. This happens despite the fact that the majority of films released blatantly fail to represent the audience, both on screen and behind the scenes. People of color are clearly helping drive the box office receipts and audience ratings.

A lot of our work has involved shattering old myths and ‘industry truths.’

A lot of our work has involved shattering old myths and “industry truths” ingrained since the early days of Hollywood, such as the idea that to be successful, films have to have white male creatives and stars as the lead, rather than a person of color. While 50 years ago it might have made business sense to cater primarily to a largely white population, that logic no longer holds. Demographics have shifted so much since then. Despite the clear business case for diversity, we’ve only seen incremental progress since we started our research.

Diversity sells. That much is abundantly clear from the data we have seen over the course of our careers as researchers.

During our tenure at UCLA’s Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies we established the Hollywood Diversity Report, which is now in its sixth edition and released annually by the Division of Social Sciences. This publication analyzes the top theatrical film releases and thousands of television shows in order to make the business case for employing and casting women and people of color.

Thanks to the recent success stories of films like Black Panther and TV shows like Insecure, Empire, and Atlanta, the industry is slowly waking up to how much money it’s leaving on the table. Five years ago, many network executives saw diversity as a luxury, whereas now most say that it is a business imperative.

Black Panther has made over $1.3 billion worldwide. The first season of Atlanta averaged 5.2 million total viewers across all platforms, with 1.8 million people tuning in for the season two premiere. The show’s first season was nominated for six Emmy® Awards and won two, making Donald Glover the first black director to win an Emmy® for directing a comedy series.

Results like these — and the success around Black Panther in particular — come as no surprise when you look at the data. A recent study by the MPAA showed that 45% of movie theater tickets are bought by people of color, even though this demographic accounts for about 40% of the US population. This happens despite the fact that the majority of films released blatantly fail to represent the audience, both on screen and behind the scenes. People of color are clearly helping drive the box office receipts and audience ratings. The industry is losing out on profit opportunities by failing to produce content that aligns with what people want. Audiences are becoming more diverse every year. In the US, people of color bought the majority of the tickets for half of the top 10 highest-grossing films in 2016. Of course, the business argument isn’t the only reason why Hollywood should diversify. There’s a considerable amount of research showing the impact images have on people’s identities and sense of self.

Despite the clear business case for diversity, we’ve only seen incremental progress since we started our research.
of self. If you don’t have positive role models on screen, it will restrict the way you see yourself and your place in society. Many underrepresented groups rarely see themselves depicted in a positive light since the days of one-dimensional characters in old Western movies that have been so greatly underrepresented. This is a problem that needs to be addressed.

If people experience an underrepresented group in film and TV but the group’s characters are stereotypical, then they are likely to believe that it is a true reflection of that group. If you live in a small, segregated town and never interact with Latinos, you might believe that the stereotypes repeated in images are true. While we believe the moral argument for diversity is the most important, it’s not the one that’s moving the industry. We made the strategic choice to focus on how diversity benefits the bottom line because all of our discussions with industry stakeholders told us that this would be the most compelling and persuasive argument.

The industry is not going to change in a foundational way until the executive suites more closely resemble broader society. Real progress requires institutional commitments to doing business differently so that change trickles down the entire culture. The way you see yourself and your place in society rests on whether it can meet your needs. Social imperatives aside, the existence of content that audiences are going to consume is key for business survival.

Main audience demographics

In 2017, the Hispanic/Latino category reported the highest annual attendance per capita, 4.5 times the average. Caucasian/White frequent moviegoers relative to their proportion of the overall population.

### Original scripted series aired on television in 2018

- **Netflix**: 1385%
- **Amazon**: 160%
- **Hulu**: 495%
- **HBO**: 35%
- **Starz**: 105%
- **CBC**: 109%

### Rise in quantity of TV content

- **HBO**: 385%
- **Amazon**: 160%
- **Netflix**: 495%

### Representation matters.

It’s a powerful and important thing for people to know they are seen and to see themselves reflected in our films and the stories we tell. — Alan Horn, Chairman of Walt Disney Studios

In a recent study — a 2018 report by the Reclaiming Native Truth project — a 2018 report by Variety — shows the ways in which diversity matters. The report finds that people who have the sensitivity and perspective to produce the type of content that audiences are increasingly demanding. Until that happens, we can only make small changes. The bottom line is that it starts at the top.

What gives us the most hope is that there are rapidly changing demographics that the industry must cater to in order to maintain profitability now. It will also help if movies that grow out of exclusionary business practices continue to struggle, and ones like Black Panther continue to set new box office records. Audiences are more diverse than ever before, so the industry’s profits and its very existence rests on whether it can meet their needs. Social imperatives aside, diversity is key for business survival.

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When #MeToo and the TIME’S UP movements gathered steam as a response to the Harvey Weinstein allegations, they sent shockwaves around the globe and raised awareness about the intersection point between workplace discrimination and the prevalence of sexual harassment.

From my perspective as President Emerita of Women In Film—a leading advocacy organization for women in media—the screen industries are now becoming conscious, woke and are slowly making progress towards dismantling change. But there is confusion between the culture of sexual harassment post-Weinstein and the need for gender parity in the workplace. They are often treated as the same thing, but sexual harassment is a symptom of the wider issue of discrimination. At the top of the issue sits the fact that, across seven of the biggest entertainment industries, just 17.9% of C-suite is made up of women, and that’s a symptom of the wider issue of systemic change thinking—which requires you to look at all parts of, and relationships within, the system you wish to alter—to effectively change cultural norms.

In most systemic change projects you end up with a triangle of problems, and ours was no different. The #MeToo model identified three core needs, the first of which is to expand the talent pipeline, which requires advancing and amplifying female content creators. We must also address the culture and habits of entertainment executives when employing women—financial decision-makers need to incentivize inclusive hiring and remove bias from corporate practice. Finally, there’s the business case for diversity. We need to prove that content by and for women is profitable.

The theory is that you can’t fix one part of the triangle without fixing the others, otherwise the whole model collapses. So in our first year, we presented three different tactical plans to actualize each systemic change goal:

1. ReFrame Culture Change (workshops, ReFrame Production Roadmap, partners reach out to their network executives, directors, writers, actors, and guild leaders to support gender parity)
2. ReFrame Stamp for Features (recognizing projects that achieve gender parity in their top-five credits using the Conscious Inclusion framework, and adapt tactics to mitigate bias as recommended by the Production Roadmap)
3. ReFrame Stamp for Television (recognizing projects that achieve gender parity in their top-five credits using the Conscious Inclusion framework, and adapt tactics to mitigate bias as recommended by the Production Roadmap)

We need to prove that content by and for women is profitable.

Gender parity in the screen industries requires cultural transformation. Cathy Schulman discusses the systemic change needed to make it happen.
to dismantle gender bias at every decision-making inflection point within the trajectory of making and financing content. For me, the key here is that gatekeeping executives, producers, directors, and department heads interview as many women as men and practice blind hiring, which means they review resumes before seeing the name of a candidate.

The trickiest part of the triangle is the business case. The biggest target group for studios for the last 25 years has been men and boys between the ages of 14 and 24. However, working with MBAs and experts in econometrics, we have created an algorithm that analyzes responses to stories created by and for women. Our results have shown that diverse content is better for business. For me, the key here is that the business case. The biggest target group for studios for the last 25 years has been men and boys between the ages of 14 and 24. However, working with MBAs and experts in econometrics, we have created an algorithm that analyzes responses to stories created by and for women. Our results have shown that diverse content is better for business.

Throughout my time as an executive, working across six different studios and producing more than 30 movies, I was always taught you have to pick content that pleases men and boys. I wanted to completely reverse that paradigm. For me, the key here is that the business case.

This experience made it painfully clear that, in many instances, the talent pipeline just isn’t there. For me, this only served to underline the importance of the work we’re doing at ReFrame. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it’s streaming companies like Netflix and Amazon that are among the most eager to sign up to ReFrame. Both businesses have already created diverse content and reaped the rewards. The fact that two of the world’s most disruptive and forward-thinking companies are really backing diversity shows that’s where we need to be.

For instance, while working on the upcoming Netflix film Otherhood, we set out absolutely determined to hit a 50/50 balance in our crew in terms of male and female representation. We got close. We brought in every woman we could, but in the end we fell short. This experience made it painfully clear that, in many instances, the talent pipeline just isn’t there. For me, this only served to underline the importance of the work we’re doing at ReFrame.

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In Media We Trust

Shamil Idriss of Search for Common Ground argues the case for building sustainable peace through media, using content to provoke discussion and overcome differences.

At Search for Common Ground, we are on a mission to change the way the world handles conflict: away from adversarial approaches, toward collaborative problem-solving.

As CEO, I have the privilege to represent nearly 700 staff supporting communities to prevent and recover from violent conflict in more than 30 countries around the world.

Our content is designed to provoke discussions within communities in conflict and model new ways to overcome differences. Depending on the issues at hand, we might create community theater, television dramas, reality TV shows, radio programs, or call-in shows, all complemented by extensive community outreach and engagement.

There are three ways that the change we help bring about becomes sustainable.

The first is institutionalization: when a government ministry, police department, media syndicate, or other important institution adopts new policies or procedures reflecting principles of peace. The second is commercialization: when a local market emerges to resource a peacebuilding approach so that its continuation need not rely on philanthropic support. The third is popularization: when social norms or how a large portion of a population deals with differences; this is where social impact entertainment is particularly powerful.

To achieve such change, our teams and partners must all be local, drawn from across the very dividing lines they seek to bridge in their communities.  

© Search for Common Ground
Ndakisa, 2017

The President season 1
Common Ground study results

The President season 1 viewers:

- 88% of polled viewers believed that youth could play a positive role as leaders in Palestine.
- 49% of the population in the Palestinian Territory (West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem) had heard of the program, of which, 26% regularly watched the show.
- 90% of the decision makers in the program took the initiative to readdress at least one public issue after participating in town hall meetings centered on the show.
- 3.8 million people were following the weekly episodes through the Ma’an satellite Network TV channel, Ma’an’s Facebook, or its YouTube channel.
- 95% of the audience reported they believed that the program was relevant to youth needs, and that the activities and topics raised during the program were relevant to them and to people’s daily lives.
- 38% of the population in the Palestinian Territory (West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem) had heard of the program, of which, 26% regularly watched the show.

The State of SIE
They alone understand the social and political opportunities and dangers that must be navigated. Building trust across divides in Syria or Myanmar cannot be done by people in the US or Europe. All programming must be conflict-sensitive and rooted in local culture.

In this process, the characters we create are critical. They have to be realistic and relatable in order to engage targeted audiences and spark community dialogue. So, we train local writers, actors and producers in developing character-driven dramas.

**Our teams and partners must all be local, drawn from across the very dividing lines they seek to bridge.**

We’ve found that repeated exposure to content is much more effective than a one-off. This means that it’s easier to drive change with a popular series programmed in a one-off. This means that it’s easier to connect it, often subconsciously, with other things in your life. Plus, the ability to drive change with a popular series designed to inspire a new generation is so effective is that it harnesses our emotions. Attitudes, behaviors, and even world views are developed from people’s emotional experiences, not their rational thinking. This is clear in how extremist groups inflame passions to recruit and mobilize young people. The emotional experiences of being ignored, humiliated, and disrespected — or on the flip side, respected, included, and heard — have a powerful determinative effect on how people see the world and how they behave in it.

To leverage this emotional power, you need to craft character-driven social impact entertainment from the inside out, making sure the characters and the content resonate with what people are seeing and living in their daily lives. By collaborating with people who are living with the conflict, we’re able to create those stories and lay the groundwork for sustainable, enduring change.

**One of the reasons social impact entertainment is so effective is that it harnesses our emotions.**

Illustrating the potential of spaced learning, our weekly series The President inspired young Palestinians to believe they can play an active role in the political process. The reality TV show tasked 100 young citizens with tackling difficult political challenges. With many Palestinians disengaged or mistrustful of politics, the show was designed to inspire a new generation of leaders to create positive change through democratic means. Around 3.8 million people watched each episode, and 88% of viewers polled said they believed young people could make a difference after watching the series. Six of the show’s contestants eventually ran for real positions in local politics, while the first season’s winner was hired by the office of the President of Palestine, serving as an advisor on youth affairs.

One of the shows I’m most excited about is our first cop drama, Nabila Set in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it tells the story of a former combatant who continues to serve his country by becoming a senior police officer. Like some actual police officers there, he hasn’t been paid for months, there are corrupt cops in his unit, and much of the population fears or distrusts him — or both. We co-produce this show with the police force in Congo. They love it because they are effectively the stars, but we use the show to foster dialogue between police and locals to improve their relations and conduct.

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**In 2016, Search for Common Ground worked with 46,000 military and police officers, 1,200 political leaders, 2,000 artists, and 1,000 local partners. In 2018, Search for Common Ground reached more than 50 million people through media.**

**Conflict Reimagined: Search for Common Ground — A methodology to transform how we respond to conflict, away from confrontation and coercion and toward collaboration.**

**The Common Ground Approach: At Search for Common Ground, how we respond to conflict, away from confrontation and coercion and toward collaboration.**

**Popularization: when we affect a change in social norms, or how a large portion of the population deals with differences. Once change takes one of these forms, it often becomes self-sustaining and can receive an external support.**

**Commercialization: when a local market chooses to resource a good or service that changes social norms and the institution adopts new policies or produces new technologies.**

**Institutionalization: when a government ministry, police department, media or other institution adopts new policies or produces new technologies in a way that endures through systems.**

**Mapping the State of SIE**

**Analysis of Progress Report: Mission Profitable or Pressure Profitable? How much do we really need to do?**

**Theory of Change**

**The Theory of Change outlines three ways change can endure without reliance on third-party support. When the outcomes of the approach satisfy the needs of individuals, communities, and institutions, there is a strong incentive for them to adopt it in their daily behaviors and practices. When this happens, change can endure without reliance or third-party support. It is the stakeholders in the conflict themselves that make it sustainable. The Theory of Change outlines three ways in which change become enduring:**

1. Institutionalization: what a government ministry, police department, media or other institution adopts new policies or produces new technologies in a way that endures through systems.

   **Mapping the State of SIE**

2. Commercialization: when a local market chooses to resource a good or service that changes social norms and the institution adopts new policies or produces new technologies in a way that endures through systems.

   **Mapping the State of SIE**

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3. Popularization: when we affect a change in social norms, or how a large portion of the population deals with differences. Once change takes one of these forms, it often becomes self-sustaining and can receive an external support.
In this section we shift our focus from the makers of social impact entertainment to the businesses and organizations that operate around — or work in support of — SIE creation. From educators to conveners, funders to talent agencies, the efforts of these professionals are an essential part of the SIE landscape. Their insight has much to reveal about the challenges and opportunities that are inherent in this space.

For our projects to bring about lasting change in the world, we need to join forces with unlikely allies, develop trust, share control, and build toward opportunities for mutual benefit.

— Sandy Herz, p180

In a survey of 50 (nonprofit) organizations, 61% of those surveyed used pop culture in the last two years as part of a communication strategy, but only 53% used it all the time (compared to 46% who said “not that often”). Of those surveyed, 75% said they would use pop culture again — so there is a significant opportunity to grow this discipline.


75% would use pop culture again

Read online at thestateofsie.com
Our vision is for TFT to serve as a premier interdisciplinary global professional school that develops outstanding humanistic storytellers, industry leaders and scholars whose diverse, innovative voices enlighten, engage, and inspire change for a better world.
Pillar #3: Public Programming and Exhibitions
Our programs incorporate a broad variety of campus-wide, public events, including screenings, festivals, conferences, symposia, and special screenings, the latter often in conjunction with Participating Media. Our annual Spark Change Summit is particularly important to us, bringing together the stakeholders who authorize in the SIE space, along with rising talent, industry leaders, faculty, and students in a single convening that welcomes both the local and global academic and professional communities at large.

Ellen Scott
Associate Professor, Vice Chair, Undergraduate, Department, UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television

My work centers on the political meanings of media, featuring women and African American identity specifically.

I am currently engaged in two major research projects. The first explains the history of slavery on the American screen, with audience and its relationship to film production and reception. Building on my research on archiving, I have recently turned my research toward the production politics behind depicting slavery from the silent era – when many viewers still had no knowledge of what black women film critics from the 1930s believed black women directors like Julie Dash, Charly Danso, and Ava DuVernay, there was a generation of black women who did not have access to the director’s chair and whose powerful ideas about the screen were expressed through critical writing. I am not primarily interested in case studies, but rather I am interested in the archiving of the world, for imagination, and for the campus. This unique model for visionary philanthropy has had a ripple effect around the world, too, by inspiring other enlightened individuals from many countries, including the US, to participate in this kind of mission-driven giving at our School supporting a wide array of SIE focused programs and initiatives.

More individuals are understanding the great value of investing in educational programs and scholarships that inspire social impact and diversity.

Critics from Classical Hollywood to Blaxploitation, explores the film writings of over forty black American women, from the Classical Hollywood era through the years when the first black women made her own feature film. The project departs from existing, largely theoretical scholarship on black women’s spectatorship by bringing greater historical specificity and by drawing attention to the intersections of black women’s film writing with broader struggles to define freedom. The book includes a substantial edited section collecting reviews written by black women film critics from the 1930s through the 1970s. It wasn’t until 1980 that a black woman had an opportunity to direct a feature film. But before there were black women directors like Julie Dash, Cheril Dunes, and Ava DuVernay, there was a generation of black women who did not have access to the director’s chair and whose powerful ideas about the screen were expressed through critical writing. I often tell students I want them to think differently. In other words, I am not primarily interested in reproducing what people already know (a canon of playwrights, for example). I see my research as addressing social issues like racial and socio-economic disparities, but also hope it enables us to reframe pressing problems. As one instance, because I am interested in different gender formations across time and cultures as well as the position of women and sexual minorities in American society today, I have structured my undergraduate theater history class to emphasize women. Indeed, all the plays and performances we study are authored by women, in part to help students realize how male-centered traditional theater history tends to bias. I provide my students with a different archive by which to imagine theater and performance in order for them to create art that matters in relation to often-submerged histories.

In my capacity as President of Performance Studies International, I see graduate students around the world working through a variety of interdisciplinary frameworks. Such frameworks include “performance as research,” a category that brings experiential knowledge together with more theoretical work. I have been thinking about bringing more of this paradigm into the undergraduate and PhD curricula. I wish to collaborate with institutions where that model has worked well, for example, in Australia and South Africa. My hope is that some international collaborative work can be facilitated across the faculty and student body. I’d love for us to create more work that not only engages with social issues but also helps to enact solutions to those problems.

As we build out the work of the center, we are drawing upon the ideas and experiences of a wide circle of UCLA TFT, campus and external experts. In addition, I am contributing several findings that have emerged from my own experiences over the past several years while advancing our vision and strategic goals. In my work as dean, I have found three distinct categories of alliances and partnerships that I believe help to define, move forward and fund our goals for social impact entertainment. They are: 1) Enlightened individuals; 2) Foundations and select organizations; 3) Like-minded companies across the creative industries. All three categories share our ideas and world view. I believe these relationships are essential for anyone looking to make headway in this space. When you strike up a great dialogue with these partners, they share your interest and values, it inevitably benefits both parties – and often the wider communities that surround you.

We work on performance and visual culture – art, fashion, film, and theater.


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Without question, we have a compelling vision and story to tell. As such, more individuals are understanding the great value of investing in educational programs and scholarships that inspire social impact and diversity. Enlightened, generous individuals are discovering that they, too, have a very important part to play in making a difference by leaving a lasting legacy that benefits everyone – for this example, by empowering women with the opportunity for a great UCLA TFT education – one that allows for memorable years, from all walks of life, to share their inspiring stories with the world – stories that until now have gone untold and that, in the telling, will make our world a far richer and more meaningful place for all.

Frankly, I think it’s going to be sharing our stories across borders and cultures, and women’s voices in particular, that is going to help save our world. This is the power of what enlightened individuals can do with visionary giving focused on advancing social impact entertainment.

Example #2 – Foundations: The William Randolph Hearst Foundation (WHRF), one of the most important and forward-thinking foundations in the US, also makes a different archive by which to imagine theater and performance in order for them to create art that matters in relation to often-submerged histories.
The goal of making this film was to raise awareness about water and the environment, to inspire change and to galvanize audiences.

playwright, Paula Vogel. A true American master, her profound, original works, searing insight. Paula will hold master classes for our students; will have a "first-look" residency, the students write a feature film screenplay and have a "first-look" contract with Sony Television and Sony Crackle. They have made a multi-year commitment to support a writing program for television class with a "first-lock" deal with Sony Television and Sony Crackle. To date, several of the students' scripts have been optioned by Sony.

Another great example of industry support for SIE is Waterschool — the first feature documentary made in the history of our School and now streaming on Netflix in 193 countries, translated into 26 languages. The film was produced in partnership with The Water Project, a nonprofit organization that serves over 500,000 young people worldwide with its focus on water, hygiene, sanitation and sustainability. To make the film, a team of seven outstanding final year UCLA TFT graduate filmmaking students worked collaboratively across five continents on the six major rivers of the world (Ganges in India, Amazon in Brazil, Mississippi in East St. Louis, the Yangtze in China, Nile in Uganda, Danube in Austria) to capture these amazing stories.

It was an honor for us to work with Nadja and Swarovski to make Waterschool. I'm so proud of our students and thankful to everyone who worked on the film including our faculty advisors and our Distinguished Mentor, Academy Award®- and Emmy®-nominated filmmaker, Lucy Walker. A true team effort, everyone was inspired to create a world of great merit and meaning — one that would use the power of story to not only move and engage people, but also drive social change around one of the world's most pressing issues of our time — water.

Waterschool explores the stories of six girls and young women living in underserved communities along the major rivers of the world. We saw how the girls' and young women's lives have been empowered and transformed by the Swarovski Waterschool educational program which serves over 500,000 young people worldwide with its focus on water, hygiene, sanitation and sustainability. The film, a true story of six girls who are educated in seven countries, now streaming on Netflix in 193 countries, translated into 26 languages. The film was produced in partnership with The Water Project, a nonprofit organization that serves over 500,000 young people worldwide with its focus on water, hygiene, sanitation and sustainability. To make the film, a team of seven outstanding final year UCLA TFT graduate filmmaking students worked collaboratively across five continents on the six major rivers of the world (Ganges in India, Amazon in Brazil, Mississippi in East St. Louis, the Yangtze in China, Nile in Uganda, Danube in Austria) to capture these amazing stories.

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On the other side, there is another gap, research that investigates the creative decisions and techniques behind social impact entertainment to better understand the process of telling a good story is not as prevalent in peer-reviewed research. Researchers could benefit from understanding the creative process and the art of storytelling. This understanding helps inform what questions they should ask, and the way in which they should ask them. One of our key publications, Assessing the Impact of Focused-Diversity Documentaries, Illustrates the bespoke approach we take to research. I published the study with colleagues and it shows that every nonfiction film project is unique in terms of how it may seek to have societal influence. For example, there are many projects that put up social issues on the map for the first time. In these cases, having a “behaviour change” goal might be tricky.

Re-up the Social Change project Re-up the Social Change project is a joint effort between Univision and the Center for Media & Social Impact (CMSI) in order to leverage the potential of mediated entertainment because if a mediated story about a social issue is didactic, overtly emotional, or preachy, people will turn off. People come to care about the issues profiled in a work of mediated entertainment because they connect with the characters and artistry of the story. This means that increased collaboration between the creative and research processes is of the utmost importance. Everything we do in storytelling, seeing what’s worked before, and moving forward through learning are some of the biggest hurdles the industry faces. The researchers are there, ready to help. We need to build funding to uncover and share these lessons in learning. If we can do this, we’ll take another step toward ensuring the stories we tell realize their true potential, and the research we conduct faithfully captures their impact.

The Documentary Filmmakers’ Statement of Best Practices in Fair Use Since the creation of the Documentary Filmmakers’ Statement of Best Practices in Fair Use in 2005, documentaries have entered fair use.

70% of documentary filmmakers said they have a "good" or "excellent" understanding of fair use in production.

50% of documentary filmmakers say they are "absolutely necessary" or "very useful" for their work.

50% of documentary filmmakers have had problems with a broadcaster accepting fair use, with a lawyer’s letter.

99% of documentary filmmakers report never having had problems with a station accepting fair use, with a lawyer’s letter. The filmmakers have embrace fair use, with 99% accepting fair use in broadcasting.

99% of filmmakers have embraced fair use, with 99% accepting fair use in broadcasting. The filmmakers have adopted into business practice the word “evaluation” in this particular case, illustrating the bespoke methodology, but they also show why any kind of research about storytelling is itself a creative process.

I also don’t use the word “measurement” to describe research that examines the social-good influence of mediated entertainment because it can imply there is a right or a wrong way to do research, which is always inappropriate. Simplicity, I don’t often use the word “evaluation” in this particular work also because it can imply there are “good” and “bad” elements that need to be weighed.

This example shows why it’s inaccurate to assume that one method can be used to evaluate the impact of all stories. As researchers, we need to understand the potential of a social issue. Our studies need to take into account necessary nuances such as where an issue currently is in terms of audience awareness, the nature of a social issue, and the current and future-looking potential in terms of audience demand for social change. This project is part of CMSI’s work in understanding the potential to fuel social change. Over the re-launch of our successful Media Movements conference, which is part of CMSI’s work in civic storytelling, there’s so much to be done. The state of being is a key factor in enabling change. Research shows that this state of being is a key factor in enabling a narrative to influence a viewer’s attitudes and beliefs. It’s a beautiful theory and a powerful idea that offers a real opportunity to storytellers, yet many organizations and media companies don’t know this kind of research exists — and more importantly, how it can be leveraged to further develop the idea of entertainment storytelling and social good.

Closing the Gap There’s so much to be gained by bringing SIE’s creative and academic communities closer together, says Caty Borum Chattoo.

At the Center for Media & Social Impact (CMSI) we believe that all forms of entertainment have the potential to shape culture. As Director of the Center I spearhead the convening, thought-building, and research we do, which strives to produce research about independent documentary, as well. And finally, as conveners, we produce the Story Movements conference, which is a re-launch of our successful Media Movements conference, which is designed to help inform the common moment in story-led demands for social change. We have embraced fair use.

The Documentary Filmmakers’ Statement of Best Practices in Fair Use

The “best practices have been: - Accepted by all four US insurance companies for Errors & Omissions Insurance of Fair Use claims — AIG, Marsh, Chubb and ChubbFed.

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The Bigger Picture

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Agency for Change

The first talent agency to develop a social impact department, CAA has a long-standing influence as creative change-makers. Michelle Kydd Lee and Natalie Tran explain how big ideas create big impact.

We are veterans in this space. We were the first talent agency to establish a department that would solely focus on developing evolving ideas to make a positive impact on the world. Created to put a nonprofit sensibility at the heart of the entertainment business, throughout the last 20 years CAA has led the way in some of the most transformative social action in our industry.

We live in a world of big, bold ideas. We sit at the epicenter of popular culture with each individual who comes through our doors — from world-renowned artists, content creators, and athletes to presidential candidates, activists, and innovators who are setting out to change the world. This gives us a very particular insight into the zeitgeist. We can see “the wave” coming months, if not years in advance, and this has enabled us to become a hub for social impact work — not only in Hollywood, but around the world. As our colleagues say, people around the planet may never visit our country, but they will see our movies, listen to our music, and watch our television shows. That is a great gift and an awesome responsibility.

CAA is a global company of diverse individuals whose mission is to identify, create, and expand opportunities for the people who shape culture and inspire the world.

The agency works with the world’s premier entertainers and athletes, leaders in politics and policy, Nobel Prize Laureates, Pulitzer Prize winners, and many other of today’s foremost thinkers and change agents.

Social action is woven into the fabric of the agency, and has been since 1995, when the new leadership of the company established the CAA Foundation.

Some 18 months later, we found ourselves deeply involved in another movie about climate change, An Inconvenient Truth. On the heels of hosting Vice President Gore in our screening room for his now famous “slide show,” we convened producers and director Davis Guggenheim into our conference room to put the wheels in motion for a documentary film that would lead to the starg at scale. The film, which was produced by Participant Media, went on to gross $49.8 million worldwide (making it the 11th highest-grossing documentary film of all time) and earned Al Gore a Nobel Prize. One of the reasons the film was so successful is that it was able to capitalize on the existing relationship the CAA Foundation has helped nurture between the environmentalists and the entertainment industry. We had helped develop a trust that simply hadn’t existed before. This relationship embodies what social impact entertainment is all about: the collaboration between content creators and those actually working on the issues in the field.

Another core strength of the CAA Foundation is our ability to connect clients and partners to a single, common cause. For example, in the lead-up to the 2018 midterm elections, we saw an opportunity to rally the entertainment community to help shift the way we think about voting, and ultimately increase voter turnout.

The CAA Foundation led the formation of a coalition of entertainment, studio, distribution, and retail companies to launch “I Am a Voter,” a campaign of movement dedicated to increasing voter turnout in the 2018 midterm elections and beyond. The combined efforts of the nonprofit organizations with our connectivity to influential companies and individuals enabled us to supercharge the message around voter registration and participation.

Our work resulted in $5 million of donated ad space and a multifaceted social media campaign featuring high-profile personalities, athletes, and everyday citizens, generating 13 billion impressions. We activated in retail and used brands to help carry the message across the country through unique public service announcements.

Since launching in 1995, the CAA Foundation has been a leader in the entertainment community on education, the environment, and health and social issues. The CAA Foundation harnesses the power and reach of the entertainment industry to create positive social change by forging strategic partnerships, encouraging volunteerism, making financial contributions, stimulating public awareness, and providing in-kind donations.

The CAA Foundation

The CAA Foundation has a long history of bringing together individuals and organizations that might not have initially seen the mutual benefits of collaborating.
The State of SIE

The Bigger Picture

Our proximity to contemporary culture enables us to connect the industry as a whole to current issues. For example, the first meeting for TIME’S UP was organized and held inCAA’s office. In October of 2017, after a slew of allegations of sexual misconduct within the entertainment industry and beyond, we went to work to not let this crisis pass without significant and fundamental change. At the very first meeting, we made sure we assembled an intersectional group: half of the 26 people we convened were women of color, and we assumed there was also an intersectional group: half of the 26 we convened were women of color, and we assumed there was also appropriate LGBTQ representation.

What has changed is that the entertainment industry, businesses, and high-profile individuals have become more purposeful about the ways in which they participate in social justice. This has become so visible and so prevalent; we feel that people now equate the idea of a successful life with having the ability to serve others.

Looking at the younger generations who have grown up in this new culture is also inspiring. They are tuned-in to the social issues of our time. By regularly protesting and marching with their peers, they self-identify as activists. We are incredibly proud to be playing our part in cultivating and supporting these next generations.

Our mission was to use the momentum of #MeToo to keep attention on this critical issue and help create actionable solutions and real, tangible progress. TIME’S UP is dedicated to ensuring safety, equity, and dignity in the workplace for women of all kinds. The original mandate has been signed by more than 300 women who work in Hollywood, including founders Shonda Rhimes, America Ferrera, Reese Witherspoon, Kerry Washington, and Natalie Portman. The movement has already raised more than $22 million from 21,000 donors across 80 countries to help survivors of abuse. We believe that when we come together and create more safe spaces, share credit rather than take it, and if we refuse to lead by ego and instead lead by service, just as we have since day one.

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While the work of the CAA Foundation has been going on for decades, its central mission has not changed. Today, our goal is still to make it as easy as possible for people to do the right thing. That is not only limited to our clients: every five business days, we offer our employees the opportunity to participate in some act of community service, just as we have since day one. Our philosophy is: to lead is to serve.

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Community Spirit

Many hands make light work. Beadie Finz discusses why it is essential to convene independent documentary filmmakers with good partners to help their work have the greatest possible impact.

“How can we respond to the changing needs of independent filmmakers?”

Bringing together the documentary community with civil society and forging new partnerships to support funding, distribution, and impact campaigns is an essential part of this strategy. For this reason, organizing convenings is a huge focus for us. In particular, our convenings primarily focus on four groups: independent filmmakers who want to understand how their films can have impact beyond a traditional distribution cycle; the burgeoning community of global impact producers who are forging new professional cities; foundations and philanthropists who are disc-curious; and leading NGOs and organizations who recognize how powerful media can be and want to help. Sometimes we bring them all together and sometimes we convene them as individual communities, and these gatherings range from informal to theatrical.

As one of the Doc Society Foundation Directors, my prime area of focus is Good Pitch. Since 2009, this annual program has been bringing together documentary filmmakers with foundations, NGOs, companies, philanthropists, policymakers, brands, and media around local, social and environmental issues. Our aim is to forge coalitions and campaigns that are good for the films and good for those partners.

We decided to redirect our resources in the US toward convening at the city and state level.

Each annual cycle includes Impact Labs for the participating filmmakers to devise an impact strategy for their feature docs. Then comes six months of deep outreach to potential allies, before the whole cycle culminates in a live event, featuring several hundred changemakers from across civil society. The event is a day of connections and radical collaboration, which forges new alliances and raises financing for documentary productions and their impact campaigns — over $30 million at the last count.

This model is now well-proven to work across continents and cultures. In addition to annual hub programs in Europe and in the United States, we have now successfully shared the model with local-level organizations in South Africa, Canada, Colombia, India, Indonesia, Taiwan, Argentina, Australia, and Kenya, with new programs in development in Brazil, and in the MENA and Pacifica regions.

The Doc Impact Award

The Doc Impact Award is a first prize to catalyze the power of documentary film in a crisis or opportunity. Every year, producers are invited to capture and articulate evidence of impact. Impact Award documentaries have created significant and measurable social or environmental impact. Past winners include The Act of Killing, Dzidzoi, Blackfish, Bonfire, V for Vietnam, Grindhouse, Chemicals, Food Chain, and Khruangbin.

With the Impact Award, Doc Society seeks to partner directly with cultural, political, and social influencers with the goal of creating real change, not just awareness. We have been bringing together documentary filmmakers with alliances — from lawyers, to musicians, local organizers who recognize how powerful media can be and wonder how they can use their platform to partner. Sometimes we bring them into doing Good Pitch Local, which has been bringing together documentary filmmakers with foundations, NGOs, companies, philanthropists, policymakers, brands, and media around local, social and environmental issues. Our aim is to forge coalitions and campaigns that are good for the films and good for those partners.

While we have seen great success with national and continental editions of Good Pitch, the dramatic global political threats of the last three years demanded soul searching among media makers and support organizations like ourselves. Following the 2016 US Presidential election, we decided to redirect our resources in the US toward convening at the city and state level, helping lift up stories missing from the news cycle — and so Good Pitch Local was born.

Good Pitch Local is a day-long networking event showcasing short-form nonfiction media projects that are deeply relevant to that community. This is where artists and storytellers connect with local allies — from lawyers, to musicians, local journalists, or community foundations — to find the resources they need to get their work made and aired. A more rough and ready convening, Good Pitch Local costs less and can happen faster.

At its core, Doc Society is an organization that’s committed to supporting independent documentary filmmakers and the extraordinary films they create. We want to help them realize their vision, to connect them to the audiences and partners they need to flourish, and to help their work have the biggest impact possible.

How do we do this? With direct funding for documentary films and mentorship of individual filmmakers but also through a series of programmatic interventions designed to help build capacity and grow resources for the whole field. From the Doc Impact Award to Doc Academy, Safe + Secure to Good Pitch, some of these projects are wholly experimental, others are more mature. The trick is to be in constant listening mode, a state of permanent OECD, asking ourselves, “Is what we’ve done most useful?” and, meaning we can do more, which is great. It’s also a smart way to share the resources we have developed working with the global documentary community over the years including The Impact Field Guide & Toolkit and essential toolkit for film teams like Safe + Secure.

If Good Pitch is an example of a structured convening by Doc Society, we also have more informal strategies for getting people together. For one thing, we’ve been believers in a damn good party! Filmmaking is typically lonely and isolating, and involves working solo or in small units over many years. There can be huge periods of doubt about the story, and enormous stress or anxiety about the process. Creating formal and informal spaces where filmmakers and the organizations that support them can come together, in solidarity, is absolutely vital.

But it’s not just the producers and directors who need love. In the last couple of years we have started convening the Global Impact Producers Assembly. Given the term “impact producer” was only coined six years ago, it was pretty damn impressive to see 116 colleagues from over 30 countries at the 2018 edition. This feat was made possible with generous travel stipends provided by the Ford Foundation, Participant Media, and Bertha Foundation. As this new professional class emerges and defines its role, having a physical gathering alongside a virtual networking group has been invaluable. We are spoiled for choice for world class festivals from Sundance to True/False.

Let’s be clear — we are not alone. Doc Society exists in a rich soup of colleagues and peers delivering really good work. The US in particular has such a rich ecology, Firelight Media and Chicken & Egg provide the community with deep professional development. We have sophisticated and strategic funders like Fledgling and Perspectiv Fund. We are spoiled for choice with world class festivals from Sundance to True/False.

When people ask me do you mean convening work, my answer is “hell yes!” The documentary community is proudly tenacious and highly entrepreneurial. We have to be bold. But we live in complex and challenging times, and so if anything, we need to do more of it — creating purposeful gatherings that bring us together, to offer solidarity and a chance to learn. We must keep asking the question — is what we are doing most useful?"
Richard Ray Perez
Director of Creative
Sundance Institute’s Documentary Film Program

At Stories of Change (SOC), we don’t believe social impact happens in a vacuum. It’s generated by a larger ecosystem involving multiple players: storytellers and filmmakers, philanthropists and the private sector, community organizers and activists. At its most effective, change happens when those players work together to address an issue.

Stories of Change is a partnership between Sundance Institute and the Skill Foundation. We support collaborations among independent storytellers working in nonfiction, fiction, and emerging storytelling platforms — like VR and AR — and social entrepreneurs. The goal is to not just create compelling media projects and support the life cycle of the project from inception to impact through grants and strategic advice. It’s a collaborative model that leverages the respective talents of the filmmaker and the social entrepreneur. The idea is that the filmmaker tells a great story and the social entrepreneur takes that story and integrates it into their work, using the power of independent film to move the needle on that issue.

This process starts at key convenings around the world and then throughout the year we provide the guidance, advice, mentorship, and sometimes additional funding to ensure the creation of high-quality storytelling projects that have an impact on the pressing issues of our time.

Today, we understand the power of storytelling better than ever before. We have seen how it can be a force for good, and we have seen its dark side in the false narratives circulating on social media before the 2016 election. Yet many content creators are still far removed from the problems on the ground, while the changemakers embroiled in the issues are often unaware of the true power of independent storytelling. Our program is an intentional effort to remedy this. We close the gap between those working in entertainment, and the lived experience of the people affected by a social issue.

We strive to deliver social impact with a community rather than for a community.

Many storytellers also have a limited understanding of the different uses of social impact media, specifically independent film and entertainment. For example, there are many different types of change you can drive, from shifting public opinion, to influencing new policies or legislation, to creating changes in behavior. Each of these has its own timeline, and has different challenges and opportunities.

In this script, we see a Nigerian community activist armed with a vast sum of money to upgrade his community. However, he inadvertently creates many more problems than he solves.

Filmmakers alone would struggle to achieve this impact, even with the best intentions. It’s up to us, as a program, to help coordinate the various players involved — from the community affected by the change, to the activists and decision-makers in the region, from the impact producers, to the international audience that can help influence Nigerian government policy.

Alongside fictional treatments like The Legend of the Vagabond King of Lagos, we also support documentary films that examine social entrepreneurship as an innovative approach to social challenges. Stories of Change encourages filmmakers to work through specific challenges. This approach. Our experience has taught us this much. But one thing is certain: it doesn’t happen alone. When part of a larger ecosystem of change, working with changemakers with vision, storytellers and artists can give the audience an experience that is transparent and transformative. Social impact entertainment can do that.

The Ecosystem of Change
The State of SIE

Creative Visions incubates and nurtures social impact stories. Kathy Eldon and Amy Eldon Turteltaub helm the organization that empowers filmmakers to tell stories that matter.

The Truth Shall Set Us Free

Since we launched our nonprofit organization, Creative Visions, we have supported more than 360 projects and productions in 35 countries, impacting more than 100 million people.

We focus on supporting “creative activists” who use media and the arts to spark awareness of critical issues and ignite positive change.

The foundation for our organization was set in 1990 when we founded Creative Visions Productions in London. From the outset our goal was to make films about issues we felt were important. We wanted our movies to spark a desire in audiences to get involved.

In 1993 Dan Eldon, our 22-year-old son and brother, was killed while working as a Reuters photographer in Somalia. Determined to raise awareness of the challenges faced by frontline journalists, we moved to Los Angeles to make a film on the subject. Together, as a mother-daughter team, we pitched an idea we had developed about Dan and his friends to TBS. In 1997 our documentary, Dying to Tell the Story, premiered at the United Nations. Acknowledged by an innovative website and a high school curriculum, the film was distributed to 90 countries and triggered major public awareness of the true cost of this type of work, and of the huge risks facing freelance journalists in the field.

After producing four more films complete with websites, curricula, and social impact campaigns for major networks, we decided to use our nonprofit to aid other aspiring filmmakers. We wanted to help develop and distribute their films and manage social impact campaigns that would ignite change around them.

Today, Creative Visions is globally recognized for its accelerator and incubator programs that offer fiscal sponsorship, mentoring, funding assistance, and development and production resources.

Over the past few years we have prioritized supporting social impact stories focused on refugees and immigration, women and girls’ empowerment, and the environment. This year we are launching a Media Impact Fund that will offer funding to emerging, high-potential filmmakers, and provide emergency funding to enable storytellers to produce critical and timely stories.

Although it’s notoriously difficult to measure the impact of social impact entertainment, over the past two decades we have seen a major shift in public awareness around pressing social, environmental, and humanitarian causes. We believe this is due to a surge in the number of social impact films that have raised awareness around important issues, triggered impact films that have raised awareness of critical issues and ignited positive change.

The film has stimulated other landfill communities to take the first steps out of poverty. The Orquesta de Cateura is on a mission to spark awareness of critical issues and ignite positive change in the areas of human rights, women and girls’ empowerment, the environment, and youth education.

The Creative Activist Program (CAP) has incubated over 360 projects and productions, from documentaries and feature films distributed on major networks, to photography exhibitions and theater projects that fuel a national conversation about pressing issues. CAP projects have created significant impact and policy change in the areas of human rights, women and girls’ empowerment, the environment, and youth education.

The Creative Activist Program

The Creative Activist Program (CAP) has incubated over 360 projects and productions, from documentaries and feature films distributed on major networks, to photography exhibitions and theater projects that fuel a national conversation about pressing issues. CAP projects have created significant impact and policy change in the areas of human rights, women and girls’ empowerment, the environment, and youth education.

We also incubated Landfill Harmonic, a film about a group of Paraguayan students from the Cateura landfill who played instruments made from trash. The film has stimulated other landfill communities to create more sustainable and environmentally responsible practices. Many children from the Cateura landfill have learned to play music, and the Recycled Orchestra of Cateura has performed to audiences around the world, increasing awareness of the challenges faced by its members.

Social impact filmmakers face a myriad of challenges as they endeavor to give voice to stories that deserve to be heard — stories that identify problems that need to be solved. Over the past few years, we have seen an increase in the number of festivals that showcase cause-oriented films — festivals like True/False, Human Rights Watch Film Festival, and the big staplers like Sundance. Filmmakers can now also apply to a growing number of funding circles for support — like those offered by Doc Society or Impact Partners — and seek alternative forms of online distribution, making it easier than ever before to get the stories to audiences.

To those who wish to venture into the world of social impact entertainment, we advise that before you start, figure out the impact you want to create. Clarity counts. Check out organizations that could benefit from your film and explore all the possible outlets that may be interested in what you produce. Then, reach out to others who have traveled the same road and learn from their mistakes. Know it won’t be easy, but at least you’ll never be bored!

As you venture forth, we suggest that you use these words by Winston Churchill onto your refrigerator and read them every day: “Never give in, never give in, never give in…” Your stories matter. Your audience awaits.

Creative Visions

Creative Visions is an organization made up of “creative activists” whose mission is to spark awareness of critical issues and ignite change through impact, media, art and technology.

Creative Visions

Creative Visions is the resulting project of the film — a portrait of an extraordinary man, and mightiest of journalists’, coverage of international conflicts so crucial and why they risk their lives to do it.

Living on One Dollar

Living on One Dollar is the true story and tool to help improve the extreme poor to take their first steps out of poverty. The film follows the story of four young friends who set out to live on just one dollar a day for eight weeks in rural Guatemala. They battle hunger, parasites and the realization that there are no easy answers. Yet, the generally and strength of Dios, a 20-year-old woman, and Chino, a 15-year-old king gives them evidence that there are effective ways to make a difference.

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Kathy Eldon

Kathy Eldon, producer / founder, Creative Visions Foundation

Amy Eldon Turteltaub

Amy Eldon Turteltaub, producer, author and founder of Creative Visions Foundation

Since we launched our nonprofit organization, Creative Visions, we have supported more than 360 projects and productions in 35 countries, impacting more than 100 million people.

We focus on supporting “creative activists” who use media and the arts to spark awareness of critical issues and ignite positive change.

The foundation for our organization was set in 1990 when we founded Creative Visions Productions in London. From the outset our goal was to make films about issues we felt were important. We wanted our movies to spark a desire in audiences to get involved.

In 1993 Dan Eldon, our 22-year-old son and brother, was killed while working as a Reuters photographer in Somalia. Determined to raise awareness of the challenges faced by frontline journalists, we moved to Los Angeles to make a film on the subject. Together, as a mother-daughter team, we pitched an idea we had developed about Dan and his friends to TBS. In 1997 our documentary, Dying to Tell the Story, premiered at the United Nations. Acknowledged by an innovative website and a high school curriculum, the film was distributed to 90 countries and triggered major public awareness of the true cost of this type of work, and of the huge risks facing freelance journalists in the field.

After producing four more films complete with websites, curricula, and social impact campaigns for major networks, we decided to use our nonprofit to aid other aspiring filmmakers. We wanted to help develop and distribute their films and manage social impact campaigns that would ignite change around them.

Today, Creative Visions is globally recognized for its accelerator and incubator programs that offer fiscal sponsorship, mentoring, funding assistance, and development and production resources.

Over the past few years we have prioritized supporting social impact stories focused on refugees and immigration, women and girls’ empowerment, and the environment. This year we are launching a Media Impact Fund that will offer funding to emerging, high-potential filmmakers, and provide emergency funding to enable storytellers to produce critical and timely stories.

Although it’s notoriously difficult to measure the impact of social impact entertainment, over the past two decades we have seen a major shift in public awareness around pressing social, environmental, and humanitarian causes. We believe this is due to a surge in the number of social impact films that have raised awareness around important issues, triggered impact films that have raised awareness of critical issues and ignited positive change.

The film has stimulated other landfill communities to take the first steps out of poverty. The Orquesta de Cateura is on a mission to spark awareness of critical issues and ignite positive change in the areas of human rights, women and girls’ empowerment, the environment, and youth education.

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The idea of having impact on social justice topics through popular culture has taken on a new moment, as some foundations strive to harness the power of the entertainment industry as a part of a larger set of integrated approaches. In particular, strategies involving commercial film and television hold great promises, but foundations must also stay focused on where the need is greatest and the intervention most strategic. Ford Foundation is at the forefront of this exploration and many new initiatives are being supported by JustFilms, Ford’s signature moving image strategy.

Ford Foundation strategy rests on the five key drivers of inequality it perceives: persistent cultural narratives that undermine fairness and inclusion; unequal access to government; unfair rules of the economy, and failure to protect public goods.

Following this, there is a generation of thought leaders, creative, funders, and social justice stakeholders who understand that culture itself has become a primary battleground for gaining and maintaining the power to effect progressive social change, and who stand as new strategists. The principles of democracy are under duress around the world — therefore, popular cultural interventions also become part of a social justice foundation’s strategy, to disrupt systems that reenact inequality, modeling the values of justice, tolerance and equity.

Altering Perceptions

Cara Mertes discusses how JustFilms combats nonfiction storytelling challenges to help create narratives that transform history.

Cara Mertes
Director of JustFilms, Ford Foundation

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Documentary, and by extension the field of social impact entertainment, is one of those areas where it makes sense to pool your resources and your risk.

Geralyn Dreyfous

I got into filmmaking in 2000 with The Day My God Died. This was a time when films were starting to be used as tools for social change, and documentaries, such as Lee Hirsch's Born into Brothels: Calcutta's Red Light District, were seen as vehicles for profiling the off the backs of starving artists. But as one of our founding members, the venture capitalist Jim Swartz, has argued, filmmakers are essentially entrepreneurs — they spot things before other people. We can help them by making films faster and by reducing the fiscal discipline of equity into the process. By amortizing the risks, we can accelerate the flow of capital to these social entrepreneurs.

The fact is these kinds of social impact documentaries provide a huge public service. You have to remember that the average US resident spends three years and a million dollars making a film that you can use as a community screening for free, or for $25,000 a projector, or as an educational tool for 10 dollars. That’s a lot of social innovation — it’s practically a miracle! But how do we get audiences to hear about these films? The distribution and the marketing of audiences are the next frontier, and we still haven’t quite figured that out yet.

No one person can make and distribute a film, so we’re building communities that learn from each other. We tell potential investors that documentary film has the unique ability to align with, and to amplify, something that they already care about — provided they work with people that understand good storytelling.

For, it boils down to a choice. They can create the same back office in their foundations to search for suitable films, staffing this for around $300,000 a year, or they can pay us $25,000 a year to cover our overhead. That way, they draw upon our expertise and avoid reinventing the wheel. They can test the waters and make sure any mistakes they make are not million-dollar mistakes but, say, $25,000 mistakes.

Documentary film, and by extension the field of social impact entertainment, is one of those areas where it makes sense to pool your resources and your risk. The next move can be a story that changes the world and cuts through the noise and clutter like nothing else.

Impact Partners was born of funding models that didn’t work. Geralyn Dreyfous explains how looking to venture capitalists gave them inspiration for their unique model of equity investing for social impact films.

Pivotal Funding

The first film I was involved in, Living in Emergency, was an abysmal failure, but it taught me a lot. We were working with a first-time filmmaker, we didn’t have the proper contracts in place, it kept costing more, and we had to repeatedly go to the investors to bail it out. We learned that we shouldn’t release large amounts of money until the whole budget is raised and that we must have systems in place that can hold filmmakers to account.

However, if the market doesn’t bear it and they only return 20 cents on the dollar, that’s still fine because it’s better than zero.

As for when things go wrong — we’re not afraid when that happens, nor do we want our filmmakers to be. It’s a great example of this. It began as a film about doping in cycling and turned into one about the largest doping scandal in sports, with its leg, chesterman, a whistleblower, becoming a target for assassination by the Russian government. Some people may have pulled out when the stakes got so high, but we capitalized. This has given Justice Department and Homeland Security (moral), and we got legal counsel. Again, it was our ability to pivot that allowed us to capitalize on an opportunity that many others would have run from.

Equity investing was seen as controversial at first, we were accused of profiting off the backs of starving artists. But as one of our founding members, the venture capitalist Jim Swartz, has argued, filmmakers are essentially entrepreneurs — they spot things before other people. We can help them by making films faster and by reducing the fiscal discipline of equity into the process. By amortizing the risks, we can accelerate the flow of capital to these social entrepreneurs.

Then I realized something was seriously wrong with the system after releasing Born into Brothels in 2005. This was the HBO film that was eventually sold to Netflix. What had exceptionally well had already won a Sundance Audience Award and an Academy Award®, and had taken $35 million at the box office. Yet the filmmakers saw only a $150,000 return, and very nearly lost money on the project. We were left scratching our heads; it just didn’t make sense.

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These early successes and failures led me, in 2007, to form Impact Partners with Dan Cogan. By this point we had realized that the system was truly broken. We had to find a new model for funding and producing these kinds of important documentaries.

The act of making a documentary is in itself an entrepreneurial process. You’re only as good as your ability to learn and to adapt — in other words, to pivot. At Impact Partners, while we learned a lot on our own, we also take lessons from the masters of pivoting: venture capitalists. We introduced a unique model of equity investing for social impact films that seeks to ensure that the money leaving the system is ultimately replenished. Every film that we make stands on the shoulders of the ones before it.

In the old model, we’d seek out great projects from a foundation and try to make a documentary that hit the foundation’s criteria. You’d be afraid of admitting when things went wrong. That’s the worst approach of what we do at Impact Partners. Instead of handing out grants, we tell the filmmakers that we’ll put up the money to complete this film but we want it back, plus a certain percentage.

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Funding the Future

A compelling story is at the core of social impact entertainment, but as Dana Barrett explains, to increase its impact a film’s production value has to be equal to its subject in terms of quality.

Dana Barrett
Founder and President, Fledgling Fund

Financing a film is always difficult, especially in the social impact entertainment space. While it has become easier to make a documentary film, both short form and long form, many films with the potential to really make a difference around an important issue never do so. Our organization exists to increase the chances that a well-made and compelling film has significant outreach potential, that it can move the needle in a strategic and sometimes measurable way.

So far, the Fledgling Fund has supported over 160 films and put $5.4 million into the field. Each year, roughly 800 filmmakers apply to Fledgling for outreach funds and we generally consider funding for a film if it is at the rough cut stage which allows us to assess the quality and potential of the project. We also maintain an online library of impact resources in the hope of strengthening the field by sharing knowledge. One of those resources, the Creative Media Dimension of Impact diagram, lays out the five ingredients for SE and reflects the way we assess applications for funding. By providing a framework for this kind of work, the diagram is one of our most recognizable contributions on this front and is still referred to today.

At the core of social impact entertainment is a compelling story — in essence, the subject of a film. But it’s our belief that the production value is just as important as the story, which is part of the reason why, when selecting projects to fund, the first thing we look at is the footage. A film’s production value has to be equal to its subject in terms of quality.

Public perception of a subject is also important, which is why awareness is the second rung on our diagram. Social impact films must shine a spotlight on issues that have been neglected and need to be talked about.

We also look for applicants that have proven engagement with outside partners; they need to tell us who they’ve reached spoken to and how their film would help to advance that organization’s agenda. We also like to know how much money the filmmakers think they need to spend, if a project already has financial backing and, or, and where else that backing might be coming from. Time and time again we see that it’s the films that have very strong partnerships with NGOs and nonprofits that tend to have the biggest impact.

As we select the films we support to have real-world effect, the outer rings on our diagram—explain how social impact work needs to be part of a wider movement in order to create social change. With every film, we consider the subject very carefully and look to see if we can take advantage of a tipping point in the issue. We try to find projects that are part of something much larger and could be moved through policymakers, legislators or influential organizations.

In 2008, we funded a film about incarcerated victims of abuse as we knew 13 states were looking at domestic violence legislation. Sin by Silence follows five members of the first inmate-initiated group in the US prison system to help abused women speak out and promote a future free from domestic violence. The film shines a light on the women as well as the abuse they suffered, and examines how that abuse contributed to them committing their crimes.

Sin by Silence
From behind prison walls, Sin by Silence reveals that a victim’s testimony will sometimes be the only way for a future free from domestic violence inside California prisons.

Sin by Silence premiered at the Cleveland International Film Festival in March 2009.

Sin by Silence was broadcast on Oxygen Channel and reached 2.2 million viewers. We helped provide funding for social impact campaigns in the 13 states considering legislation. In addition to 140 town events, 427 host screenings were ordered and there were 258 events hosted on university campuses. In the end, bills that would empower abuse survivors in court were passed in several states. In California, two bills even named the “Sin by Silence Bills.”

Raising the public’s awareness of an issue can have a profound effect. With the documentary, The Sentence we wanted to highlight the issue of mandatory minimum sentencing, which most Americans don’t have a clue about. This documentary tells the story of Cynthia Shank, a woman charged with conspiring years after she’d failed to report that her then-teenage boyfriend was dealing drugs.

Mandatory minimum sentencing laws dictate that judges must sentence offenders to a minimum, specified amount of time in jail for a specific crime. This meant that Shank — who had since married and had three children — was sentenced to 15 years in prison in 2008. President Obama released 38,000 requests for clemency during his tenure. Before leaving office, he granted almost 2,000 of these requests, many of which were related to mandatory minimum sentencing.

Shank was one of them, and she was released on March 22nd 2017.

Timing is an important factor when it comes to making an impact. As our application process can take a while, we offer another route for filmmakers who need to get their work out faster. The Rapid Deployment Fund was created in response to our turbulent political climate, so that issues can be addressed more quickly than the normal funding process would allow.

The initiative provides grants of $2,500 to $10,000 to support short nonfiction films or other visual stories that can be completed and distributed quickly. Sometimes we’re able to supply the money overnight, though it tends to take time in advance of the project. The projects we are funding work before it has been seen, so we usually only work with experienced filmmakers.

Through our funding, research, and partnerships, we offer online, we aim to provide the right support at the right time for issues that are poised for action. We believe film is a language, and if you can speak it in front of the right people, it has the power to educate, engage, and mobilize. By mastering this language and those that speak it, we hope to see more work have a profound social effect.
The Power of Partnerships

For Sandy Herz it’s clear that the most successful SIE projects bring together multiple stakeholders. What’s more, creating lasting change can often mean joining forces with unlikely allies.

Sandy Herz
Director of Global Partnerships
Skoll Foundation

At its heart, the field of social impact entertainment is a collaborative space.

For our projects to bring about lasting change in the world, we need to join forces with unlikely allies. One of the key tenets of social entrepreneurship is working in networks, rather than in silos, and building a community that reaches new audiences—all of which are necessary for success.

As Director of Global Partnerships at the Skoll Foundation, I work to ensure we engage the right partners to drive large-scale social change by investing in, connecting, and catalyzing social entrepreneurs solving the world’s most pressing problems. We focus on social entrepreneurs because we believe they offer society a new way of operating, and a chance to fundamentally shift the systems that create and maintain global challenges like climate change and poverty. Our efforts range from funding and convening, to collaborating and storytelling. Partnerships are essential for outsized impact, especially in the social impact entertainment space.

For us, storytelling is a crucial tool for helping audiences see the world not just as it is, but as it could be. In addition to creating our own films about social entrepreneurs, the Skoll Foundation funds storytelling about and in support of social entrepreneurs through a curated network of partners. Each partnership fits roughly into one of these categories, and we like to think of these relationships as forming a funnel-like continuum for social change. These categories are: raising awareness around social entrepreneurs and their potential to drive transformative change; targeted audience engagement with social entrepreneurs; and driving impact on the result as a that of engagement.

For example, our Sundance Stories of Change partnership connects independent storytellers with social entrepreneurs and supports the creation of compelling SIE film and media projects that result from those connections. Since 2008, Sundance has hosted 35 screenings between filmmakers and social entrepreneurs and funded 46 film projects, 29 of which are complete and in progress. Each of Stories of Change’s standout successes is the documentary Open Heart—a film about eight Ethiopian children with rheumatic heart disease who must fly to Sudan without their parents for high-risk standard cardiac surgery, free of charge.

From Sundance® | Lessons from Ethiopia’s first high-risk standard cardiac surgery

For our broadcast media partners—like NPR, Public Radio International, BBC, and PBS NewsHour—to fit into the first category. These institutions reach millions of people through their reporting, and we support our coverage of social entrepreneurs to create awareness about social entrepreneurs’ innovations. Editorial independence is key for journalistic partners, so we focus on the number of stories, the size of the reach, and the demographics of audiences, rather than on specific outcomes. In total, Skoll broadcast partners have produced more than 4 million stories about social entrepreneurship stories in the last year, reaching a global audience of over 50 million.

With film and storytelling organizations like Bending the Arc and Doc Society, the work that emerges often falls into our second and third categories: engagement and impact. With these partners we focus on building storytelling capacity within social entrepreneur organizations and supporting collaborations between individual social entrepreneurs and filmmakers.

The Skoll Foundation has invested approximately $470 million worldwide, including providing the Skoll Award to 128 social entrepreneurs and 156 organizations in 35 countries.

We’re on the way to over $21 million for the organization through targeted screenings across the country.

The Emmy® Award-winning Collisions is an example that found success in the policy arena. This VR film follows an indigenous elder of Western Australia’s Murri tribe as he recounts his experience witnessing a nuclear test explosion in the 1950s. Director Lyndelle Wallwork and producer Nicole Neevham premiered the film at 2016 at the World Economic Forum in Davos, the Sundance Film Festival and the Skoll World Forum. Collisions then went on to back rooms in high-level nuclear non-proliferation meetings around the world, culminating with a screening at the UN prior to their historic vote to ban nuclear weapons. It then helped prompt Australian legislators to pass a budget funding healthcare for Aboriginal people exposed to nuclear tests in the 50s and 60s.

Having learned the lesson of the power of collaborations, we then joined forces with Just Films/Ford Foundation and Doc Society to launch Realfund, to support entrepreneurs and filmmakers with existing projects poised for impact. There are now eight Realfund initiatives.

Open-Heart

Open-Heart is the story of eight Rwandan children, afflicted with rheumatic heart disease, who leave their families and embark on a life-or-death journey to the Sudanese hospital, the Salam Center, which is the only facility in Africa capable of high-standard cardiac surgery, free of charge. From Sundance® | Lessons from Ethiopia’s first high-risk standard cardiac surgery


Sundance Film Festival in 2017 and the Skoll World Forum.

Skoll World Forum

Skoll World Forum is an annual three-day-long gathering in Oxford of innovators gathering to inspire and connect the most influential leaders working on critical questions, share ideas and critical questions, share ideas, and build networks across a range of issues including climate change on a global level, forcing decision makers at the Summit to make commitments on how we can continue to move the needle on the problems facing us today.

Open Heart—award winners

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**Amplifying Impact**

**Partnerships are imperative to creating change.**

Wendy Cohen explains the importance of impact campaigns to making a difference.

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**Independent film is anything but independent. If your goal in making your film is to drive meaningful and memorable change, you’re going to need a lot of help and strong partnerships.**

You have to find productive and rewarding ways to get the film in front of the community you want to impact. And that’s where we come in.

Picture Motion, and companies like us, are known as impact consultants or producers—just like I think of us as bridge-builders. If you imagine a Venn diagram of the film world and the nonprofit, community-organizing world, we sit right in the middle. We make sure a film has the largest possible audience and makes the greatest possible impact.

We start every project by asking all of the stakeholders—including the filmmakers, the distributors, the partners, the producers—who their impact goals are. Usually, a filmmaker has a sense of the change they want to see happen, whether it’s a legislation change, behavior change, or something more specific like changing hearts and minds. At this stage it’s also essential to be honest about the campaign’s budget and the time we have together, so we can be realistic about what we can do. Money isn’t always the key to making an impact, but you have to be realistic about the team it takes to bring your ideas to life. Perhaps most important is creating a film, a story, that is high-quality, engaging, and well-told. If the community you’re hoping to engage loves your movie, you will likely have a successful campaign.

Once we have clear goals from the stakeholders, we dive in and learn everything about the issue at hand at this moment in time. We think of ourselves as the experts at finding the experts. We’ll make phone calls to the nonprofits, activists, professors—as we do a lot of listening. Who is already working on this issue? Where can the film make the most impact? Who are the people who might think differently if they experience this film? Those phone calls and meetings are the most important part of our job.

This is where we become the bridge-builders, because now we understand the goals and intentions of both sides. We never just ask a partner to promote a film and sell tickets for us, we make sure that we are helping them meet their goals as well. How can the film support their strategy? Can they be involved in the press around the movie? Can they be speakers at events? Can their current initiatives help us answer the question about what audiences can do after they see the film? Partnerships only work when they are mutually beneficial.

Where there was once a fear of associating a film with an impact campaign, now people are starting to see that it’s an opportunity, not a liability. We’re getting press outside the review pages stories about communities using films to create change. It’s helping the bottom line at a time when breaking through has never been more difficult. In today’s world, your project is competing not just with every film and TV series ever made, but with everything on the internet as well. Through this model of “Impact Distribution,” we can demonstrate very specifically that we’re bringing audiences directly to your film and driving greater change.

Audiences really are eager to do things more meaningful than just clicking “like” on Facebook. We know this is true for millennials and Gen Z in particular. We’re seeing the audience draw something powerful they can do the moment the movie ends.

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**Wendy Cohen**

President of Picture Motion

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**Middle of Nowhere**

When her husband is sentenced to eight years in prison, Ruby drops out of medical school in order to focus on her husband’s well-being while he’s incarcerated—leading her on a journey of self-discovery in the process.

Lion

A five-year-old Saroo gets lost on a train which takes first thousands of miles across India, away from his family and home. Saroo must learn to survive alone in Kolkata, before ultimately being adopted by an Australian couple. Twenty-two years later, Saroo is a data scientist in Melbourne, re-living memories of a revolutionary technology, known as Google Earth. He is out to find his last family, and return to his first home.

*Participant*

Middle of Nowhere

Jurisdiction: India

By the Center for Media Justice, an online petition co-sponsored by the Center for Media Justice, the Middle of Nowhere campaign site features phone rates. Participant’s social impact campaign site features a direct link to audiences with ways to petition for an end to predatory prison phone calls. Participant’s social action to link audiences to ways to urge end predatory fees on prison phone calls. Participant, with additional volunteers and workers, capping phone rates and fees. It was a perfect example of how a film can play a specific role in accelerating change.

It’s important to remember that change doesn’t happen in isolation. And this is why we believe the wider you can share your film and form these partnerships, the better. You might have a clear vision for the impact you want to have, but more often than not, it’s only with the support of the right partners that you’ll be able to achieve it.

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**Amplifying Impact**

**Partnerships are imperative to creating change.**

Wendy Cohen explains the importance of impact campaigns to making a difference.

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**Independent film is anything but independent. If your goal in making your film is to drive meaningful and memorable change, you’re going to need a lot of help and strong partnerships.**

You have to find productive and rewarding ways to get the film in front of the community you want to impact. And that’s where we come in.

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The SIE landscape is vast and ever-changing. As we built this report, we began the process of putting together a list of convenings within the social impact entertainment space. The following calendar is only a preliminary snapshot of events and meant to be a jumping off point for anyone looking to connect with others within the entertainment industry for whom social change is the primary concern. To help us build this further or correct anything we may have missed, visit www.thestateofsie.com

### March 2019
- **March 4-6, 2019**
  - **Story Movements**
    - American University Center for Media & Social Impact, Washington, D.C.
    - [cmimpact.org/storymovements](cmimpact.org/storymovements)
- **March 8, 2019**
  - **Spark Change Summit**
    - The Skoll Center for Social Impact Entertainment, Creative Visions and Participatory Media, Los Angeles, CA
    - [sparkchangeevent.com](sparkchangeevent.com)
- **March 9-15, 2019**
  - **SXSW Social and Global Impact Track**
    - SXSW, Austin, TX

### April 2019
- **April 1-6, 2019**
  - **April 2019 TED Conference**
    - TED, Vancouver, Canada
    - [ted.com/tedconference/2019](ted.com/tedconference/2019)
- **April 10-14, 2019**
  - **Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Festival**
    - Toronto, Canada
    - [hotdocs.ca/2019](hotdocs.ca/2019)
- **April 16-21, 2019**
  - **Milken Institute Global Conference**
    - Los Angeles, CA
    - [milkeninstitute.org/events/milken-global-conference/2019](milkeninstitute.org/events/milken-global-conference/2019)

### May 2019
- **May 5, 2019**
  - **Webby Awards**
    - International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences, New York, NY
    - [webbyawards.com](webbyawards.com)
- **May 7-15, 2019**
  - **GLAAD Media Awards**
    - GLAAD, New York, NY
    - [glaad.org/mediaawards/awards](glaad.org/mediaawards/awards)
- **May 18-20, 2019**
  - **Cannes Film Festival**
    - Festival de Cannes, France
    - [festival-decannes.com](festival-decannes.com)
- **May 20-22, 2019**
  - **Environmental Media Association Impact Summit**
    - Environmental Media Association, Los Angeles, CA
    - [emaawards.org](emaawards.org)

### June 2019
- **June 4-9, 2019**
  - **SmartPhilm Fest**
    - SmartPhilm, Washington, D.C.
    - [smartphilm.com](smartphilm.com)
- **June 10-16, 2019**
  - **Skiff World Forum**
    - The Skoll Foundation, Oxford, England
    - [skillofworldforum.org](skillofworldforum.org)
- **June 18-22, 2019**
  - **Sheffield Doc/Fest**
    - Sheffield Doc/Fest, Sheffield, England
    - [sheffielddocfest.co](sheffielddocfest.co)

### July 2019
- **July 9-12, 2019**
  - **Encounters Film Festival**
    - Cape Town and Johannesburg, South Africa
    - [encountersfilm.com](encountersfilm.com)
- **July 23-28, 2019**
  - **Fiction Film Festival**
    - Berlin, Germany
    - [fictionfilmfestival.com](fictionfilmfestival.com)
- **August 9-10, 2019**
  - **IDFA Documentary Awards**
    - Amsterdam, Netherlands
    - [ff.hrw.org/awards2018](ff.hrw.org/awards2018)
- **September 2019**
  - **September 23, 2019**
    - **FIVARS**
      - ACM SIGGRAPH Special Interest Group on Visual ARchitectures and Realities, Los Angeles, CA
      - [fivars.org](fivars.org)
- **September 25-27, 2019**
  - **Social Justice Film Festival**
    - Los Angeles, California
    - [socialjusticefilmfestival.org](socialjusticefilmfestival.org)
- **September 26-29, 2019**
  - **BFI London Film Festival**
    - British Film Institute, London, England
    - [bfi.org.uk/film/festival](bfi.org.uk/film/festival)
- **October 2019**
  - **October 19-24, 2019**
    - **AFI Fest**
      - Los Angeles, California
      - [afi.com/afi-fest](afi.com/afi-fest)
  - **November 8-10, 2019**
    - **IDFA**
      - Amsterdam, Netherlands
      - [ff.hrw.org](ff.hrw.org)
  - **November 10-17, 2019**
    - **Social Impact Film Festival**
      - MAI LA, Los Angeles, CA
      - [socialimpactfilmfestival.org](socialimpactfilmfestival.org)
  - **November 19-21, 2019**
    - **Tribeca Film Festival**
      - New York, NY
      - [tribecafilmfestival.com](tribecafilmfestival.com)
  - **November 21-24, 2019**
    - **New Zealand International Film Festival**
      - Wellington, New Zealand
      - [nziff.org.nz](nziff.org.nz)
  - **November 22-30, 2019**
    - **Palm Springs International Film Festival**
      - Palm Springs, CA
      - [pacificpalmsinternationalfilmfestival.com](pacificpalmsinternationalfilmfestival.com)
  - **December 1-11, 2019**
    - **Tribeca Film Festival**
      - New York, NY
      - [tribecafilmfestival.com](tribecafilmfestival.com)
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The Skoll Center for SIE at UCLA TFT serves to advance the role of entertainment and performing arts to inspire and drive social change. The center is committed to establish, define and foster the new field of social impact entertainment, and share new knowledge for artists, practitioners, and organizations in this emerging ecosystem.

To explore the digital version of the report (complete with interactive map), find out more about our work and future events visit www.thestateofsie.com.