

Planning a FIRST DEGREE Screening Event

Documentaries have the ability not only to educate, but also to generate engagement that extends beyond the screening. The first thing a viewer will want to do after watching a powerful film is talk about it. Screening events facilitate meaningful debate, reflection, and subsequent action. The following suggestions will provide you with the tools you need to host the most successful event possible.

Create goals for the event

What do you hope to achieve as a result of your event? Do you want to increase awareness, change attitudes or behavior, or help people network in ways that spark energy and ongoing connection? Being clear about your goals will make it easier to decide how to structure the event, target publicity, and evaluate results.

Outreach for partner organizations

Although FIRST DEGREE is primarily an intimate portrait of three Sing Sing inmates who discover the transformative power of higher education, their stories are emblematic of larger challenges facing the criminal justice system. Consider inviting partner organizations that work in the areas below to co-host your screening in order to reach more diverse audiences, build coalitions, and share possible solutions to the problems addressed in the film:

Criminal Justice Reform Organizations
Faith-based Organizations
Legislators and Staffers
Reentry Programs

Juvenile Justice Organizations
Prison Education Groups
Grassroots Community Organizations
Diversion Programs

Plan ahead

Choose a screening date at least several weeks out to secure the best location, find partner organizations, and publicize the event widely.

Make sure the structure of the event fits your goals

Do you need an outside facilitator, translator, or sign language interpreter? Who are the local experts on the topic who should be present? Will you have a panel presentation, a structured Q&A session, or just an open discussion? Try to gather a group of people who have different opinions on the subject. If all sides are fairly represented, the discussion will be much stronger and have more impact.

Select a venue

Does your screening facility allow for an inclusive discussion? Is the building wheelchair accessible and easily reachable by public transportation? Does it have the appropriate screening equipment for the size of your audience? The best locations are those that regularly host film screenings, such as movie theaters, church meeting rooms, public libraries, community centers, and labor halls. Be sure to test audio-visual equipment before the day of your event.

Choose a facilitator

The facilitator plays an important role in creating an environment in which people feel respected, safe, and encouraged to share their opinions about controversial topics. University professors, journalists, and professionals from community organizations can provide background knowledge about the subject matter, maintain a neutral position, and keep the dialogue moving forward. The FIRST DEGREE Viewer Guide and screening toolkit on our website at <http://www.pppdocs.com/firstdegree.html> have extensive discussion questions to help stimulate discussion.

Publicity

The FIRST DEGREE screening toolkit and electronic press kit on our [website](#) have materials to help you publicize your event, including digital flyer and press release templates, social media posts, a sample invitation letter to legislators, feedback form, key art, film synopsis, credits, director's filmography, film reviews, and photos. Here are some tips on using these communications tools.

Email blasts. Make your invitation short and personal; ask recipients to spread the word

Social media. Set up a Facebook event page; invite viewers to attend the event

Press releases. Contact writers/bloggers and local radio hosts who cover these issues

Events listings. Promote the event on newsletters, listservs, and online calendars

Post-screening discussion

Since audiences will passively absorb a lot of information during the film, you may want to open the floor right away to questions, discussion, and next steps.

Remind participants that everyone sees through the lens of their own experiences

Everyone in the group may have a different view about the film they have just seen. Geography, age, race, religion, and socioeconomic status can all have an impact on comfort levels, speaking styles, and prior knowledge.

End discussion with a plan for action

After an engaging film and thought-provoking discussion, your viewers will hopefully leave the event wanting to take action. Provide a wide range of next steps that audiences can take in their communities, whether they are new to the subject, have limited time or resources, or are seasoned organizers. Refer to the FIRST DEGREE Viewer Guide on our website for suggested activities and organizations that welcome community participation.

Collect feedback and sign-in sheets

Remind viewers to fill out feedback forms and sign-in sheets so you can stay in touch, find out more about community needs, and learn how to improve future events. Please send a copy to Public Policy Productions, PO Box 650, 3 Ludlow Lane, Palisades, NY 10964, or email us at pppinfo@pppdocs.com.

For more information about planning a community screening of FIRST DEGREE, please visit <http://pppdocs.com/firstdegree.html>.