

Planning a *Let's Talk About Water* Event

Why use documentary films?

- Documentary films create teachable moments by heightening audience interest in environmental topics
- They engage the audience emotionally and tell a compelling story
- They often have some science content with “flashy” or “fun” graphics or animations that can help explain complex concepts
- They demonstrate the social relevance of science
- They provide an opportunity to impart critical thinking skills by challenging or examining the claims and assumptions presented in the movie from an objective science view point

Keys to a Successful Event

• **Place and Space**

- One of the first steps should be to secure a theater for the film showing. You should tailor the event to your intended audience when thinking about location and time. Will your showing be on-campus or off? What dates and times work best for the student audience you are trying to attract – do you have a large number of commuter students? – what times in the semester work best?
- Many universities may allow faculty to use theaters free of charge. If possible, choose an intimate theater or location to encourage engagement between the audience and the panel. The experience of seeing the film in an engaging setting is the kick off point for the students.



• **Films and Themes**

- Choose a film that connects to your intended audience. We have found that localizing the event (showing *Chinatown* in California, *A Civil Action* in Boston) has been important in generating student interest. Documentaries such as *Flow* which highlight empowered citizenry often spark lively conversations. We have held successful events around the following films. Clicking on the link will provide more information on each film and its distributor. If you organize the event, you will need to contact the film distributor to secure film rights.
- *A Civil Action* [[IMDb link](#)]

- *Chinatown* [[IMDb link](#)]
- *Flow* [[IMDb link](#)]
- *Gasland* [[IMDb link](#)]
- *Het Verloren Land* [[IMDb link](#)]

- **Select a Panel and Moderator**

- Interaction is key. Panelists should represent a mix of expertise (science, policy, community activists, etc) that can provide balanced viewpoints on issues and cover various questions that might arise from discussing an interdisciplinary water issue. If possible, get some “star power.” For example, if the budget allows, get a big name on the panel. Jan



Schlichtmann, the real prosecuting attorney in the case featured in *A Civil Action*, appeared on the Boston panel for a fraction of his usual fee due to his interest in education.

- Keep the panel at a reasonable size – we have found four or five to be an optimal number. This allows more give and take among the audience and the panel members, and often encourages more direct interaction between the panelists, adding liveliness to the event. Additionally, keep introductions brief, and allow most of the time for direct audience interaction.
- Offer honoraria or travel support to panelists if possible. Don’t be afraid to ask!
- We have found that one of the keys to success is getting the panel together the day before for a nice dinner and informal interaction. This primes the panel for a convivial and more interactive discussion.
- An effective moderator must both challenge and engage the panel – keeping the panelists “on topic,” asking for clarifications or follow-ups, and managing the discussion.

- **Build The Buzz**

- Reach out to student and community groups to publicize the event. Coordinate with other instructors at your school and/or other local colleges and universities to encourage them to bring their classes. We have found that offering extra credit has been a good way to ensure a good turnout.

- **Have An Effective Host**

- Each event we have organized has had an enthusiastic and effective host professor. Some has to take the lead to organize, raise money, bring in University Public Relations and reach out to the community, organize student helpers, and pick the time, date, place and themes.



- **Licensing**

- One important aspect to organizing a public showing of these films, such as we do in a *Let's Talk About Water* event, is that you will need to secure public performance rights. U.S Copyright law does not allow showing a movie in a public setting without securing permission to do so — even if there is no charge for admission. Many professors are used to showing films in their classes. If you plan to use a film in a classroom setting, you can borrow a copy from your university library if they have one, or ask them to purchase a specific film. Copyright law has an exemption allowing showing of video recordings if shown in a class and for direct learning activity. But if you plan on organizing a public showing, you will need to secure performance rights. This is one of the support services CUAHSI provides when organizing such events. Public performance rights and licensing will involve a fee, set by the distributor. It is important to gather this information early in the process when planning the event and budget.
- If you are planning a public showing, you will need to contact the vendor/distributor of the film and secure public performance rights, or you will be in violation of U.S. Copyright law. Distributors will sell or rent a copy of the film with public performance rights and/or license for a public performance. Your university library may be able to help you with contacting the distributors, or you can find the distributors through the movie information, such as the IMDB links provided for our example videos.
- For more information, we recommend contacting your university library and/or the following website:
www.prattlibrary.org/locations/sightsandsounds/index.aspx?id=11096.
- You can also contact CUAHSI for complimentary consultation.

[CUAHSI](#) currently can help facilitate these events but does not have funding available to support holding them. The typical cost of past LTAW events has been about \$10,000. Organizers often work with their university, other universities in their area, student groups, and other sources (foundations, sponsors, etc.) to hold these events.

A recent [EOS article](#) describes the general formula we have used for these events. This page provides information on our past events, current activities and information, and options and resources for organizing a ***Let's Talk About Water*** event of your own. CUAHSI has experience holding these events, and can work with you to organize the event. If you are interested in learning more, contact Rick Hooper (rhooper@cuahsi.org). CUAHSI is happy to provide complimentary phone consultation on organizing LTAW events, and can provide some support services on a cost-recovery basis.