



# STATE OF THE FIELD:

A REPORT FROM  
THE DOCUMENTARY SUSTAINABILITY SUMMIT



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A report of the Documentary Sustainability Summit held February 10, 2017 at the National Endowment for the Arts offices in Washington, DC in collaboration with the International Documentary Association.

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# PREFACE

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On behalf of our respective organizations, we are pleased to present this report as an extension of conversations from the Documentary Sustainability Summit held on February 10, 2017 at the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, DC. It is with sincere hope that these discussions inspire ongoing dialogue and action throughout the field in pursuit of tangible strategies leading towards a sustainable and healthy ecosystem for our documentary filmmakers, producers, and distribution platforms.

Comprised of voices from the field, the following report represents a reflection of the day-to-day realities of maintaining a documentary career in an ever-changing cultural and business marketplace. Accompanied by recommendations throughout, these reflections are aimed to empower the documentary community (and related stakeholders) to assert agency in shaping a forward-thinking future that re-envision current systems.

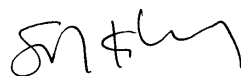
In sharing this report, we urge all readers to consider their role in this ecosystem. Whether you are a content producer, festival programmer, distributor, public official, consumer, or beyond, there are ways you can contribute to improving the sustainability of the field by using your respective networks and resources to raise awareness and take action on these issues. Collectively, we can transform the field and dramatically impact the ability for many more artists to have sustainable careers in years to come.

As a closing note, we sincerely thank the dozens of individuals who gave their voice, time, and talent to participate in this event. This summit was greatly enriched by the high quality and honest perspectives of some of the most talented and accomplished practitioners in the field, and by public servants who demonstrated a genuine interest in exploring contemporary issues impacting the documentary community. Thank you for your time and support.

We look forward to continuing this conversation together.



Jax Deluca  
Media Arts Director,  
National Endowment for the Arts



Simon Kilmurry  
Executive Director,  
International Documentary Association

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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On February 10, 2017, the National Endowment for the Arts and the International Documentary Association hosted a one-day Documentary Sustainability Summit featuring 80 filmmakers, producers, distributors, film festival representatives, funders, and other stakeholders in the documentary community, as well as leaders from the federal, state, and local governments (including representatives from nine federal agencies). Through panel presentations and small group activities, conference participants shared their perspectives on the issues facing the community with a goal of articulating tangible, actionable strategies and initiatives to positively impact the field.

The purpose of this report is to reflect current conversations in the field and provide an overview of key findings and actions that will strengthen the documentary ecosystem. Case studies are featured throughout this report to serve as examples that contribute to building sustainable infrastructure for the documentary community. Additional details regarding the Documentary Sustainability Summit, such as the summit agenda and detailed reflections that emerged from group work, are located in this report as Appendices.

The following are key themes and action items that emerged from the summit.

## Key Findings

1. Cross-Sector Connectivity Is Central to Sustainability
2. Peer Networks Need Strengthening
3. Public Sector Needs More Engagement
4. A Sustainable Future Is Dependent on Research
5. Everyone Is a Stakeholder

## Action Items

Stakeholders at all levels of the ecosystem are recommended to take ownership of this conversation and move the work forward with the following recommendations:

1. Strengthen the field through knowledge exchange, technical assistance, cross-sector collaboration, and professional networks.
2. Research, data, and metrics are critical to the sustainability and success of the ecosystem.
3. Public sector needs continual engagement from stakeholders to accelerate its role as funder, convener, and strategist and also examine the impact of various policies on the sector.



# KEY FINDING #1

## Cross-Sector Connectivity Is Central to Sustainability

The sustainability of the documentary field depends on forward thinking, cross-sector engagement that finds solutions by recognizing the interconnected nature of its challenges and opportunities. While we live in an era where more documentaries are produced and viewed than at in any other point in our history, the documentary community exists in an ever-shifting landscape of evolving technologies, emerging business models, transforming consumer behavior, and uncertainty about future legal and regulatory frameworks.

In part, because of these shifting structures and a lack of reliable business models, independent content creators often depend upon alternate revenue streams (such as a second job or freelance contracts) to manage living expenses during development and production phases of a film. Frequently, this contributes to burnout, delayed production schedules, incurred debt, and risk of abandoning a project altogether. These types of challenges are significant and pervasive throughout the field. By assessing past, present, and future revenue models and engaging with parallel arts disciplines, the field has an opportunity to pursue economic structures that benefit all members of the documentary ecosystem.

During the convening, stakeholders representing all parts of the documentary ecosystem explored factors contributing to economic challenges and emphasized cross-sector collaborations as a potential source of solutions in the following areas.

### Evolving Technologies

- Nascent cross-sector collaborations provide insight into the potential for future redefinition of nonfiction storytelling. While today's focus may be on short-form digital distribution and emerging virtual reality (VR) opportunities, the field will benefit from continued exploration of how advancing technologies can redefine both the art form and audience engagement.
- The digital transformation is fundamentally altering how documentaries are produced, distributed, and viewed by audiences. Streaming technology, smart phones, and other advances are also making global distribution possible in ways that were unthinkable two decades ago. It is safe to say we are in the midst of this transformation, not at the end.
- The intersection between the tech industry and digital storytellers will be increasingly central to the future of the documentary field. Emerging forms of technology, such as VR and 360-degree filmmaking, offers provocative new opportunities for artists to explore more experiential forms of documentary. Though expensive and require a new technical skillset, organizations and producers are beginning to take advantage of this transformation.
- Partnerships with technology innovators are essential for creators of independent content and are providing new opportunities for a mutually beneficial exchange of resources between partnering organizations and individuals. For example, tech companies that offer incentives for their personnel to volunteer their tech-savvy skills to a nonprofit organization offers unique value to all parties involved. The field needs to continue facilitating and tracking the impact of such collaborations.

- Short-form documentaries are increasingly prevalent in the mainstream as digital delivery platforms mature and consumer demand evolves. Media platforms—including the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, NPR, Refinery 29, the *Atlantic*, and others—are investing in short-form documentaries as a way of supplementing traditional nonfiction storytelling. This is emerging as a strong new opportunity for filmmakers, although one that is often underfunded.

## Diminishing and Emerging Business Models

- The digital transformation will continue to disrupt traditional models for production, promotion, and distribution, which comes with serious financial implications. While it is challenging to control those dynamics, it is possible to understand the emerging marketplace through economic research, collaborations with emerging technologies, investments in professional networks, sharing of best practices, and dialogue with policymakers to ensure the public sector is aware of how their decisions can positively or negatively impact the community.
- It is critical for the community to take an active role in establishing more equitable systems. Historic business models based on in-person screenings, licensing, and sale/rental of physical products have rapidly evolved. Much work needs to be done to evaluate how past and present business models generate income for independent content creators, which can inform the evolution of future business models.
- The business models of the film and television industries are moving away from consumers “purchasing” and “owning” content and toward “accessing” content. The evolution from a physical to a digital marketplace mirrors the music industry’s previous transition, a shift that proved historically disruptive to longstanding business and compensation structures and can inform the future economic structures of the documentary community.
- User-generated and streaming platforms are becoming increasingly popular ways to distribute and consume media, yet often fail to generate significant revenue for creators of independent content. In contrast, the digital download and DVD marketplaces are fading, which in many cases still comprise a significant source of revenue.
- Access to capital, supplemental income, and potential distribution platforms are impacted by the shifting dynamics in the cable television industry. Cable television networks program thousands of hours featuring nonfiction and reality-based programs, in many circumstances providing work for independent documentary creators. Artists who rely on this income are wary about the potential impact of the cable industry’s evolution.
- Advancements in broadband deployment have seeded greater integration of documentary film into K-12 and higher education. As the distribution mechanism moves from physical product to streaming, the education and documentary communities need to explore appropriate compensation models that reflect the value of this content in an educational context.
- Direct-to-consumer streaming services (including Netflix, Amazon Video, HBO Now, FilmStruck, and other over-the-top streaming services) provide consumers with HD-quality presentation without a cable subscription, offering a window into decentralized business models and revenue opportunities of the future.



### Policy and Public Institutions

- The field needs to fully engage policymakers and public institutions in discussions about the complexity of the emerging ecosystem, including how capital flows to fund projects, the evolution of consumer electronic devices that allow content to be streamed, the integration of nonfiction film into K-12 and university education, future generations of platforms and services to deliver content to consumers, and the role of intellectual property and antitrust oversight in a digital marketplace.
- Legal and regulatory decisions at the federal level will determine the future of broadband policy and the open Internet.
- There is a level of uncertainty around net neutrality and how decisions might affect the ability of filmmakers to market and deliver product direct to consumers.
- The transformation of the public broadcasting ecosystem impacts their role as broadcaster, funding partner, and distribution platform for documentary films.
- Federal and state arts agencies' roles in providing professional development, technical assistance, and audience development are evolving.
- Public schools, universities, and community colleges—critical partners in the documentary ecosystem—are increasingly integrating documentary storytelling into curricula and public programming.
- Libraries are increasingly viewing themselves as community catalysts, working to elevate conversations and bridge communities, offering unique opportunities for collaboration with professionals in the documentary field.

**In** this historic gathering of the great documentarians of our time, it was sobering to realize the personal cost each of us have quietly borne in making independent films that dare to take up so many of the critical issues that cannot be dependent on the commercial media industry. We need initiatives for integrating arts into the classroom and the workplace, tax incentives for fair remuneration and sustainability for artists, and government programs to kickstart and harness the enormous power and impact of nonfiction storytelling in civic life.

- **Maria Agui Carter**,  
Filmmaker, Iguana Films



# The State of the Documentary Field

According to the inaugural report, [The State of the Documentary Field: 2016 Survey on Documentary Industry Members](#), released by the [Center for Media & Social Impact at American University](#), making a living is the most pressing challenge facing the documentary field today. As a result of these findings, the documentary community is urgently tasked to establish stronger, more sustainable infrastructures that better support the diverse ecosystem of independent media makers and addresses issues of funding and distribution.

The following are excerpts from the pilot report, which has broader plans to provide a longitudinal analysis of those working in the field.

## Challenges & Motivations

- By far, documentary film professionals see making a living as the most pressing issue facing the industry. They see the greatest challenges as funding for documentaries and sustainable careers, with more than two-thirds (67 percent) indicating these two categories are the “most challenging issues” today.
- Despite challenges, documentary professionals view this as an exciting time in the field. Eight in ten (83 percent) agree or strongly agree that they are excited about the future of documentary. About two-thirds (64 percent) feel strongly this is a “golden era” for documentary.
- In terms of specific trends in the field, documentary professionals are most optimistic (“very optimistic” and “optimistic”) about: (1) new opportunities for online distribution (94 percent), (2) documentary’s social impact (92 percent), (3) web-based short-form documentaries (90 percent), and (4) new audiences discovering documentaries to watch (90 percent). They are least optimistic about the distribution of documentaries in theaters (62 percent “not optimistic” or “not at all optimistic”) and crowd-funding for their work (41 percent).

## Careers & Funding

- Only about 22 percent of documentary professionals say they are able to make their primary living from documentary filmmaking; about three-quarters (78 percent) say they are not at all able to make a living from their documentary work.
- Combined, more than two-thirds (66 percent) of documentary makers made either no salary at all (36 percent), or less than 50 percent of their salary (30 percent), from their most recent documentaries.
- Half of the documentary film professionals surveyed report spending \$5,000 to \$50,000 on their most recent documentary projects. More than a quarter (27 percent) spent between \$20,000 and \$50,000 to fund their documentary work.
- Foundation grants remain the top option as a main source of documentary funding (33 percent), followed by personal finances (24 percent) and broadcast and cable TV licensing deals (21 percent). Entities that are not at all sources of documentary funding, according to these documentary professionals, are film studios, online streaming platforms, and corporate funders.

- Documentary film professionals find revenue from their documentary work through a mix of non-film-industry sources and some traditional industry streams. About 61 percent of documentary professionals say educational distribution and DVD sales are tied at the top of the list for revenue from documentary work (as a contributing or main source of revenue). Other top revenue streams (as contributing or main sources of revenue), in order, are grassroots and community screenings (52 percent), speaking engagements (49 percent), international TV broadcast licensing (46 percent), and self-distribution (44 percent).

## Distribution & Format

- Most documentary filmmakers still predominantly create long-form stories (feature-length or :60 broadcast length); more than two-thirds (66 percent) produced a long-form documentary as their most recent film project.
- Film festivals are the primary form of distribution (73 percent), followed by grassroots/community screenings and educational screenings (both 49 percent), DVD sales (43 percent) and public TV (39 percent). Premium cable and cable VOD remain elusive.
- In terms of working in different formats, these documentary professionals are interested in working in new spaces: web-only documentaries (45 percent have not worked in this format but plan to do so), virtual reality (45 percent have not worked in this format but plan to do so), and scripted film and TV (32 percent).

## FURTHER READINGS ON THE STATE OF THE FIELD

### [Show Me the Money! At DOC NYC, Making Your Skills Pay as an Independent Filmmaker](#) by Audrey Ewell

This article provides an overview of a panel discussion led by producer and director Esther Robinson at [DOC NYC](#) (November 2016) about how to sustain yourself financially while also building a career as a filmmaker. Insights from professionals in the field, such as Carrie Lozano (*The Ballad of Fred Hersch*), Yoruba Richen (*The New Black*), and Jenni Wolfson (Chicken & Egg Pictures), conjure a realistic picture of the challenges many filmmakers face today.

### [The Messy Truth Behind the Day Job as a Documentarian](#) by Lance Kramer

This article is a detailed account from independent documentary filmmaker Lance Kramer (Meridian Hill Pictures) about all of the steps it took to fund his first-time feature-length documentary film, *City of Trees*, which included the taking on several contract jobs and navigating public resources, such as a state-administered film production rebate program.

## Brooklyn Castle: Charting a Path towards Sustainability

Independently producing and releasing a documentary film involves substantial investment—financial and otherwise—from creators, production teams, and a variety of partners and organizations. While directing her first feature-length documentary film *Brooklyn Castle*, Katie Dellamaggiore experienced both challenges and successes in producing, screening, distributing, and financing her work. Released in 2012, *Brooklyn Castle* follows five members of the chess team at an inner-city junior high school (I.S. 318) where a majority of students live below the poverty line. Through community partnerships and national distribution via public broadcast, the film harnessed the power of nonfiction storytelling to effectively illustrate the impact of after-school activities on students' academic success and well-being.

In the following case study, we interviewed Dellamaggiore to get a closer look at her experience as a first-time filmmaker navigating common challenges that face those working in the field today as an independent documentary professional.

### Challenges as a First-Time Filmmaker

For Dellamaggiore, raising capital funds to support *Brooklyn Castle* during the early production stages was a substantial challenge, and one that, she noted, is experienced by many independent creators. With the early stages of the film's development and production entirely funded by Dellamaggiore and her partner, producer and editor Nelson Dellamaggiore, she estimated the two incurred \$40,000 in credit card debt to cover film-related expenses. Due to limited options for early phase project investment, using credit and working for free to finance the initial stages of production is an increasingly common practice in the field. Doing so, Dellamaggiore noted, can pose additional challenges later on for documentary creators, as interest can accrue well before film-related revenue can be generated. Without receiving compensation for their work on *Brooklyn Castle* at this early stage, furthermore, the additional expenses in lost wages brought the team's total initial investment to an estimated \$100,000.

In addition to upfront financial investments, documentary professionals often need to offset the costs of independent projects by taking on salaried, contract, or freelance work to cover day-to-day expenses. Dellamaggiore, for example, worked as a television producer much of the time she was directing *Brooklyn Castle*, which served as her main source of income during this period. Although taking on contract work while balancing an independent project is not ideal, it is often necessary to make ends meet. However, Dellamaggiore observed, the time spent lining up a steady stream of contract work can be another job in itself. She noted that professional development programs offering pipelines to a steady stream of commercial projects could be a powerful way that organizations can help alleviate financial stress and provide more reliable sources of income for artists in this field.

Balancing time and financial commitments were only one portion of the efforts involved with successfully launching the project. While completing the film, for example, Dellamaggiore was also entering the early stages of first-time motherhood. Because she was not entitled to benefits that often accompany a traditional full-time job, determining how to take maternity leave without pay or employee benefits, paying out-of-pocket for medical expenses, and touring *Brooklyn Castle* at film festivals with a newborn baby added another complex layer of personal and financial challenges to navigate. Now working on her second feature-length documentary, Dellamaggiore noted the process is somewhat easier the second time around, but creating a sustainable life balance and having the ability to produce her independent projects on a full-time basis still remains a challenge.

### Funding and Organizational Support

As production continued on *Brooklyn Castle*, Dellamaggiore spent a substantial amount of time researching and submitting applications for grants, professional development programs, and other opportunities. She was successful in receiving financial support from organizations such as **Chicken & Egg**, **International Documentary Association**, and **The Fledgling Fund**. Many of these opportunities also came with a significant amount of non-monetary support,

such as mentorship and professional development. [Chicken & Egg](#), for example, provided Dellamaggiore with financial resources and a wealth of network- and career-building and opportunities, from offering workshops to making industry connections. These opportunities have proven to be powerful investments in her overall career, as Dellamaggiore is able to continue leveraging the resources offered by these organizations in support of future projects. For her second feature-length documentary, these organizations and connections are among the first she turned to in embarking on a new project, proving peer mentorship and professional networks to be an equally valuable resource as funds themselves.

### Funding and Organizational Support

- BRITDOC's Good Pitch program
- Chicken & Egg Grantee
- The Fledging Fund Grantee
- IFP Spotlight on Documentaries
- IDA's Fiscal Sponsorship Program
- Neda Nobari Foundation Grantee
- Film Fatales Collective

### Partnerships and Impact

To engage a widespread audience, Dellamaggiore was strategic in partnering with a range of cross-sector entities, which later enabled the film to be used as an effective means to raise awareness of the importance of after-school programs. Early on, Dellamaggiore developed a partnership with the **New York City Department of Education** through requesting approval to film at I.S. 318. At a time when funding for after-school programs was under scrutiny, a partnership with the **New York City Council** offered opportunities to screen the film at City Hall, and for council members to attend festival screenings and public events. The film proved to have had a demonstrable impact; in 2013, the City Council restored crucial funding for after-school programs proposed as a possible cut to the city budget. The restored funding was announced by Mayor de Blasio at a press conference outside of I.S. 318.

In addition to local education and government, national partnerships with the **Afterschool Alliance** and the **United States Chess Federation** helped develop audience for the film by hosting screenings at local network affiliates across the nation, while providing a compelling story to educate the public and policymakers on a particular issue. The Chess Federation supported the film's community screenings and theatrical release to affiliate chess groups, while the Afterschool Alliance provided legislative context and supported screenings focused on impact to demonstrate the value of local and national funding for after-school programs.

### Distribution, Investment, and Return

While reaching community outreach and impact goals with ease, meeting monetary goals through commercial distribution of *Brooklyn Castle* proved challenging. Dellamaggiore called the financial structure of investment and return for *Brooklyn Castle* a "waterfall," in which tiers of investors and distributors receive funds generated by the film's release first—often to repay initial investments in the film—followed by payment to the production crew and lastly to filmmakers themselves (if there are funds remaining). While Dellamaggiore was able to attain domestic distribution and project financing through Producers Distribution Agency (PDA), which secures outside investors and provides an alternative theatrical distribution model, she strongly suggested that first-time filmmakers include payment for their own work when constructing a distribution agreement. Whichever way financial and distribution structures are approached, documentary professionals are often the last ones to benefit and are compensated for their initial investments toward the end of project's lifecycle, rather than earlier in the process.

### Distribution Highlights

- Domestic distribution through [Cinetic Media/Producers Distribution Agency](#) (PDA)
- Dellamaggiore was able to retain rights to *Brooklyn Castle*, particularly for international distribution
- 50 theatrical release markets
- Digital release on iTunes, Netflix, Amazon, and Movies on Demand

To support production and post-production costs on the film, for example, Dellamaggiore's production company (Rescued Media) partnered with Indelible Marks, working out a structure in which each entity will split reimbursement on investments in the film 25/75 until the respective amounts are fully repaid. International distribution of *Brooklyn Castle*, as well as selling the rights for a narrative version of the film, has generated some revenue toward these goals, allowing Dellamaggiore to begin paying down expenses, such as the \$40,000 of credit card debt incurred during initial stages of the film's development. In addition, Dellamaggiore's distribution agreement with PDA included a deferred salary of \$60,000 for her work on the film, which will be preceded by repayment of substantial financial support from a single investor. In each structure, the goal will be to move to a profit-sharing model once all investments are repaid. A key factor in the ability to generate revenue from *Brooklyn Castle* (which will make its way back to her as the creator of the film), Dellamaggiore cited, is retaining as many rights to the film as possible.

This process exhibits the entrepreneurial nature of independent filmmaking, as productions are often approached like a small business. For example, *Brooklyn Castle* was produced by Rescued Media, a film and television company co-founded by Dellamaggiore and her partner. This meant the couple were involved with all of the day-to-day aspects of running a small business, right down to the accounting. Wearing many hats can be exhausting in the long run, Dellamaggiore warned, as the constant hustle can lead to burn-out and exhaustion.

## Expanding Impact

In addition to distributing the film commercially, *Brooklyn Castle* continued to reach audiences through targeted community screenings throughout the country. A grant from the **Fledgling Fund** allowed Dellamaggiore to hire an outreach director during the post-production phase of *Brooklyn Castle*. This role was instrumental in building audiences for the film, and resulted in more than 100 high-impact screenings nationwide. It was critical, she noted, to have this type of project funding managed by a hired professional, as coordinating logistics takes a considerable amount of time, which is challenging to do when on the road.

## Financial Structures for *Brooklyn Castle*

### Filmmakers and Private Investors:

- 25/75 split for reimbursement of investments from both filmmakers and investing partners
- Currently repaid in part by international distribution revenue
- Goal is to reach cost-sharing of profits

### Distribution Partners and Private Investors:

- Reimbursement of \$500,000 from a single investor (almost repaid in full)
- Followed by deferred salary (\$60,000) and other expenses paid to filmmaker
- Goal is to reach cost-sharing of profits between single investor and filmmakers, with a 5 percent distribution fee paid to PDA from domestic distribution

The film's national broadcast through the PBS television program *POV* also offered opportunities for both widespread distribution and targeted impact on educational audiences. Once the film was released via Netflix and other digital platforms, convincing educators to pay for its use in schools became a challenging task. *POV* helped fill this gap by organizing a [national outreach campaign](#) for *Brooklyn Castle*, targeting youth, educators, and policymakers through community screenings and public events. *POV* also created [free curriculum guides, lesson plans, and toolkits](#) for educators to use alongside screenings of the film.



## Screenings and Impact Campaigns

National broadcast through PBS program *POV*

- In addition to securing national broadcast, *POV* distributed toolkits, managed station grants to produce local content and engagement events, hosted and coordinated screenings with partner organizations, and managed a promotional media campaign

*Independent screenings:*

- 100 community and school-based screenings
- 30 screenings at film festivals
- 115 outreach screenings

*POV American Graduate Campaign*

- National engagement campaign with *POV* and Corporation for Public Broadcasting
- 645 events held across the country
- 97,000 attendees at broadcast stations and partner events

*Impact Campaign Highlights:*

- 15 screenings with Afterschool Alliance affiliates
- Two screenings with congressional representatives in the Afterschool For All Challenge on Capitol Hill
- Ten screenings hosted by United States Chess Federation affiliate groups
- Additional screening partnerships: American Federation of Teachers, New York City Council, New York Department of Education, Wallace Foundation, America's Promise Alliance, SXSW EDU, Google, National Ad Council, Teach for America, Scholastic, Harvard Graduate School of Education, and BOOST (Best Out Of School Time) Collaborative Conference

## Questions for Stakeholders

- Alleviating the stress of unreliable sources of income (such as short-term contract jobs) can be helpful for documentary professionals. How can funders and organizations help create a stronger pipeline that connects filmmakers to commercial ventures, paid gigs, and other opportunities offering reliable sources of income?
- A particular challenge for documentary professionals is securing funds early in the process of production, which caused Dellamaggiore to rely on credit card financing. How can organizations, investors, funders, distributors, and other entities work together to provide cash flow solutions that prevent independent content creators from accruing debt at high interest rates?
- Dellamaggiore states that organizational support has been critical in developing her professional trajectory as an artist. How can funders, investors, and organizations promote models in the field that go beyond short-term, project-based investments to investments in the long-term development of an artist's career?
- This case study demonstrates substantial need for artist-friendly support in negotiating financial agreements. How can organizations, investors, funders, distributors, and other entities work together to ensure financial agreements are mindful of working towards a more sustainable future for independent content creators?

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**The** revolutionary impact of the social web on traditional models for creating and distributing media demands courage, a long view, and determination to realize new and more-inclusive approaches to our work. As we turn our focus to "making stories with and for people" in local communities, we have not only an opportunity but a call to action in leading change.



- **Sue Schardt**,  
CEO, Association of Independents in Radio (AIR)

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# KEY FINDING #2

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## Peer Networks Need Strengthening

In the interest of developing a sustainable future, the documentary community will largely benefit from strategic network building, alongside a continued exploration of cross-sector collaborations through advisory groups and networking opportunities designed to strategically explore new ways of working across multiple sectors. Through initiatives that establish stronger relationships and multifaceted networks, there is an opportunity for professional development, knowledge exchange, and learning across disciplines, addressing previous gaps in communication. In turn, the realization of these interconnected networks can bring a new level of collective power and resiliency to the documentary community.

- Collaborative infrastructures can be strengthened through convening local, state, regional, and national networks on a regular basis to provide continuity and focus on the development of a more sustainable and equitable ecosystem for independent content creators.
- Strengthened peer networks create the potential for organizations and filmmakers to pool resources, share success stories, align programming, and explore opportunities to invest in collaborative infrastructure (for example, legal and accounting support, impact campaigns, publicity and outreach efforts, etc).
- Internal and external siloing within the greater documentary landscape creates artificial barriers that restrict the ability of the field to collectively build solutions that address the larger sustainability challenges. Though multiple sectors engage with documentary film, it is challenging to get these intersecting entities to understand and embrace their role as stakeholders in the sustainability conversation. Though different on the surface, there are many opportunities to intersect intentionally and align programs that build pipelines to serve those working in the field at every stage of their career.
- Parallel forms, such as feature film, narrative and reality television, print and broadcast journalism, the music industry, commercial and noncommercial radio, and podcasting, share key characteristics—they are in the business of creating and distributing content to consumers. Much can be learned from these various forms, as they are similarly immersed in efforts to redefine the business aspects of their community.
- While there is a tendency to fixate on replicating traditional business models within a digital marketplace, conversations need to focus on growth instead of survival. Asserting agency in embracing entirely new models for distribution and compensation is essential. For example, the podcasting community is showing signs of economic viability through the development of an entire new delivery mechanism, which can provide valuable lessons to the broader documentary field.
- Organizations and independent producers operate on lean budgets and staff, contributing to the reinforcement of isolated networks. A deliberate revitalization of peer networks is critical, but must be strategic and mindful of time and capacity constraints.

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**Regional** film festivals provide an ideal opportunity to bring together filmmakers, audiences, and members of the community into dialogue with these broader, national conversations, whether about research, new business models, technology innovations, or even how public policy decisions impacts our community. An intentional focus on peer networks is central to accelerating these strategies.



- **Sean Flynn**,  
Program Director,  
Points North Documentary Forum

## Southern Circuit: Public Sector Partnerships with Regional Focus

Finding the time, support, and resources necessary to organize a touring film program can be a challenging task to undertake for artists and nonprofit organizations alike. To help address this need, the regional arts organization South Arts established **Southern Circuit**, offering opportunities for filmmakers to screen their works at nonprofits to engage audiences through a multiveneue tour of independent film in the American South. In this case study, we look at how South Arts leverages the resources of arts organizations, supports independent artists, and engages local communities through their regionally focused model of public sector arts partnership.

### How It Works: The Southern Circuit Touring Model

Southern Circuit partners with nonprofit institutions to provide independent filmmakers with the paid opportunity to participate in a regional tour, screen their films for new audiences, and engage in discussions about the content and production of their films. Now in its 34th year, the program has screened more than 300 films and engaged audiences in more than 100 communities across the South. Southern Circuit is currently composed of three separate touring circuits, each with six filmmakers or filmmaking teams, who travel to as many as eight partnering locations throughout the southeastern United States.

### Nonprofit Organization Partnerships

Nonprofit organizations apply to participate as screening partners in the Southern Circuit touring program through an open call process. Screening partners are selected based on their ability to screen films (criteria such as available equipment, screening space, and potential audience) as well as their interest in presenting new independent film. Each screening partner provides a participation fee between \$5,500 (returning partners) and \$6,000 (new partners) for a season consisting of six screenings. With this participation fee, South Arts coordinates the film submission and review process; curates the final group of 40 films for consideration; and manages all of the tour logistics, including screening schedules, travel bookings, per diems, and the development of publicity materials. All screening partners later receive a \$2,400 grant award from South Arts to provide an artist honorarium of \$400 for each of the touring filmmakers.

### Film Submission and Selection Process

Any filmmaker based in the United States may apply to the program. In addition, South Arts staff works with film industry professionals and media arts funders to identify potential films and filmmakers for Southern Circuit participation. Screening partners are actively involved in the process of selecting the films that will screen in their communities. For the 2016-2017 programming season, South Arts worked with 21 screening partners to present 126 film screenings and filmmaker appearances for local audiences.

### Support for Independent Filmmakers

Selected filmmakers receive a \$400 honorarium for each screening on the tour (not to exceed \$3,200), paid travel expenses, a per diem of \$200 per evening away from home to cover expenses for meals and lodging, logistics and travel support from the South Arts staff, and marketing support from South Arts and screening partners for each film screening. In return, selected filmmakers agree to travel to the designated screening partner venues throughout the South; present their film; and engage audiences in a post-screening Q&A discussion of their work, the filmmaking process, and their lives as artist. Filmmakers may also participate in program-related events coordinated by screening partners, such as private dinners, public receptions, and classroom presentations.

### Audience Engagement Strategy

- Screening partner organizations, often located in small, rural communities, are able to connect their audiences with opportunities to access new independent films and directly engage in dialogue with the filmmakers in-person.
- Filmmakers benefit from direct access to new audiences that would not be reached otherwise.
- Audiences benefit by having the opportunity to meet filmmakers and further explore the art of filmmaking, especially valuable for those living in area with limited access to independent, art house theaters or related organizations that specifically exhibit independently produced content.
- Communities benefit by having the opportunity to use film as a catalyst for discussion about social issues.

### Regional Arts Partnerships

- South Arts is one of six designated regional arts organizations (RAOs), each representing a geographic grouping of states. South Arts works in partnership with the state arts agencies of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee.
- Supported in part by federal funds from the National Endowment for the Arts, the role of these RAOs is to assist in distributing funds and programs regionally through touring programs and other activities that are responsive to the needs of the region and address NEA outcomes.
- For more information, visit the NEA's resource on [State and Regional Partnerships](#), as well as this comprehensive list of [State and Regional Arts Organizations](#) located across the United States.

### Want to get involved?

- If you are a filmmaker looking to do community outreach with a current film, you can apply for these all-inclusive touring opportunities.
- If you are an organization based in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee, you are eligible to apply as a screening partner for the [Southern Circuit](#) program organized by [South Arts](#).
- If you are an organization in Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, U.S. Virgin Islands, Virginia, and West Virginia, you are eligible to apply as a screening partner for the [On Screen/In Person](#) program, modeled after Southern Circuit and organized by the [Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation](#).
- If there is no comparable touring film program operating in your region, you could be integral in the process. Start conversations with your local film community and residents, reach out to your local, state, or regional arts organizations, and share existing models, such as Southern Circuits and On Screen/In Person. You may also contact Teresa Hollingsworth, senior director of film & traditional arts for South Arts at [TeresaH@Southarts.org](mailto:TeresaH@Southarts.org), as an additional resource for learning how to establish a regional touring project to your area.

**SOURCE:** South Arts



## Testimonials from Southern Circuit Participants

Filmmakers and organizations express the value and importance of these regionally focused partnerships.

"We loved being part of the Southern Circuit series. We say this as filmmakers who have set up screening tours ourselves; the value in your structure is that you can apply it to so many films & venues, as compared with individual filmmakers setting up tours independently and starting from scratch each time."

**- Gabrielle Burton,**  
Kings, Queens & In-Betweens  
(2015-16 Southern Circuit Participant)

"Over the last two weeks, as I zipped around to ten cities in the South as part of the Southern Circuit Tour of Independent Filmmakers, a question formed in my mind that became more and more urgent with each new city that I visited and with each new screening filled with curious, intelligent, arts-craving audiences. That question was why—why doesn't this exist anywhere else? Why doesn't every region in the United States have a circuit tour?"

**- Ellen Bar,**  
NY Export: Opus Jazz  
(2011-12 Southern Circuit Participant)

"Working with South Arts is a dream. All of the scheduling of the filmmakers, which I know is a logic puzzle, and arranging their transportation and itineraries is done for me. The publicity information is well-written, beautifully designed, and easily accessible. The staff at South Arts is ALWAYS responsive, informed, and helpful."

**- Scott Bishop,**  
Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art,  
Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama  
(Screening Partner Organization, 2008 – present)

# KEY FINDING #3

## Public Sector Needs More Engagement

All levels of government often are allies in the sustainability discussion and play a key role in the documentary ecosystem. In a fluid and shifting legal and regulatory landscape, public officials need to hear directly from documentary community stakeholders so they can understand how public policy decisions can impact the documentary ecosystem. Similarly, the documentary community needs to deepen their understanding of policies under consideration and dedicate a focused effort toward fostering a dialogue with policymakers. Establishing personal networks and distributing quantitative and qualitative research can assist in raising awareness about the impact of public policy and investment on sustainability of the ecosystem.

- Representation at the convening from federal agencies, state arts agencies, and local government signaled significant interest in the documentary community from the public sector. While each representative had routinely intersected with the documentary form in some fashion, the convening provided insight into how public officials at all levels can expand their understanding of and participation in the sustainability effort. Continuing to build relationships in this manner will be beneficial for information-sharing and cross-sector knowledge-building.
- A wide range of laws and regulations enforced by a range of federal agencies play an important role in ensuring filmmakers have the ability to produce work, access distribution platforms, and engage in commercial transactions as they see fit. It's important for individual stakeholders in the documentary community to step forward and participate in this dialogue by taking the time to share their perspective and personal experiences with policymakers. Likewise, public officials can take initiative to engage in conversations about policies that could potentially impact the documentary community.
- State, regional, and local arts agencies and humanities councils can lend technical assistance, expertise, and resources to produce new work and grow audiences for documentary films across the country. Increasing opportunities for the documentary community to intersect more broadly with the greater arts community will be a beneficial step towards building public support and recognition of documentary as an art form.
- At the state and local level, tax incentives and related strategies are effective tools to support local filmmakers and production companies in an environment where policymakers value the health of local creative economies. Job training and apprenticeship programs help new workers transition into the field (see case study on page 23).

- Due to the increased recognition of the power of nonfiction storytelling, government agencies and publicly funded entities are significant funders of documentary productions through commissions, contracts, work-for-hire projects, and grants. These organizations value the documentary field's ability to tell the stories of challenges and opportunities facing the American public by investing in screenings, outreach campaigns, and educational partnerships. Whether they fund documentaries or benefit from existing work, all public entities have an incentive to actively engage in the field's efforts to foster a healthy documentary ecosystem.
- Government determines policies that dictate how filmmakers and producers can access audiences, including the future of public broadcasting and the role of intellectual property in a digital age. Further, legal and regulatory decisions on net neutrality will impact the future of distribution platforms. On a state and local level, tax incentives and direct investment support the viability of production companies, theaters, and film festivals.

**This** summit confirmed for me the important role that local and state government can play in support of art and culture, and the underutilized resources of state arts agencies across the country. For example, we can play a role as convener and catalyst, helping facilitate implementation of topics addressed at the summit—such as a new generation of financial design systems that provide a flexible and comprehensive structure for artist project development, from capitalization to realization. This would address the interface that is often missing between funder and filmmaker, and help take the burden off the filmmaker of being all things financial and creative. As funders, this would also deepen our role as partners in creative culture by collaborating to support the professional skills required for sustainability.



- **Karen Helmerson**,  
Program Director for Electronic Media & Film,  
New York State Council on the Arts

## OCTFME: Building a Workforce Development Pipeline through Public-Private Partnership

What role can local government play in strengthening the creative economy? In 2015, the Washington, DC [Office of Cable Television, Film, Music and Entertainment](#) (OCTFME) launched the **Creative Economy Career Access Program (CECAP)**, an innovative workforce development program that promotes sustainable careers in the growing creative economy by matching DC resident [L.E.A.P. Academy](#) candidates with public and private sector media production, broadcasting, and creative technology employers. In this case study, we look at how OCTFME aligned preexisting programs in city government with the resources offered by local media organizations to create multifaceted partnerships in support of a sustainable creative economy and labor market in the District of Columbia.

### How CECAP Works

- Available through the DC Department of Employment Services, the L.E.A.P. Academy (Learn, Earn, Advance, Prosper) is a network of interconnected partners utilizing the “earn-and-learn” approach, which links the city’s unemployed residents with employment, education, and training opportunities.
- The earn-and-learn approach applies the apprenticeship model to skill development, allowing individuals to earn a wage while participating in an on-the-job training experience and concurrently participating in related technical instruction. L.E.A.P. Academy trainees participate in a six-week intensive training module at the local public access television station, [DCTV](#). All training costs are covered by the DC government.
- After completing the training, participants have the opportunity for on-the-job training with a local media industry employer through the **Creative Economy Career Access Program (CECAP)**. Managed by OCTFME, all CECAP employer-partners sign on to the program and agree to accept an entry-level “trainee” for up to 12 months. The employer agrees to provide training in identified creative economy skill sets for the program participants. In return, the DC government fully subsidizes the compensation for the trainee placement.
- There are currently seven employer-partners on the list, ranging from public- to private-sector media production, broadcasting, and creative technology employers. Each employer has the opportunity to interview and select their trainee placement from the pool of L.E.A.P. Academy participants.
- Once the subsidized on-the-job training period ends, CECAP employer-partners that choose to retain their CECAP trainees are eligible to apply for the [Work Opportunity Tax Credit \(WOTC\)](#), a federally funded program offered through the U.S. Department of Labor.

### Strategies for Success

- Knowledge of city government infrastructure and opportunities allowed OCTFME to align the initiative with existing programs.
- Partnership with DCTV strategically leverages the resources of a local community access television station as a technical career training center.
- Relationships with local media industry employers drive the success of the placement program.

**SOURCE:** D.C. Office of Cable Television, Film, Music and Entertainment (OCTFME)

## Making the Case: Providing Effective Public Statements

### PUBLIC TESTIMONIALS

Speaking or providing testimony at a public hearing is an effective way for individuals to engage policymakers and public officials. To illustrate an example of this, the following testimony to the DC City Council on the significant value and impact of the DC Office of Cable Television, Film, Music and Entertainment (OCTFME) Creative Economy Career Access Program (CECAP) was presented by Lance Kramer, executive director of Meridian Hill Pictures, on February 22, 2017.

Details for the CECAP program are featured in the case study on page 23.

As fourth-generation Washingtonians, my brother Brandon and I have long held a deep passion for this city. When we started Meridian Hill Pictures in 2010, we wanted to create a place to tell honest, people-centered stories through documentary film. We also wanted to figure out how to build a career making films in this city we love—without having to move to New York or LA to get a job.

DC is known for its excellence in documentary filmmaking, a unique art form that requires a great deal of time, money, talent, and relationships. Along with its strengths, the independent documentary filmmaking community also faces a number of struggles—particularly when it comes to maintaining year-round salaried positions (as opposed to hiring freelance project-based crew)—and a lack of job training, internships, and apprenticeship opportunities for our field, particularly for people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Along with other local filmmakers, I have testified on these issues several times over the past decade. During these last two years, I have been impressed with the way the Council and OCTFME have stepped up to take meaningful steps to address these issues and bolster our segment of the creative economy.

Several new and revised programs launched since 2015 are making it markedly easier for producers and production companies to make independent documentary films in the District. Last fall we released *City of Trees*, a story about a green job-training program started during the recession to put long-term unemployed District residents back to work through planting trees and taking care of parks east of the Anacostia River. The film delves

into nuanced and complex human conflicts, raising hard questions about environmental justice, race, and community power dynamics. *City of Trees* has played in more than two dozen film festivals nationally and internationally, was broadcast on the WORLD Channel series *America ReFramed*, is in distribution with Cinema Guild to K-12 schools and universities, and will soon be launched on video on demand, facilitating important dialogues across the city and across the world.

*City of Trees* took five years to make and cost a total of \$406,000. Though small by most feature-length film budget standards, for us *City of Trees* was a major project and undertaking, employing a total of five District residents as full-time filmmakers and 27 District residents as part-time and temporary hires. Under the previous guidelines, our film would not have been eligible for a production rebate. Thanks to revisions that lowered the eligible budget from \$500,000 to \$250,000, independent documentary films like *City of Trees* are now eligible. The rebate has made a major impact, allowing us to reinvest funds into our production company to retain and grow our current staff and gear up for our next film.

OCTFME has also demonstrated commendable leadership in strengthening pathways for underserved community members to enter the field. This fall, we were fortunate to become one of the introductory employer partners in the new CECAP program, hosting Kenya Raymond as a member of our team. For Kenya, having this kind of introductory first step in the field may not be possible without a program like CECAP. These kinds of programs are helping build toward more diversity in the

field. Other initiatives, like the Filmmaker of the Month program, sponsorship of local screenings, Movie Mondays, and social media promotion, have also all done a great deal to raise visibility of local independent filmmakers who may otherwise struggle with receiving attention for our work absent substantial promotional resources.

The entire team at OCTFME—led by Angie Gates and Herbert Niles—should be commended for the way they listen to their stakeholders and sensitively design programs and offer support to advance independent filmmaking in the District. Thanks to the work and innovation at OCTFME, cities and states across the country are paying attention to DC in an elevated way. At national film conferences I have attended recently, people are regularly asking how their cities can replicate DC’s successful models for advancing their local film economies through rebate programs and diversifying their respective workforces through programs like CECAP. OCTFME has made great strides in the past two years, but there is much more work to be done. I hope that the Council continues to support the critical and vital work at OCTFME. As we try to push the field to be more sustainable and equitable, and advance the exploding talent pool of people building lives and careers in this art form in DC, OCTFME’s role is vital in advancing excellence in the artwork and the economics that drive the creative process.

**SOURCE:** Lance Kramer, Meridian Hill Pictures

### Making a Statement

Decisions made by policymakers have a tangible impact on the livelihoods of professionals working in the field. It is critical for the field to continuously engage to make sure policymakers are aware of the overlap.

- In order to lead policymakers to solutions to the problems or goals they are trying to meet, understanding the broader goals of policymakers is key to an effective statement.
- Do you have an experience that can contribute to this conversation and raise awareness of this sustainability discussion?
- Collaborating with peer networks can lead to more effective public statements. Are there people in your network that can provide expertise and mentorship in this area?



# KEY FINDING #4

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## A Sustainable Future Is Dependent on Research

Effective research will provide fuel for the sustainability discussion. In an uncertain and evolving landscape, the documentary community's ability to commission and execute a well-planned quantitative and qualitative research agenda will be essential to play an active role in determining future economic structures. As we move forward and develop strategies to improve career sustainability for documentary filmmakers, leveraging the influence and reach of the many types of stakeholders will be essential to communicate the breadth of the field to others who may not be familiar.

In order to achieve this, participants explored what research and additional resources would be needed to support this work.

- Convening participants expressed a level of interest in establishing a Research Advisory Council to monitor initiatives that are relevant to the documentary ecosystem; ensure best practices are implemented when conducting research; and act as a bridge to other sectors, disciplines, and institutions.
- Research partnerships and research-focused advisory groups will be critical to overcome internal and external siloing and continue to build a momentum of engaged stakeholders. Collaborative cross-sector partnerships will help evaluate research needs, discuss budget and design, and share findings with the broader field.
- Cross-disciplinary engagement will help explore effective research methodologies that can be adapted for the field.
- The wealth of consumer analysis conducted by public and private entities that informs emerging business models could be leveraged to strengthen research undertaken by the field.
- Research that accurately measures the reach and impact of documentary films across multiple sectors and on specific communities, organizations, and issues will help expand the universe of allies in the broader pursuit of sustainability.
- **Included on the following page is a prioritized research agenda, summarized from conversations with convening participants.**

# Research: What Do We Need to Know?

During the convening, participants emphasized the important role research will play in strengthening field identity and making a stronger case for investing in the long-term viability of the documentary community. Convening participants collectively brainstormed specific research ideas that would benefit the field.

The following is a reflection of those conversations.

## Urgent Need: A Documentary Data Project

There is no single clearinghouse resource for data and research related to documentary film. With a fractured field that is struggling with sustainability, a centralized “Documentary Data Project” would be an invaluable resource to educate filmmakers, organizations, funders, and industry on what the data is telling us about the field. Data that drives transformative change is urgently needed. If funded, this clearinghouse might contain the best currently existing research on documentary film, gathered in one place together with key new research on the following topics.

### Context and Landscape Mapping

- Landscape mapping of who is in the field, including makers, organizations, funders, resources, distributors, academic institutions, professional services, and more
- Power-dynamic mapping to show the flow of power, access, funding, and distribution between the relevant parties in the field, and to more clearly place the filmmaker themselves within this power-dynamic paradigm
- Mapping of the landscape of under-capitalization that exists across the field from individuals to institutions
- Research on documentary audiences: how are they consuming documentaries and what are they getting out of it?

### Economic Research

Economic case studies and budgets for films including:

- An accounting of complete filmmaker labor throughout lifecycle of film from inception through distribution
- Analysis of where financial gaps exist in the lifespan of a film from inception on
- Accounting for where filmmaker investment is a critical but overlooked factor
- Comparative research on differing economic data for different genres
- Impact of new distribution models on overall career sustainability
- Typical rates for each position in documentary production, grouped by geography and experience level, so that others can ask for fair pay

### Research into Documentary Filmmaking as an Economic Engine

- What is the economic impact of a thriving documentary industry when you consider each film/company as a small business that hires, spends and generates?
- How many jobs, and in which regions, are generated by documentary filmmaking?
- What are the local economic impacts of more documentary production?

### Artist Revenue Models

- Analysis of all revenue streams that filmmakers rely on in order to be able to exist in a non-sustainable economic environment
- What is the component makeup of the total and how much are filmmakers forced to juggle revenue opportunities in order to make work?
- Analysis of real debt load for documentary filmmakers
- How do emerging filmmakers fit into this landscape?

### Diversity and Access to Opportunity

- Who has access to funding, and who doesn't?
- Which stories are being funded, and at what level?
- Which stories are being programmed, distributed, etc?
- What is the state of the workforce development pipeline when it comes to diversity?

### Issue Impact

- How and why do documentary stories lead to impact on issues in the world?
- What quantitative metrics exist that show shift in issues related to film?
- Were there positive *and* negative impacts?

**The** summit illustrated a need to convene in a non-festival space to discuss trends and research.

Regular communication with the support of funders and policymakers will be key to the shared development and success of new models, particularly in distribution and audience engagement.



- **Teresa Hollingsworth**,  
Senior Director of Film & Traditional Arts  
for South Arts

## Sundance Institute's *DOC FILM MONEY MAP: A Guide to Tax Incentives: Mapping the Financial Landscape*

### Research as a Field Resource

*Research can serve as a powerful resource for filmmakers, local government, and the public sector alike. In this case study, we will use the [Sundance Institute's DOC FILM MONEY MAP](#) as an example of how research can effectively contribute to achieving more sustainable livelihoods for documentary professionals by identifying sources of financial support, setting a standard of best practices, and serving as a catalyst for conversations among stakeholders.*

We frequently hear from filmmakers that the one resource they need, more than any other, is financial support. To better understand the current film funding landscape, the Sundance Institute designed and conducted a comprehensive scan of the field to reconsider where the money is—and isn't—for independent documentaries and nonfiction films.

One finding from Sundance Institute's field scan proved particularly surprising. They discovered that while independent fiction films sometimes avail themselves of state and municipal tax incentive programs, independent documentary makers rarely, if ever, do.

They couldn't help but wonder—why not? With an eye toward disrupting the status quo, they investigated the issue further. Many filmmakers believe that nonfiction genres are always excluded from tax incentive programs, or that the minimum “spends”—the amount you need to spend in-state on eligible activities in order to qualify—are way out of reach. In some cases, this is true. But, as the Sundance Institute reports, 31 states and Puerto Rico have tax incentive programs where nonfiction projects can qualify.

Thanks to Sundance Institute's publication of *DOC FILM MONEY MAP: A Guide to Tax Incentives*, this good news can be shared across the field. Designed as a resource for independent filmmakers, the *DOC FILM MONEY MAP* project aims to stimulate conversation in the field about the relationship between philanthropic, public, and private funding for the art and craft of independent film.

Resources in the guide include a state-by-state cheat sheet and synopsis of tax incentives, as well as a data visualization tool that guides filmmakers to the programs that are a fit for their budget range. The publication also includes a quick-consulting guide to help film producers determine if pursuing a tax incentive is the right move for their project, and a “Best Practices Quiz” for film commissioners that want to champion independent filmmaker-friendly policies and practices in the field.

**The *DOC FILM MONEY MAP* is available, free to the public, for download as a PDF on the Sundance website.**

**SOURCE:** *DOC FILM MONEY MAP: A Guide To Tax Incentives*, Sundance Institute

# KEY FINDING #5

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## Everyone Is a Stakeholder

All members of the documentary ecosystem have a role to play in the sustainability effort. The use of the word ecosystem is deliberate—decisions made by policymakers, funders, distributors, technology companies, and audiences have a significant impact on the economics and long-term viability of the field. All key stakeholders must engage in this conversation and take action to move the conversation forward.

- Filmmakers and producers must actively engage stakeholders in an honest, transparent, and persistent manner about the realities of existing economic structures. Additionally, aligning with the national conversation focused on fair compensation for work (in the creative sector and beyond) will further broaden the ring of stakeholders.
- Distributors, festivals, broadcasters, entertainment attorneys, digital distribution platforms, tech companies, equipment providers, and all other business that profit from nonfiction storytelling should actively listen and engage with content creators to explore new ways of structuring relationships. Doing so will lead to a more equitable and sustainable ecosystem for the industry, including innovative business strategies that celebrate career filmmakers, champion new formats, uncover new talent, and engage new audiences.
- Investors in both the nonprofit and commercial documentary sectors should be aware of the real cost of films and the sequencing of capital (especially early investment). In many cases, producing a documentary is highly speculative, taking years of research, planning, and shooting to even determine the core story. Filmmakers are rarely funded to cover costs at this early stage of work, and limited opportunities exist for this type of capital, creating significant economic pressures and anxiety. For example, investors who recognize the importance of funding the “filmmaker” and not the “project” can help educate other investors about how this alternate model can provide the financial security necessary for a filmmaker to follow a story to its optimal conclusion.
- Public agencies, nonprofits, educational institutions, museums, libraries, and other community-focused organizations use documentary films as educational tools to promote initiatives, highlight programs, facilitate community dialogue, and explain complicated issues to their constituencies. Each of these organizations can support the ecosystem by providing financial resources and compensation, leveraging networks within the public sector, aligning strategies and goals, and fostering cross-sector collaborations.
- Policymakers and government officials need to engage with the documentary community to gain a deeper understanding of how their priorities and decisions can positively or negatively impact the field, and how their investments of capacity and resources can support the cause of sustainability while addressing other public policy objectives.
- Audiences who have been inspired and challenged by documentaries have a valuable role by helping propel the work of the filmmakers and producers forward. Everyone has individual networks and platforms that can be activated intentionally on behalf of specific films and can positively benefit the broader ecosystem.

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**With** the need for more diverse voices in storytelling and the recent explosion of multimedia storytelling across platforms, we need to focus on bringing new and innovative forms of funding into the field, particularly at the development phase. Often the difference between a film or media piece being made is not the merit of the idea but rather the access to funding at the moment when the project needs to gestate and be nurtured. Dialogue with existing funders is critical, as is gaining a deeper understanding of how media makers and filmmakers can leverage local government funding, tax rebates, or other potential funding streams.



- **Marilyn Ness**,  
two-time Emmy Award-winning  
documentary producer and partner  
at Big Mouth Productions



## Get Involved

Everyone is a stakeholder, regardless if you are a content producer, consumer, funder, public sector representative, or involved with an organization. Now is the time to take ownership of this conversation and move the work forward. In order to be effective in continuing to build the case for the field, collective communication and leveraging existing resources across sectors will be critical. What could be your next steps?

- Consider your resources. Perhaps it is a specific set of funds, capacity to host future convenings, or access to a network of people that can move this work forward or raise awareness about research or other initiatives.
- Take ownership of building local initiatives that offer solutions to filmmaker sustainability.
- Strengthen public understanding of local, regional, state, and federal resources and funding opportunities. Establish community-based networks to help navigate these resources through targeted professional development workshops in your local area. Additionally, state arts agencies and regional arts organizations have a particularly interesting role to play as conveners and connectors.
- If you are a resource provider, evaluate and align programs to complement existing opportunities in the field, effectively strengthening a career-building pipeline that leverages resources and maximizes the impact of programs and initiatives across the nation.
- At the local and state level, many governments are deeply interested in the creative economy sector, and are exploring strategies, investments, and incentives to attract and keep creative workers in their communities. Get involved in these conversations.
- Organize local, regional, and state convenings to facilitate cross-sector discussions that bring together a range of stakeholder and provide a shared space for leaders with different perspectives, areas of expertise, and objectives to work as a community in pursuit of strategic solutions that will benefit the entire ecosystem.
- Partner with other organizations to share resources and cross-pollinate audiences. We are stronger together!
- Raise public awareness about the state of the field, including engaging audiences and consumers. Inform them about specific policies and issues that could affect you. This can help activate a new base of supporters to engage in this conversation as a stakeholder.
- Documentary film fans can be intentional about how your money connects with filmmakers and producers. Participate in crowdsourced funding campaigns and support distribution platforms, festivals, independent cinemas, nonprofit institutions, and other merchants that prioritize fair compensation to filmmakers and producers. Furthermore, fans can promote films on social networks, post reviews online to boost audience metrics, and get involved with impact campaigns around issue-oriented films.
- Community leaders can organize paid screenings and serve as advocates to explain the importance of policies and funding that support documentaries and raise the profile of certain films inside their community.
- Know the resources available to you—and use them!

If you want to help create a sustainable path for documentary filmmakers or directly engage in opportunities for convenings, research projects, advocacy efforts, or other activities, please contact [policy@documentary.org](mailto:policy@documentary.org).

# NEXT STEPS AND ACTION ITEMS

The following are recommended action items that will help contribute to building more sustainable careers for documentary professionals.

## **1. Strengthen the field through knowledge exchange, technical assistance, cross-sector collaboration, and professional networks.**

- Host convenings at local, regional, state, and national levels to continue cross-sector knowledge exchange and spur future collaboration.
- Create intentional spaces that allow for different industry segments to learn from other perspectives.
- Establish local, regional, state, and national networks to regularly share information, resources, and expertise.
- Examine possibilities for shared infrastructures or streamlining processes that can reduce redundancies and contribute to sustainability for those working in the field.

## **2. Research, data, and metrics are critical to the sustainability and success of the ecosystem.**

- Determine the research necessary to increase understanding of today's ecosystem and the marketplace of the future, and ensure information is transmitted to the stakeholders who require it.
- Document and report out on best practices in the field. Prioritize research initiatives outlined on pages 27-28.
- Establish a cross-sector research advisory group comprised of academics, researchers, and industry leaders.
- Examine other arts communities to see how they are responding to critical questions in their fields.
- Share new and existing research with key stakeholders at all levels.

## **3. The public sector needs continual engagement from stakeholders to accelerate its role as funder, convener, and strategist and also examine the impact of various policies on the sector.**

- State, regional, and local arts agencies are in unique positions to engage their respective communities and networks in this conversation and take the initiative to act as conveners, connectors, and resource providers for this artistic field.
- Federal agencies, such as the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for Humanities, play a vital role as a funder, researcher, and connector.
- Local governments committed to develop and sustain a flourishing creative economy sector should include members of the documentary field in conversations when exploring strategies, investments, and incentives that attract and keep these creative workers in their communities.
- Policymakers should include a range of stakeholders at all levels of the documentary ecosystem during all decision-making processes that may have any type of impact on the industry.
- The public sector can actively enforce regulations that establish a fair marketplace and limits unfair business practices.

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**I**t was invigorating to have a multifaceted discussion about the strengths of, and challenges facing, the independent documentary community. I came away reminded of the intersecting nature of our work and excited about new partnerships. I hope that policymakers and funders understand the value of documentary as a meaningful tool to break through the media clutter and bring people together, in person or online. We need reasons to come together, across the vast spectrum of human experience and belief—to reflect, to converse, and to act.



**- Justine Nagan,**  
Executive Director of American Documentary, Inc.  
and Executive Producer of PBS's *POV* series

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# APPENDIX A

## Documentary Sustainability Summit Agenda

### Documentary Sustainability Summit - Overview of Activities

The following is a synopsis of the sessions that took place during the Documentary Sustainability Summit on February 10, 2017, which informed the details outlined in this report.

### AGENDA OVERVIEW

9:30

#### Welcome Remarks

Jax Deluca (Media Arts Director, National Endowment for the Arts)

Simon Kilmurry (Executive Director, International Documentary Association)

9:45 - 10:00

#### Conference Overview: The Question of Sustainability

The Sustainability track at the *Getting Real* conference was the product of months of planning by filmmakers and other stakeholders. IDA principal consultants Michael Bracy and Cynthia Lopez will review the day's agenda, discuss the thinking behind the sustainability conversation and outline goals and objectives for today's convening. Presented by facilitators, Michael Bracy and Cynthia Lopez.

10:00 - 10:45

#### Roundtable Conversation: The State of the Documentary Union

The documentary field is at a moment of terrific opportunity and upheaval. New technologies and business models are transforming how nonfiction film and video is created, distributed and viewed. At the same time, the traditional funding and compensation structures are evolving to keep pace with these changes. The result is an incredibly fluid landscape where documentary film is more vibrant than ever, but many feel pressures of sustaining a career in this transformative time. Stakeholders from across the community share their perspectives on the documentary field as we move into 2017.

#### Moderator

Wendy Levy (The Alliance for Media Arts and Culture)

#### Panelists

Maria Agui Carter (Writer/Director, Rebel - WGA Diversity)

Simon Kilmurry (International Documentary Association)

Caroline Libresco (Director, Catalyst & Women's Initiative, Sundance)

Mimi Pickering (Director, Appalshop's Community Media Initiative)

Gordon Quinn (Artistic Director, Kartemquin Films)

**10:45 - 11:30** **Filmmaker Perspectives: What Does Sustainability Look Like?**

In September's *Getting Real* conference, the International Documentary Association paid particular attention to the concept of "sustainability." In this session, filmmakers discuss their take on the current industry with a particular eye on what kinds of initiatives, partnerships and best practices could create a more stable and sustainable industry for working filmmakers.

**Moderator**

Marjan Safinia (International Documentary Association)

**Panelists**

Byron Hurt (Filmmaker)

Shola Lynch (Filmmaker)

Marilyn Ness (Filmmaker)

Laura Nix (Filmmaker)

Esther Robinson (Filmmaker)

**11:30 - 12:00** **Effective Public Sector Partnerships**

There is a strong overlap between the public sector at all levels and the documentary film community. Many states and localities value the economic impact of a thriving production scene and have established incentive programs and tax rebates to provide support. In other communities, local leaders are building apprenticeship and job training programs to provide opportunities for young people looking to work in the field. Finally, agencies at all levels of government recognize the utility of nonfiction film and video as a way of articulating issues and engaging with citizens. This session will explore specific examples of how these kinds of partnerships are effective for all parties involved.

**Moderator**

Cynthia Lopez (Former NYC Film Commissioner)

**Panelists**

Lance Kramer (Meridian Hill Pictures)

Justine Nagan (Executive Director, American Documentary/POV)

Herbert Niles (Dist. of Columbia Office of Cable TV, Film, Music, Entertainment)

**12:00 - 12:10** **Moving Into Action: Advancing the Cause of Sustainability**

Discussions about sustainability are useful, but what does this mean in practicality? In our afternoon sessions we will begin exploring how these concepts can be advanced not as conversations, but as specific, actionable initiatives. As we prepare to break for lunch, we will synthesize some of the themes that are emerging from our morning sessions to provide insight into how the community can develop specific, actionable strategies. Discussion led by facilitators Michael Bracy and Cynthia Lopez.

**12:10 - 1:00** **Lunch**

**1:10 - 2:00 Small Group Session #1 (Rooms A & B)**

*Participants break out into two smaller groups (Room A & Room B) to explore currently existing models that address specific sustainability topics.*

**Room A****Workforce Development & Empowering the Next Generation of Filmmakers**

This group will gain insight on existing strategies to align public sector and industry goals by highlighting shared goals of local government and established documentary filmmakers. One such intersection is around the questions of workforce development and job training. From the standpoint of local governments, it is critical to provide opportunities for new entrants in the workforce to be supported as they begin to establish their careers. On the other hand, many documentary filmmakers are eager to welcome new, ambitious, creative and diverse voices into the field. In some communities, these agendas have overlapped in job training and apprenticeship programs that are creating the kinds of paid positions that simply could not exist without public support. This working group examines existing models from various standpoints and explores how these kinds of initiatives could be scaled.

**Presenters include:**

Wendy Levy (Executive Director, The Alliance for Media Arts & Culture)

Herbert Niles (Dist. of Columbia Office of Cable TV, Film, Music, Entertainment)

Gordon Quinn (Artistic Director, Kartemquin Films)

**Room B****The State of the Documentary Field's Essential Data and Research**

What do we know in order to advance the case for documentary production and careers and funding? What do we need to know? How do we move forward as a field?

In all industries, particularly artistic ones, there is a need for data, research and insights to help make the case for all kinds of angles in advancement—this is especially true in this fluid and evolving documentary landscape. From filmmakers trying to make informed decisions about their career to policymakers seeking a deeper understanding of the marketplace to new funders understanding the essential role documentary plays in the culture and even the economy, research, and data provide valuable insight into the realities of the community. Research does not have to be simply quantitative—often, qualitative analysis can help identify and promote best practices and opportunities to learn from others innovative strategies. This discussion takes a look at the needed data and research in the field with a strong focus on what we already know, what we need to know and how to move forward.

**Presenters include:**

Caty Borum Chattoo (Director, Center for Media and Social Impact, American University)



2:10 - 3:00

## Small Group Session #2 (Rooms A & B)

*Participants break out into two smaller groups (Room A & Room B) to explore currently existing models that address specific sustainability topics.*

### Room A

#### The Shifting Educational Marketplace: This Isn't Your Parents' Filmstrip

Digital technology is paving the way for an explosion of nonfiction film, as documentaries and videos are increasingly integrated into K-12 and university curricula. Filmmakers also see this as an opportunity for their film's to reach a larger audience over a longer period of time—while also instigating conversations and actions that transcend the viewing of the film itself. What are the implications of this dynamic marketplace? How are filmmakers compensated for their films' integration into the classroom? And how are educators responding to these new opportunities spurred by broadband deployment, integration of laptops and tablets and low-cost, high tech projection platforms?

#### Presenters include:

Alice Apley (Documentary Educational Resources)

Katie Dellamaggiore (Director, Brooklyn Castle)

### Room B

#### The Exploding Short Documentary Field: New Tools, New Platforms, New Audiences

We know technology is transforming how nonfiction film and videos are made, distributed and viewed. Social media and other platforms are also creating unprecedented opportunities to share short videos, directly engage with audiences and elevate important perspectives. In particular, new business models are emerging around short-form documentaries, creating new opportunities for working filmmakers and organizations that are eager to showcase this content. What is the status of short-form documentaries? What's working and what isn't? How does the move toward shorter works impact filmmakers that prefer to work on feature length projects? And how are philanthropic organizations and the public sector integrating these kinds of short-form documentaries into their overarching communications and outreach strategies?

#### Presenters include:

Whitney Dow (Multimedia Storyteller)

Marjan Safinia (International Documentary Association)

3:10 - 4:00

## Group Discussions, Reflection and Closing

Throughout the day we have heard many perspectives and explored many issues. To close the day we will self-organize into tables of eight to reflect and discuss next steps. What has inspired us? Where do we feel challenged? What other sectors have done a good job addressing these issues? And how can we turn today's conversations into action?

# APPENDIX B

## Networks, Community, Education

During small group work, participants explored the following questions:

- How do we leverage existing networks to reach the community more effectively?
- How do we align various networks more efficiently around shared goals?
- How do we exploit our collective reach to make sure that we engaging in powerful knowledge sharing and community-building?

The following is a reflection of conversations that emerged from these questions.

### Need: Educate funders about the real economics of documentary production

Funders of documentary film, who are inherently inclined to recognize its value and support the form, need better education about the economic realities for documentary filmmakers so that they can be more responsive to these real-world challenges.

Education areas included:

- A shift towards career support for artists, and away from project-based funding
- The value of investing in financial asset-building resources, education, and strategies for artists to help them more effectively manage their financial landscape
- Understanding the opportunity costs of filmmaking and the impact this has on artists and resulting films
  - Examples include artists forced to choose between taking work that generates income versus spending time working on their film, or forced to make decisions about being able to invest in homeownership (a traditional building-block of sustainability) versus continuing to make documentary films.
- Understanding the real debt load that many documentary filmmakers carry in order to be able to complete their work
- Understanding the complete costs of filmmaking, including indirect costs that are traditionally not funded, and a shift towards requesting budgets that reflect these fully loaded costs
  - Examples include time spent on research and development, time spent fundraising, time and money spent on shooting funding samples, time spent deal-making, time spent on marketing and distribution, etc.
- Alignment of funder requirements around core application elements both on the front end and in the reporting obligations of grantees

### Need: Capitalize on collective and shared approaches to help improve career sustainability for filmmakers

While documentary filmmakers and documentary institutions are rooted in independence, there may be certain arenas in which collective and shared approaches may significantly improve career sustainability for filmmakers.

To support filmmakers, these arenas include:

- Funding of technical assistance collectives by region to help filmmakers achieve collective economies of scale for necessary expenses such as insurance, bookkeeping, tax preparation
- Collective negotiating power to sit at the table on behalf of filmmakers with industry partners across the field and set industry standard minimums for pay, for indirect costs, for acquisitions, etc.
- Investment in searchable knowledge-sharing platforms for the field, including provision of stipends for filmmakers to write case studies and share key learning with their peers
- Investment in local field-building with more opportunities for filmmakers to connect by region

For institutions and industry organizations, there arenas include:

- More industry convenings to allow organizations to plan ways to effectively collaborate across silos and more effective partnerships to ensure important communications are quickly disseminated across the field
- Shared and open-source strategic planning across key documentary institutions to more effectively leverage their collective power to bring about important changes across the field
- Collective open-source publishing of content shared at industry panels around the country
- A coordinated education/convening strategy that passes from industry event to event across the calendar year, bringing about an evolving (not duplicative) conversation across the field
- Industry-wide commitments to diversity and inclusivity, including a commitment to ensure that every panel includes women and people of color

### **Need: To elevate dialogue about documentary filmmaking and the state of the field**

We need to engage in more elevated and consistent dialogue about documentary and the state of the field, so that this knowledge penetrates the mainstream cultural landscape. While more people are consuming documentaries than ever, there is not yet an adequate mainstream understanding of the impact and value of documentaries on society, nor an awareness of the real challenges that documentary filmmakers face.

This cultural mainstreaming dialogue includes:

- More frequent and creative storytelling about documentary filmmaking and its value
- More dialogue about the power paradigm in the field and how low filmmakers rank in this paradigm
- More dialogue about the extraordinary volume of documentaries produced each year, and what this glut of content means for individual sustainability, and sustainability for organizations who fund, program, and otherwise support documentary film
- Greater highlighting of documentary filmmakers as elite creatives who have inherent value to democracy, art, culture, etc.
- Elevated general public understanding about the challenges and values of documentary filmmaking

# APPENDIX C

## National Resources and Service Organizations

The Alliance for Media Arts & Culture: <http://www.thealliance.media>  
Service organization for the media arts field and related practitioners.

America's Public Television Stations (APTS): <http://www.pts.org>  
Nonprofit membership organization ensuring a strong and financially sound public television system and helping member stations provide essential public services in education, public safety and civic leadership to the American people.

Association of Independents in Radio (AIR): <https://airmedia.org>  
AIR and its network of producers recruit, cultivate, and deploy independent storytellers to enrich, expand, and strengthen the public media system.

Association of State Film Commissioners: <http://www.afci.org>  
Service organization for film commissioners who assist film, television, and video production across the globe.

Center for Social and Media Impact (CMSI): <http://cmsimpact.org>  
The Center for Media & Social Impact, based at American University's School of Communication in Washington, DC, is an innovation lab and research center that creates, studies, and showcases media for social impact.

Corporation for Public Broadcasting: <http://www.cpb.org>  
CPB is the steward of the federal government's investment in public broadcasting and the largest single source of funding for public radio, television, and related online and mobile services.

The Directors Guild of America: <https://www.dga.org>  
Entertainment guild which represents the interests of film and television directors in the United States motion picture industry and abroad.

The D-Word: <http://www.d-word.com>  
Online forum that hosts discussions about the art, craft, business, and social impact of documentary film. Documentary professionals around the world can apply for free access to a wide range of industry discussions in business, creative, social, and technical topics, and beyond.

Independent Television Service (ITVS): <https://itvs.org>  
ITVS is a service in the United States which funds and presents documentaries on public television through distribution by PBS and American Public Television, new media projects on the Internet, and the weekly series *Independent Lens* on PBS.

International Documentary Association: <http://www.documentary.org>

Service organization for the documentary community, providing resources and programming related to the craft and business of nonfiction filmmaking. Includes a comprehensive directory for documentary-focused grants and awards.

Media Impact Funders: <http://mediainpactfunders.org>

A network of funders, working broadly on media and technology issues, in order to create social change.

MIT Open Documentary Lab: <http://opendoclab.mit.edu>

The OpenDocLab brings technologists, storytellers, and scholars together to advance the new arts of documentary.

National Assembly of State Arts Agencies: <http://www.nasaa-arts.org>

Service organization that unites, represents, and serves the nation's state and jurisdictional arts agencies. Each of the 56 states and jurisdictions has created an agency to support excellence in and access to the arts.

National Endowment for the Arts: <https://www.arts.gov>

Independent federal agency that funds, promotes, and strengthens the creative capacity of our communities by providing all Americans with diverse opportunities for arts participation.

National Endowment for the Humanities: <https://www.neh.gov>

Independent federal agency that provides grants and resources to cultural institutions, such as museums, archives, libraries, colleges, universities, public television, and radio stations, and to individual scholars for humanities programs in the United States.

National Minority Consortia (NMC): <http://nmcmedia.org>

With primary funding from CPB, the NMC is comprised of five distinct and separate organizations to support diverse voices in independent filmmaking and digital media: Center for Asian American Media (CAAM), Latino Public Broadcasting (LPB), the National Black Programming Consortium (NBPC), Pacific Islanders in Communications (PIC), and Vision Maker Media.

POV on PBS: <http://www.pbs.org>

Television's longest-running showcase for independent nonfiction films.

The Producers Guild of America: <http://www.producersguild.org>

Trade association representing television producers, film producers, and new media producers in the United States.

Regional Arts Organizations: <http://usregionalarts.org>

The six regional arts organizations (RAOs) are integrally tied to U.S. state arts agencies and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). This partnership helps ensure that public funds are distributed responsively, equitably, and efficiently.

Women in Film: <https://womeninfilm.org>

Nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting equal opportunities for women, encouraging creative projects by women, and expanding and enhancing portrayals of women in all forms of global media.

**“...making a living is  
the most pressing  
challenge facing the  
documentary field  
today.”**

FROM *THE STATE OF THE DOCUMENTARY FIELD: 2016 SURVEY ON DOCUMENTARY INDUSTRY MEMBERS*,  
RELEASED BY THE CENTER FOR MEDIA & SOCIAL IMPACT AT AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

