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GRANTMAKERS ON FUNDING SOCIAL ISSUE MEDIA PROJECTS

The Ford Foundation

by Victoria Rodriguez Thiessen

The Ford Foundation has supported public television since its inception in the 1950s to create an outlet for educational and cultural programs. For more than two decades, the foundation funded efforts to set up local public television stations, make them independent yet interconnected and provide them with high-quality programming. This activity, intense until the mid-1970s, decreased over the next decade.

Recognizing the power of television to influence public views and perceptions, the foundation made a grant to the Civil Rights Project, Inc. (CRPI) in 1985 to research and produce a series about the civil rights movement in the United States. Foundation staff hoped the series, documenting the struggles against racial segregation and discrimination, would promote a better understanding of African Americans and of minority populations in general.

Supplemental funding enabled the producers to complete the film—which became the award-winning *Eyes on the Prize*—and develop an educational outreach initiative directed to a broad audience. In addition to broadcasting *Eyes on the Prize*, PBS distributed the 14-part series to colleges and universities, where it

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became one of their most popular telecourses for distant and on-campus students.

CRPI also conducted extensive outreach to schools and teachers to help them use the series and its accompanying materials in class as a way to engage students in the study and discussion of controversial issues. Today, the series remains a valuable educational tool used in schools and universities across the country.

The extensive post-broadcast reach of *Eyes on the Prize* rekindled the foundation's interest in providing high-quality programming to television. A media projects program was established in 1988 to support film, television and public radio productions that reflect the foundation's programmatic interests. Since then, the emphasis has been on content and impact, as well as on giving a voice to groups and ideas that would otherwise go unheard.

Public television has been a good venue for many foundation-supported film projects for several reasons. First, it reaches 99% of television households across the country with free, noncommercial, educational and cultural programming. Moreover, the public broadcasting system provides a forum for minority voices, diverse ideas, controversial issues and programming that would not survive on commercial networks, including educational shows for children. Many public television stations also have ties to their local communities, including schools, and can provide educational services.

However, with the increase in cable television, wireless cable and direct broadcast satellite channels, viewers have a great range of choices, and producers are finding it more difficult to reach their intended audiences with a single broadcast. Because of this, most successful films use a variety of outreach tools before, during and after a broadcast to reach targeted audiences and generate follow-up activity. As *Eyes on the Prize* demonstrates, attention to outreach and dissemination are crucial for long-term success, and these activities have become an integral part of The Ford Foundation's media projects.

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

The foundation's media projects program and the Reproductive Health and Population Program funded the completion and outreach campaign for *The Heart of the Matter*, a film in which five HIV-positive women from different

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backgrounds discuss how they contracted HIV and how they are living with the disease. P.O.V. conducted the outreach campaign, debuting the High Impact Television approach.

Outreach initiatives educate the public by increasing the visibility of the programs and ensuring that important messages reach their intended audiences. To attract as wide an audience as possible for *The Heart of the Matter*, P.O.V. approached a variety of potential outreach partners, including AIDS organizations, health agencies, women's groups, government agencies, religious organizations, minority groups and foundations. Many of these groups held screenings at their regular meetings, promoted the broadcast to their constituencies and used the program as a springboard to discuss their particular concerns.

In addition to educating viewers, outreach campaigns can mobilize communities around particular issues, stimulate action and, in some cases, lead to change. The Balm in Gilead, whose mission is to help African-American religious institutions become involved in AIDS-prevention services and advocacy, uses an edited version of *The Heart of the Matter* to focus on several aspects of the program—in one instance, a woman's experience and the church's eventual acceptance of her as an HIV-positive sister. This adaptation serves as the centerpiece of the Comprehensive Black Church HIV/AIDS Education Kit. Other initiatives targeting policy-makers can contribute to relevant debates, and those aimed at the mainstream press can promote a wider discussion.

Foundation staff see the very process of outreach as an opportunity for collaboration between grantees and also between grantees and community organizations. The foundation encourages its grantees to establish partnerships with a variety of grassroots groups in the early stages of outreach, and it will often bring together grantees working on related issues. For example, a grantee of the foundation's Reproductive Health and Population program, the National AIDS Fund (formerly known as the National Community AIDS Partnership), met with P.O.V. at a Community Partner Meeting to identify regional coordinators for *The Heart of the Matter* outreach campaign.

Furthermore, outreach activities can establish new relationships within the community at large. National health and AIDS-prevention organizations enlisted

their local chapters in the outreach efforts. These regional agencies hosted screenings for health and social service agencies, which helped generate grassroots support. Ultimately, *The Heart of the Matter* had a tremendous impact in part because of the partnerships between the grantee and a variety of organizations.

OTHER OUTREACH STRATEGIES

Media Works, a nonprofit production company dedicated to creating materials on public health issues, also used a similar collaborative approach with great success around a different film. Media Works had produced *Sex Education in America: AIDS and Adolescence*, a one-hour documentary exploring the effect of the AIDS epidemic on America's youth through interviews with HIV-positive teens. Several national health and education organizations provided research support during the production. After the national broadcast on public television stations, Media Works collaborated with these organizations on outreach. Other groups, after seeing the documentary on television, contacted the producers and joined the effort as well. As a result of the collaborations that took place before and after the broadcast, *Sex Education in America* became a powerful, relevant tool for communities to use in their AIDS education programs.

The documentary also created a demand among educators and public health experts for a shorter program for use in schools and with youth organizations. With the foundation's support, Media Works responded by producing *In Our Own Words: Teens and AIDS*, a 20-minute classroom video. To reach its target audience of adolescents with *In Our Own Words*, Media Works once again collaborated with national health, education and AIDS service organizations, some of which had participated in the outreach efforts for *Sex Education in America*. Dozens of others became interested in the project after a screening at a national conference of health educators. Moreover, a large corporate grant provided complimentary copies of the video to approximately 2,000 schools and youth-serving organizations.

Many schools and community-based groups have since incorporated *In Our Own Words* into their national health curricula, and the Boys and Girls Clubs of America and the American Red Cross have added it as a supplement to their joint

AIDS program. The *Oprah Winfrey Show* has also called attention to the program nationwide. Ms. Winfrey featured excerpts from the video, interviewed the producer and encouraged schools across the country to integrate *In Our Own Words* into their AIDS education efforts.

Some of the most successful audience development strategies devised by foundation grantees have been shaped with the guidance of outreach coordinators, educators and experts. Family Communications, Inc.—which received a grant for *Different and the Same*, a series of short videos designed to help children in the early elementary grades recognize and deal with prejudice—provides an example of this approach. The producers had an advisory board that included a diverse group of teachers, psychologists and sociologists. With their help, Family Communications created a Teachers Guide containing discussion questions, suggested activities and additional resources, making it easier for teachers to incorporate the materials into their classroom activities. The producers also involved teachers and public television station outreach coordinators in various stages of production. They quickly discovered that early involvement in the project stimulated interest in using the completed materials.

Other effective strategies involve a variety of media to promote broadcasts about sensitive issues and to encourage discussion and action afterwards. P.O.V. conducted an outreach campaign for *Silverlake Life: The View from Here*, an autobiographical film about a gay couple's battle with AIDS. *Silverlake Life* received extensive local and national press coverage urging the public to watch the program. P.O.V. also enlisted radio stations to promote the broadcast and have follow-up call-in shows to encourage viewer feedback. In another effort to reach people dealing with AIDS, P.O.V. contacted AIDS hotlines nationwide to spread the word about the broadcast and included the telephone number of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at the end of the program. After the broadcast, the audience was urged to send P.O.V. video letters with their reactions to *Silverlake Life*.

In addition to traditional media, outreach campaigns should make use of new technologies to reach a broader public and contribute to a project's longevity. For some projects, tele-conferences may enhance community discussion. The World Wide Web, e-mail, CD-ROMs and other interactive technology also offer many opportunities for innovative outreach.

EVALUATION

Grantees should also evaluate the effects of their audience development campaigns. Carriage reports, ratings and viewer feedback demonstrate immediate effect. Discussions with coordinators of public television stations, members of participating organizations and others can give an in-depth look at how a variety of people used the program. Press coverage and critical attention before and after the broadcast, op-ed articles and awards may also be used to gauge immediate success.

Mid-term impact can be measured by looking at the post-broadcast use of the program and its ancillary materials. The incorporation of the program into a school or training program might represent long-range success.

By looking at any and all of these factors, grantees can improve their outreach strategies. For instance, P.O.V. evaluated the immediate results of their outreach around *The Heart of the Matter* and learned the importance of lead time and informational materials in enlisting the support of public television stations and organizations. Several grantees, including Family Communications, have hired research firms to evaluate the dissemination and use of their programs and accompanying materials. Foundation staff also examine evaluations to determine the impact of media projects.

LESSONS LEARNED

The Foundation has learned several lessons from its experiences with media grants:

RECOGNIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF OUTREACH, Foundation staff strongly encourage producers to begin developing outreach strategies during the planning stage of their projects.

FUNDERS SHOULD NOT EXPECT OUTREACH EXPERTISE in all filmmakers, but rather should introduce them to organizations that specialize in the field.



TO CULTIVATE PARTNERSHIPS WITH LOCAL

ORGANIZATIONS, outreach experts should identify those who are already advocates for the cause and involve them early in the planning process so that the groups can use the partnership to advance their own agendas.

OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE

Public television continues to evolve. Its federal funding is being reexamined, and corporate sponsorship for programs is in flux. More than ever, foundations and private funding sources are being called upon to support programs that address tough issues while reaching diverse audiences. The public television system is also becoming more decentralized: getting a program on the PBS schedule does not imply that it will be aired nationwide. Thus, identifying and targeting audiences is essential.

Foundation staff see the very process of outreach as an opportunity for collaboration between grantees and also between grantees and community organizations.

Finally, independent filmmakers cannot rely on PBS to coordinate outreach campaigns for all its programs, nor can they expect national strategies to be successful in reaching local audiences. Due to media fragmentation and options such as cable television, the Internet, and CD-ROMs, filmmakers will have to increase their promotional efforts to compete with other programming and ensure maximum effect. In our new media environment, outreach is imperative, and The Ford Foundation—along with other foundations—can help producers develop and implement strategies to succeed in educating and mobilizing viewers.

Victoria Rodriguez Thiessen worked at The Ford Foundation for two years as a program assistant in the Media Projects office.



GRANTMAKERS ON FUNDING SOCIAL ISSUE MEDIA PROJECTS

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

by Raymond Rigoglioso

In 1996, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation launched a year-long initiative to foster a national dialogue as part of its public relations activities around end-of-life issues. In an unusual step for a grantmaker, the foundation developed, coordinated and funded the video-based curriculum centered around the national PBS broadcast of the Fred Friendly seminar *Before I Die*. By the end of the project, hundreds of nonprofit organizations around the country had engaged in activities to bring this difficult subject out into the open to help improve the quality of life for dying people.

Born out of findings from a 10-year foundation-sponsored study that found that both patients and their caregivers fail to communicate effectively about end-of-life decisions such as pain management and last wishes, the foundation worked with the producers of the Fred Friendly Seminar series, aired on PBS and broadcast through Thirteen/WNET in New York City, to develop a program to address this issue. The program, taped in Washington, D.C., and broadcast nationally on April 22, 1997, brought together a panel of experts who engaged in a dramatic discussion on end-of-life situations. More than 70 senior representatives of national health care, patient support, voluntary health and


other interested organizations attended.

The broadcast, however, was only the first step in the comprehensive outreach effort. Prior to the broadcast, the foundation and Thirteen/WNET sponsored a videoconference to train organizations working on end-of-life issues to conduct community discussions on the topic. Throughout the country, public television stations—often partnering with bioethics centers, hospices and hospitals—downlinked the videoconference, inviting constituents as well as other interested groups, such as heart, cancer and Alzheimer’s associations. In some sites the nonprofits themselves took the lead. In all, more than 40 sites around the country downlinked the videoconference, and more than 500 key people engaged in end-of-life issues participated.

To help videoconference participants promote discussions about end-of-life issues at the local level, the foundation produced viewers guides to accompany the upcoming broadcast. Additionally, it distributed a five-part, specially edited version of the broadcast to community organizations to assist their memberships in discussing and improving care and caring at the end of life. The foundation produced a Resource Kit to accompany the videotape, which features discussion questions, role-playing guides and corresponding community outreach activities.

The response to outreach around *Before I Die* was impressive. National groups sent organization-wide mailings and placed announcements in their newsletters promoting the broadcast and the videoconference, encouraging their affiliates to participate in community forums. The Oncology Nursing Society screened the program at its 1997 annual meeting and held a question-and-answer session on how to use it on the local level. The National Hospice Organization ran an article about the program in its publication, mentioning the resources and videotapes available. The result: over 100 hospices requested Resource Kits and videos and planned on hosting community forums to discuss end-of-life issues and the services they offer. Through word-of-mouth, a bioethics group heard about the program and placed an article in its member newsletter, eliciting tremendous response and requests for outreach materials.

For The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the *Before I Die* effort proved to be an extremely effective way to help meet its program goals around chronic care and successfully supplemented its public relations campaign, Last Acts, an effort



to improve care and caring at the end of life. Long a funder of television programs, the foundation has recently chosen to focus on only those media projects that have a solid community-based outreach component.

"It's about using television to go beyond entertainment, beyond even education," explained Marc Kaplan, program officer for the *Before I Die* program.

"Television needs to be conceptualized and coordinated within a network of constituencies that can turn images and words into an enriching and long-lasting benefit."

In fact, as Kaplan sees it, "everything is in the follow-up." Even today, community groups continue to request Resource Kits and videotapes, and outreach activities have yet to crest. "I'm looking for this project to have a long shelf life," Kaplan concluded. "I hope that this broadcast and the outreach materials will slowly, quietly change the world a little for the better."

Raymond Rigoglioso was the director of communications and development at the Center for Strategic Communications.

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