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INTRODUCTION: Where this came from

To begin, we have to revisit our original intentions. Our research and investigation for the Cinema Research Institute was borne of two experiences that we tried to match in our minds.

The first was our work on the Obama for America campaigns of 2008 and 2012. Especially in 2008, we were treated to a crash course in the fundamentals of grassroots organizing; Michael was a field organizer in the primaries while Josh had done the equivalent work on a Senate campaign in the prior cycle. Though we were both New Media directors in the general election – in Ohio and Michigan respectively – the entire Obama campaign of 2008 was defined by a radically different approach to organizing politics. The energy throughout the campaign structure was not based on the hierarchical, old boy network of the Democratic party with a capital D. In other words, the perception and excitement about the prospect of Barack Obama was so huge that campaign workers were motivated by something beyond the standard chain of command; the campaign redefined what a campaign could be. His appeal crossed party lines and brought more people into the process than ever before, but what was more important was the historical context for the kind of organizing that the campaign would capitalize on—a context of which Barack Obama's own biography was a part. The soon-to-be-president had been educated in the organizing principles of Marshall Ganz, professor at Harvard and current godfather of community organizing, who was passing the torch from the legendary Saul Alinsky. Fresh out of Harvard, Barack Obama had been hired by an Alinsky-associated group to organize disenfranchised steelworkers in Chicago.

What does this mean exactly? What do we talk about when we talk about organizing? What does a term as currently loaded as grassroots?
To start the unentangling process, the Wikipedia definition of community organizing is actually helpful:

"a process where people who live in proximity to each other come together into an organization that acts in their shared self-interest."

This is what Barack Obama was doing in Chicago. In a situation in which people were feeling disconnected from each other, hopeless, and without resources in the face of a real problem, as an organizer, it was his job to bring them together and let them see that they shared a common purpose despite their differences—and then leverage that common purpose into power. In his campaign in 2008, ironically, that common purpose became the election of Barack Obama himself. And because the scope and appeal of that common purpose was very wide, and the campaign created the proper infrastructure to capitalize on it, any potential supporter felt an energy to achieve that goal that could be brought into the fold of the operation as a whole. The motivation to put Barack Obama in office—a seemingly impossible task at one point—truly came from the ground up. Volunteers did not act because they were guilted, instructed, or following orders at the end of a chain of command; they had the energy already, and they just needed to be organized. As a field organizer in rural Pennsylvania, it was Michael's job to channel the energy of the few Obama supporters in his area, build upon it, grow it, enable it, and put it towards a manageable micro-goal. The structure of the campaign was lateral—like a snowflake—finstead of top-down. Volunteers were not the end of the line; in fact they were endowed with the responsibility of bringing other supporters into the fold.

As New Media Directors, we merely experienced and promoted the online version of these offline ideas. For example, it was not our job as managers of our states' online presence to be a public, immovable face—a place for a potential supporter or undecided voter to send an email or message to and never hear back. Every video we created, every thing we put on the blog, every word we used in any email had to be crafted with a mind

towards being inclusive, enthusiastic, inviting, and empowering. The mantra for the entire campaign—online and offline—became "Respect, Empower, Include." Videos documented the fun of the volunteer activities going on. Blog posts showed various events happening that could serve as entryways for supporters into the campaign, sharing voices and photos from these supporters themselves. Emails were scientifically designed for the highest possible click-thru rate, sharing premium content that would both make readers feel special and give them opportunities to "opt in" to the next level of engagement. In the 2012 campaign, working out of the national headquarters, armed with data and knowledge of our successes and failures from the 2008 campaign, as part of the digital (New Media no more) department we oversaw the creation and launch of multiple micro-sites that engaged supporters, donors, volunteers, and voters in increasingly inventive ways.

That was the first experience (primarily the 2008 campaign) that drove our research. The second was the experience of producing *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, a monumental task that began within two weeks of Barack Obama's inauguration in January 2009. We put much of what we learned on the campaign about how to mobilize people around a seemingly impossible goal through common purpose (also known as community organizing) into practice. The allure and potential of the production of Benh's first feature film snowballed during development in increasingly widening circles, and we used that enthusiasm to get things done as soon as we could. The casting operation was largely accomplished by future crew members that were, at the time, merely excited volunteers. Through enacting a grassroots field operation and empowering team members to be responsible for certain parishes across the map, we were able to cast an extremely wide net as we looked for a six year-old in Louisiana to play the character of Hushpuppy, and then for other cast members. What's more, we did it in a vacuum of resources, a condition that goes hand in hand with a grassroots operation; we used flyers to get the word out, held auditions in libraries, churches, and schools, and relied on local allies to help us in promotion and execution. As we got closer to production, this spirit informed how we went about many facets of the operation in our bayou locale: the securing of boats, animals, locations, extras, and housing would not have been possible without

working directly with community members towards a common goal. Had they just wanted to get paid, and without enthusiasm for the project, like campaign canvassers in the era before Obama, we would not have gotten nearly as far. Finally during production, we managed our crew around a shared acknowledgement of the immense challenge (but also importance) of what we were doing, such that everyone was there because they wanted to participate in that challenge first and foremost. The production had the same kind of immersive quality of the campaign, in that we were all living within a few miles of each other, in makeshift housing, with a common gathering space around our makeshift production office. Like the campaign, it was more than a job—it was a lifestyle with its own pop-up subculture. All organized around the same goal.

However, the campaign-like techniques we put into practice in a kind of trial-by-fire with *Beasts* worked because of the particulars of what that project and process called for. Independent film productions in general, however, are too various in nature, as far as what each of them requires, for these organizing ideas to be so broadly applied. There are plenty of films that call for a much more controlled setting, to which the crew commutes to work from their home every day, and such an immersive situation and intimate collaboration with locals as the one we had with *Beasts* is not only uncalled for, it is unnecessary. That said, it seemed to us that the one challenge that nearly every single independent film production is grappling with more than ever these days—where there are vastly more questions than answers—is distribution. More than ever, distribution is not the finish line of an independent film's process, but rather just its third act. Even that sounds charitable—given the amount of work that it requires, and how much of that work falls directly into the filmmakers' lap (as opposed to during production when labor is neatly delegated amongst the army that is the crew), it is no less than just the beginning of a film's life. And in order for that film to stay alive, it needs to be supported by constant work, strategy, effort, enthusiasm on the part of the filmmaker or the filmmaker's team.

Why is distribution rife for consideration through grassroots organizing prism? Because such an incredibly small percentage of films receive traditional distribution these days

that even referring to it as “traditional” distribution seems silly. Given the massive amount of films being made these days, the tiny number that are handed off to a straight-up distribution company, that then relieves the filmmakers of any responsibility towards getting their film out into the world, is frankly negligible. That statement is not even in the context of independent film; it applies to the film industry as a whole. The all-encompassing distribution deal is the exception to the rule now, not the rule. It is unfairly perceived as the rule because it is how Hollywood’s big studios work, but Hollywood’s big studios account for merely a couple hundred films made every year; the actual number of feature films made every year, just in the United States, dwarfs that number by a staggering ratio.

This is all to say that nearly all filmmakers can relate to the predicament of having gone to great and exhausting lengths to develop, write, cast, produce, and edit together a finished film, only to then be left with it in no one’s possession but their own—and without any money left to take it anywhere else. However, a film, as a work of art, is inherently a thing that many people can endow with many different meanings, that a huge cross-section of people can appreciate from a multitude of angles and for a plethora of various reasons. In a way, Barack Obama was like this in 2008: Bush-exhausted Republicans saw a potential return to pragmatism on the world stage, while hard core environmentalists envisioned in him the dawn of a new era of energy sustainability. They had little in common, except that they wanted him to be President, and they came together to mobilize towards that purpose. A film can be that, to disparate people. What’s more, the distribution conundrum shares something else with the campaign mentality: a vacuum of resources. Filmmakers are left with a film, but not much in terms of fiscal power to do anything with it. Organizers on the Obama campaigns had the great calling card that was Obama himself, but forged field offices out of abandoned storefronts, churches, and community centers. Did they have to trim costs at this level? No, but in a grassroots scenario, where people are motivated from the bottom up, elements like where to set up shop can be resolved with little fiscal cost.

The question we asked is: what happens when you apply the same rubric—the same campaign logic—to a film's distribution? Come distribution time, a filmmaker has their film and enthusiasm about it, which seems meager but could serve as the very first building blocks towards a real, considerable grassroots operation. Who has done this before? What has the experience been like? These questions are incredibly complicated by the fact that the internet has become the premiere space to digitally distribute and promote films. However, we welcome those complications; just as offline political campaigning works best in collusion with complementary online political campaigning, so it is necessary for us to examine how organizing on the ground for a film works in conjunction (or doesn't) with that film's online strategy. If film lives online and online content is shared, then these days anyone who sends such content via an email, a social network, or a blog is, in a way, a film distributor. But how do you mediate that process to build enthusiasm about a film in a smart, strategic, grassroots way?

Many filmmakers, disheartened with the process or prospect of distributing all by themselves, throw their hands in the air and either never attempt to get their film out anywhere, or do the opposite: make it totally available for free online. At the end of the day, what we aimed to do was equip filmmakers with information that could help them make much more deliberate decisions than these about a distribution strategy from a grassroots campaign perspective. What's possible, what is not, what has been tried, and what still needs to be—through conversations and case studies of people and projects in all corners of the film world as well as the political campaign world, this is what we aimed to figure out. Here are our findings.

WHAT WE FOUND: Conversations, case studies, and context

The intersecting worlds of distribution, grassroots campaigns, and politics is such a large and multi-faceted beast that no deliberate order to our findings seems to make sense. So we will just begin to unearth them one by one.

1. The Definition of Grassroots

This seems as appropriate a first finding as any. In the introduction, we defined what "community organizing" is, but grassroots remained an elusive term. Though we didn't interview 2012 Obama for America Field Director Jeremy Bird until July of our fellowship, how he defined grassroots can serve as a working definition for the whole of our study and for the rest of this paper—since Jeremy, like the President himself, studied under community organizing godfather Marshall Ganz, and is as much of an authority on field organizing as anyone. What makes something a grassroots operation, according to Jeremy is:

1) *Access to data and information.* A surprising first descriptor, but in the context of political campaigns, it makes sense. Before the Obama campaign of 2008, campaign workers did not have access to the information they do today, which makes the 2008 phenomenon as much about the technology that was suddenly available as it was about a sea change in enthusiasm about a candidate.

2) *Real responsibility and goals at the local level*. In other words, a palpable sense of accountability. Trusting that the larger goal would be met not by a few leaders at the very top of a hierarchy, but by each ground-level operation spread across the map doing its part to meet its own goal. And by endowing people present at that ground level with responsibility.

3) *The ability to scale and make your campaign accessible*. Going off of the last descriptor, this means that you can take the campaign anywhere. It is not tied to some antiquated or traditional geographic centers of power. It is nimble and can move, engaging people wherever it is.

4) *A fundamental belief that volunteers can change the outcome*. All of this grassroots, community organizing bluster is just a phony brand that is not

> worth applying unless you actually do subscribe to the belief that a volunteer force—someone there not motivated by wages—can move the needle towards your goal. With self-distribution of films, volunteers may be all you have available, so it's a definite they would make a difference.

[Our entire conversation with Jeremy can be read in two parts at http://cri.nyu.edu/?p=3059 and http://cri.nyu.edu/?p=3096]

These are the characteristics of a grassroots operation. There are also common situations, aforementioned, in which they are usually applied—for example, when a challenge is stark, but the desire to surmount it is palpable and widespread. There is "energy to tap into," for lack of a better term. The extent to which a grassroots entity is successful as such depends not on the fulfillment of these basic characteristics but rather on how each entity or person involved is respected, empowered, included, and, in turn, takes ownership of their part in expanding the movement. Again, motivation derives from a sense of urgency felt personally instead of from top down leadership, or incentivized financially. Understanding both the common characteristics and the markers of success for a grassroots endeavor is key for us to understand in film, where the term has largely been co-opted to serve as a euphemism for "free," "of a social network," sometimes, more appallingly, "easy." People refer to "grassroots marketing" for film in reference to fans sharing links about a film on Twitter or Facebook; in other words, free publicity. Sometimes grassroots marketing just means the decision to advertise on a social network like this. Both of these uses are not helpful and not relevant to what we're referring to here.

The structure of a grassroots entity takes the form of the Snowflake Model, with each module of organized activities both an extension from another and its own center of many other. In other words there is an ultimate center, but it is not elevated in power, and the snowflake can expand ad infinitum. One example of how the snowflake worked is articulated in the Obama campaign's own Legacy Project, which did a post-mortem study of its best practices:

"Relationships among team members held the snowflake together and ensured the team was communicating frequently and working toward common goals…In the center of the team snowflake was the Field Organizer, who managed multiple Neighborhood Team Leaders. In addition to the NTL, each team ideally consisted of at least three Core Team Members, or CTMs: a Phonebank Captain, a Canvass Captain, and a Data Captain" [http://cri.nyu.edu/?p=2605].

Neighborhood Team Leaders were technically volunteers, but they had authority, a title, and responsibility for others' involvement. This was key.

A *grassroots organizing campaign* for a film can similarly qualified according to this rubric. However, in our study we also pondered if there would be use for classifying a film itself as a "grassroots film." These days the word "independent" to describe a film is such a complex and broadly used term that perhaps grassroots could help the taxonomy. Independent could continue to be widely applied to films made outside the Hollywood production system, whether they are picked up for distribution by a subsidiary of a big Hollywood studio or a smaller one or none at all. Could "grassroots" then be a subcategory within the umbrella of "independent," to describe films that are self-distributed? Ultimately we decided that such a definition is tricky, and discounts some of the fundamentally groundbreaking grassroots work being done by organized distributors (while a self-distributing filmmaker might not be doing anything "grassroots" at all). At the end of the day, grassroots should describe an applied methodology, not a tangible item like a film itself [http://cri.nyu.edu/?p=2800].

2. All Films Are Not Created Equal: Growing (Cam)Pains

We discovered that there are two—arguably three—categories of film campaigns one can launch. The first is the film that is its own campaign. The surmountable challenge to organize around is the film's presence and life in the public consciousness and the larger marketplace. This is what volunteers and organizers would advocate for, and the agenda they would be pushing at every step. This seems the purest form of campaign and best

use of organizing tactics; if one is to use grassroots organizing in film, it stands to reason it should be to solve the problem of birthing and supporting a film's life in the world of an audience, with no other goal. What we did with *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, to complement Fox's mega marketing machine, would fall in this category. We mobilized members of our crew to go to Q & A's in regional theaters, as a draw to get audiences to come out, and deepen the connection they had with the film, which could then be transferred into their own advocacy (snowflake model!). The thing we were up against, we would say, was the marketplace itself and the very tiny room that Hollywood's relationship with exhibitors allows for a small independent film like *Beasts*. We managed the message of our online presence in complementary ways.

The second category is the campaign that has a social or external action tied to it. In this paradigm, the film—though its own work in and of itself—is being used as a political tool to accomplish other action. It is, in other words, part of an organizer's arsenal—a way of bringing people into something larger. One film we studied was *Speaking in Tongues*, which deals with issues of secondary languages in schools. Their campaign attempted to raise awareness of the importance of bilingualism through community screenings, educational distribution, and community action. In other words, they explicitly imagined and positioned their film as a tool for social change [http://cri.nyu.edu/?p=2883].

There are upsides and downsides to the film's potential life as a film that being subsumed to a larger cause comes with. The assumed downside is that grassroots energy is going somewhere other than to the film's success itself. In perhaps too ideal a world, a film would be worth supporting just as a film – or perhaps that is too cynical a world, in which films can't stand up on their own artistic merits. Narrative films, especially, can endow audiences with real affection because they can come at a fictional world with more of their own projected meaning and significance. But especially in the documentary space, films have been a successful organizing tool for a very long time. Also, social issue films (of which there are more documentaries than fiction films) inherently have a sense of urgency and refer to topical things that lend themselves to a campaign-like structure: this

is a problem and we need to mount an effort to solve it. This campaign-like structure also lends itself to a real difference in fiscal support. Of the film projects successfully supported on Kickstarter, 80% are social issue documentaries; filmmakers benefit from the sense on the funder's part that they are contributing to both a cause and a film [http://cri.nyu.edu/?p=3291]. Finally, another upside of films with external action campaigns is that they do achieve something inherently measurable. You can measure what impact a film had – for example, the BritDoc Impact Reports for the nominees of their PUMA BritDoc Awards. The producers of *The Visitor* know that their efforts trained 2500 immigration lawyers, who helped 10,000 detainees [http://cri.nyu.edu/?p=2736]. In a world where the perception of a film's success is muddled by distributors who want nothing less than to tell you how a film really performed, these metrics mean something. They say: this film did something.

An article we studied compared two different films, one from each of these different categories, to illustrate this point: *We Were Here*, a documentary about HIV awareness, and a romantic comedy titled *Henry's Crime*. Although both films apply similar grassroots methods by reaching out to core constituency groups to help promote the film, *We Were Here* had a much more successful distribution run. The issue of HIV awareness generated a sense of urgency that motivated supporters and advocacy groups to spread the message of the film. In contrast, even though *Henry's Crime* tried similar grassroots tactics like reaching out to the fans of stars in the movie to help promote, there was less urgency surrounding the romantic comedy, and the film flopped [http://cri.nyu.edu/?p=2381].

The sweet spot—the place where the aims of politics and film meet perfectly for a grassroots film campaign – is a film that achieves its external political action goals *by* showing the film. The recent example is *The Act of Killing*, where the political act of the film was to show it in as many places as possible in Indonesia. Here the success of the film as a tool and as a film are one and the same. (Then there are some who dress up a film that just wants to succeed in the prestige circles or the marketplace as if it has higher

ambitions. See: Harvey Weinstein framing *Silver Lining Playbook* as a catalyst for discussion about mental illness. See also: our eyes rolling).

3. The Internet Has Changed Hardly Anything (?)

But where can all films – non-fiction and fiction -- benefit in the modern digital landscape?

Sometimes our conversations provided insight that seemed refreshingly counterintuitive to some fundamental assumptions we had had about the realm of our research. For a new set of definitions, we pivot from Jeremy Bird, a current field organizing guru, to a veteran *digital* campaign authority from the pre-Obama age. We interviewed Nicco Mele, Harvard professor of digital politics and former "webmaster" for Howard Dean's political campaign, which was revolutionary in how it utilized and fostered its online community of supporters. He named the three pillars of a digital campaign, as defined by David Karpf in his book *The Move On Effect*:

1) Build a substantially sized email list. "People live overwhelmingly in their inbox."

2) Foster online community. "The care and feeding of evangelists is necessary for online success.

3) Complement online with offline. "Politics is really a face-to-face business and you really have to be able to use the internet to drive people to meet face to face." [http://cri.nyu.edu/?p=3291]

Further elaborating on this necessary relationship of online and offline, Mele's colleague on the Dean campaign and chief digital strategist for Obama in 2008 and 2012 Joe Rospars continues: "The relationship that Obama built with individual supporters and between them was the unique part. Our tools were sort of the glue for the relationships,

but if you're not running a campaign where people understand that those relationships are central to winning, they don't care about tools on your website." Now imagine that instead of the President, he's talking about a particular film – about an audience's particular attachment to a certain very special film. Bajir Cannon's dissertation *"The United States of Unscreened Cinema,"* suggests that filmmakers using offline organizing tools are able to significantly increase their online audience. One of the filmmakers Cannon interviewed was Tom Quinn who made a film that is set during the *Mummers' Day Parade* in Philadelphia. Quinn recalls that to distribute his film he "went around to a good chunk of the Mummers clubs, and talked one-on-one with them about how we were going to donate part of the proceeds back to the parade, and the Mummers organization got behind the film doing press as well, which was huge. I think our Facebook fans went from 200 people to 2,300 people in one week." The irony here is interesting: offline organizing led to a rise in online metrics [http://cri.nyu.edu/?p=2514]. Given all this, it would seem there would be no reason Mele's pillars would not apply to digital campaigns for film as well as politics.

Mele also lists five elements that each political campaign needs to succeed -- which correlate nicely with what a film needs to succeed:

1) *Raise money.* FILM EQUIVALENT: A film's distribution will necessitate some sort of fiscal support, even if it is the bare minimum, though it will never compare to the way that money is the lifeblood of a political campaign. Distribution costs should certainly be accounted for, but whether or not fundraising should be an "ask" in the film's distribution campaign depends on if the film's campaign is for the film itself or tied to another cause. If it's an external action or a social issue film, given Kickstarter statistics, it seems realistic to attempt to fundraise for film (production, post-production, and) distribution costs. Raising money for a film in general (not just limited to distribution) is an altogether different topic, but inextricably linked to ours; we will revisit that in a moment.

2) *Have a message*. FILM EQUIVALENT: The message is essentially the film itself. If you have a film that no one is excited about, it is the equivalent of having a politician that doesn't have a clear message: it will be very hard to connect to an audience.

3) *Communicate the message through media*. FILM EQUIVALENT: This would refer to how the advocates of the film—the grassroots operators, be it on the phone, in person, or over the internet—talk about the film. The mandate for them from an Obama organizing background would be to make it personal: to communicate what about this film and its story resonates with them personally. That honesty will appeal to whoever is being engaged.

4) *Deal with press*. FILM EQUIVALENT: Probably the most literal parallel – with a film in distribution, one has to be strategic about what press is reached out to and engaged. A grassroots perspective would also tell you that the best press is not necessarily the biggest outlet. Sometimes a well-placed news item in front of the right niche audience could mean the difference for that community taking your film seriously.

5) *Field or turnout operation*. FILM EQUIVALENT: At the end of the day, who do you have working or volunteering for you that will make sure that people turn out to go see the film on opening day? What does the operation on that day—the equivalent of Election Day—look like? Who is your grassroots army, and how have you delegated them? By geography? By theater? Or just via social network?

Mele pointed out that the internet has only changed one of them: fundraising. Television, as a passive medium, versus the internet (an intentional medium) still has way more potential to reach viewers as far as political ads or trailers and generally getting your "message" out there. Could it also be said that the internet has only changed fundraising for a film's campaign? [http://cri.nyu.edu/?p=3291].

Frankly, no. Film now lives on the internet in a way that politics doesn't. For many independent films, a theatrical run is a loss leader while the real grosses come in during the film's life while available digitally, over the internet. This inevitably separates a film's campaign from a political one; at the end of the political campaign, you will be expected to perform the ultimate democratic act offline, even if it is through the mail instead of in a voting booth. But arguably, a person in front of their computer clicking on a film online to watch it digitally is as important an act to a film's life now as getting up to see it in the theater would be.

However, Mele's assertion that fundraising is where the internet has made the *most* impact ironically might hold true for independent filmmakers, specifically in regards to distribution, because fundraising has become a way of identifying and gathering audience – by building the email list that Mele mentions in his three pillars. The irony of a site like Kickstarter is that it uses a campaign-like platform and urgency to reach a fundraising goal, but then gives away many of what you would want an audience to pay for as part of its incentives for giving. The trend towards donation based models in independent film is truly a mixed blessing: it indicates a shift towards more of a campaign structure, but simultaneously possibly indicates the failure of filmmakers to have used grassroots tactics already to turn their work into a profitable business for themselves. In other words, is the turn towards Kickstarter an easy way out—a quick fix when there should be more deeply seeded relationships between a film and its audience if a grassroots model is working? [http://cri.nyu.edu/?p=2886]. However, one thing is for sure, and the staff at Kickstarter would be the first to say so, followed closely by David Plouffe of both the Obama campaigns: as we transition to donation-based campaign models for fundraising for film, it is incredibly important to make the machinations of your process as transparent as possible. It creates a feeling of your supporters being involved in your decisions and successes, deepening their connection to your process; and that kind of sustainable support is the best kind of support.

4. Sometimes the Best Way to Succeed is to Fail / Sometimes the Best Way to Fail is to Succeed

The story of the *Four Eyed Monsters* filmmakers is a textbook case about how the incredibly dynamic landscape of the independent film world can make the traditional path towards success lead to failure, and said failure lead to unexpected success—if you are smart about how to mobilize the resources around you in a grassroots way. The filmmakers of *Four Eyed Monsters* employed four online grassroots organizing tools to successfully distribute their film:

1) Producing a Four Eyed Monsters web series

2) Creating an online petition for theatre screenings

3) Investigating the metrics involved in how manifested online support translated to actual ticket sales

4) Selling DVDs and merchandise on their website.

The filmmakers tried to put their movie out through the normal festival channels but it led them nowhere. However they happen to document their struggle when new online formats were emerging like videocasts, YouTube and Facebook. Similar to how the *Obama campaign* would later use online video to persuade voters and encourage volunteers, the supplementary material from *Four Eyed Monsters* helped the filmmakers connect with fans and motivate them to become more invested in the film. Creating an online petition to see the film in theaters channeled the support of their online audience towards theater distribution. The filmmakers promised to screen the film in cities that obtained 150 or more sign ups. This helped create a concrete goal and sense of urgency that motivated fans to encourage their friends to also petition to see the film.

Ultimately, *Four Eyed Monsters* received over 8,000 online requests to see the film in theaters. Translating petition signatures to ticket sales convinced more theaters it was in their economic interests to screen the film. The filmmakers compared the number of online sign ups to ticket sales and determined 1 sign up led to 1 ticket sale. This led to 31 theaters across the country agreeing to distribute the film. Allowing audiences to buy DVDs and merchandise online helped direct enthusiasm from the film in theaters towards making a profit on the film afterwards. Interestingly, the film made more money from people interested in buying shirts, DVDs and other merchandise online than on ticket sales in theaters. However, theater screenings helped the filmmakers mobilize support offline, which later led to them raising money through sponsor websites like sprout.com which paid the filmmakers $1 for every new who signed up.

What did we find here? Not every film campaign can use the same distribution model and expect to succeed. The DIY model of Four Eyed Monsters proves that if you are flexible and creative you can find solutions that lead your movie towards your target audience. That is why data and metrics are critical for film, so you can measure the progress of your distribution campaign and make changes accordingly. [http://cri.nyu.edu/?p=2581].

The case of Susan and Arin and their film *Four Eyed Monsters*' non-traditional path to an audience was interesting context in which to consider *Honor Flight*, which gathered a Guinness Book World Record-setting crowd at their premiere, only to be met with a tepid response to a (costly) festival and awards run [http://cri.nyu.edu/?p=2979]. It was another case where the common sense traditional path of distribution mollified a potential massive grassroots success. Productions, stuck in their glut, are struggling to find any kind of stamp of approval—Sundance, the right distributor, a good review in the New York Times – to separate them from the herd. That's why it was particularly ironic when Manohla Dargis article bemoaned the "excess" of films coming through New York theaters. It's Dargis' own paper's policy to review every film that comes out in New York that leads to filmmakers spending an unnecessary amount of P & A money on traditional "New York & L.A. first" theatrical runs (or theatrical runs in general!), sometimes even four-walling a premiere, for that precious New York Times review…

when they could have done something more inventive by taking the temperature of their fan base and manifesting a grassroots campaign accordingly. Maybe it makes sense to open in Iowa first! Who knows until you look at the data [http://cri.nyu.edu/?p=3428].

Now, a bit of a detour, guided by Crumley and Buice, who we decided to revisit for an interview—not just because their film is a fundamental example of the new and changing landscape for distribution, but also because they happen to be insightful and vocal evangelicals for filmmakers doing distribution on their own terms. One large scale interesting observation the duo focused us on is that the efficiency of technology should democratize the actual practice of distributing films into venues, such that so-called "distributors" are more and more serving as brands and less as actual delivery/marketing systems for films. The actual delivery of a film to an audience is easier than ever; however the importance of a brand in the chaos of so much product for an audience is, in turn, more important than ever. [http://cri.nyu.edu/?p=3331]. This race to the bottom in terms of distribution technology is echoed by the Simple Machine creators in an interview we cite in our study. As they say, the barrier is not the physical delivery, but rather a theater's bureaucracy. We will revisit this idea in the proposal of our app: http://cri.nyu.edu/?p=3369

5. Goals and Measuring the Unmeasureable.

We found that it was of utmost importance for filmmakers to determine what their metric system for success would be from the get-go, to organize their resources, manpower, and grassroots strategy accordingly. Grassroots campaigns need comprehensive accountability, because volunteers need goals—not just to achieve them but to feel that they are achieving something (when fiscal reward is not possible).

We also talked to the figure that is probably the equivalent of Jeremy Bird in the world of socially active, grassroots film outreach, as far as pretty much writing the playbook—Sandi DuBowski, who made us rethink how we thought about the metrics of "success" for a film. Sandi, with his own film *Trembling Before G-d*, came up with his own system

of measurement: he counted in units of institutions in which he showed the film. For him, the screening of the film was itself the political act, in that it broke the silence about gay orthodox Jews, so wherever he was able to break that silence with a screening, that became another success [http://cri.nyu.edu/?p=3139]. By contrast, the film "Grassroots," however, tried to use organizing to distribute its film but failed because it lacked clear goals. Concrete goals are key for any grassroots campaign since it gives direction and accountability to volunteers [http://cri.nyu.edu/?p=2388].

6. Catch You on the B-Side

Along with Four Eyed Monsters, the story of B-Side is probably the case study most revelatory for our findings.

Chris Hyams formed B-Side in an attempt to use digital tools to discover a more effective way to monetize and distribute independent film. It began by offering an interactive, online festival guide that allowed audiences to plan their experience by organizing their own schedule and then reviewing films. In this capacity, B-Side became an invaluable resource for festival organizers and goers alike, eventually partnering with 245 film festivals, representing the largest online audience dedicated to film festivals. The company did this for free in exchange for the email addresses and other information collected from the audiences that used their program. Liz explains how the data process at festivals worked: “You would go in and be able to do recommendations, comments and reviews and see who else is buying tickets and see how popular the films are … And behind the scenes Chris and a group of tech engineers would be looking at all the data that was coming in.” This gave B-Side valuable information about what films were drawing the largest audiences and what kind of audiences were going to what kind of films. Chris and his team were then able to mine through data to find undervalued films to distribute. Also, half of the more than 3 million people that used the B-Side program opted into their email list, which resulted in B-Side collecting a massive online community they could tap into to help them distribute their films [http://cri.nyu.edu/?p=2744].

B-Side created an invaluable tool, which got them a world of information on users that they could later use for distribution, like the way Google gathers information to make its ads more user-specific. The importance of offline outreach led to advocate organizations spreading awareness of the house screening campaign.

7. Data, Data, Data.

Without access to big data independent filmmakers should use more creative ways to find the target audience for their films. A properly targeted campaign that mines the enthusiasm of their fans can overcome the disadvantage of not having access to big data.

The behemoth that was the campaign in 2012 still had much to offer that smaller grassroots filmmakers could utilize in terms of how they use data. A New York Times article we analyzed conjured the campaign's process in finding a cheaper and more effective way to use data to identify who they should be targeting with their persuasion tactics. Through cross-referencing data sets from voter contact, Facebook, party-voter lists, and a new TV tracking firm, the campaign ended up spending 35% less per broadcast than the Romney campaign, but got 40,000 more spots on the air for $90 million less (truly astounding). The ultimate irony, from a film business lens, is that that tracking firm they used is Rentrak — which, while also being a competitor for Nielsen to inform TV viewing practices, has been the film industry's standard paid-for service to measure how films perform in each of their theatrical venues and markets. In other words, the campaign utilized one of the film industry's tools, but more effectively than the film industry itself, the big studios of which likely (and this is conjecture) use what the article classifies as the more antiquated, less reliable, and certainly less precise Nielsen system to determine where to throw their advertising dollars (combined with "hunches and deductions"). Nielsen is in 22,000 homes; Rentrak is in 8 million. Nielsen breaks down audiences into big chunks like "18 to 49 year-old male"; it did not provide a proper data set to cross-reference the 15 million potential Obama voters the campaign had identified through Facebook. Nielsen is what tells advertisers and studios to

broadcast an ad aimed at a huge swath of the U.S. during primetime; the campaign's Rentrak-based data told them they could do more for less by targeting "Judge Joe Brown" and "The Insider" viewers in early afternoon and 1 A.M., respectively.

An interview with Dan Wagner, one of the Obama data gurus featured in the New York Times piece, brought us closer to what filmmakers themselves could do. The shorthand: work with what you have, as opposed to trying to compete with Big Data or credit card companies that gather information like what magazines you subscribe to or car you own (which is what the Bush campaign used to use to analyze its supporters). Dan's advice for filmmakers wanting to gather info on their audience was 1) to start with who likes you, not who doesn't like you, 2) use every bit of data immediately available to you, and 3) sharing data with like-minded filmmakers can make it insanely more helpful. This interview was so interesting it merits getting into the details of these pointers:

1. There's an automatic assumption when we think about data that the starting point should be to gather as much as possible about the entire pool of potential consumers/audience members/voters. But Dan told us that during the whole endeavor of gathering data on the Obama campaigns began in Iowa in 2007, focusing on turnout—in other words, getting as many likely supporters to turn out for the caucus as possible. Dan and other team members used statistical models to identify people likely to support then candidate Obama, then integrated these models to the voter file and what the other operations of the campaign were doing (i.e. constituency outreach, volunteer recruitment). In other words, you can do more by perfecting the profile of someone who *does* like what you're offering than you can by trying to deal with the whole sea of data out there.

2. Dan encouraged independent filmmakers to look wherever they could and do whatever they could to gather data sets about the audiences going to their films. That could be as simple as a Facebook page; that could mean trying new things like a sign-up sheet after screenings. By pooling and cross-referencing these data sets, you can come up with a more and more finely attuned profile of the kind of

audience member that likes films like yours. To further this process, Dan says the question becomes "When we create a product, how can we display it to a range of people to see how we can maximize the potential of a more targeted approach?" In other words, "test drive something specific, and see who likes it." We suggested limiting the test art house theaters in New York, like BAM and Nighthawk, but Dan warned against a regional approach.

3. A consolidated grassroots consortium could give filmmakers a similarly solid incentive to join: data management handled in house, and a more targeted idea of what an audience member who could like their next film would look like, for the sake of craftier, more efficient marketing efforts next go-round. As Dan puts it: "A bunch of people working together, like a mini-studio, could get consumer info—'we looked at 20 films, these are the people who like them… These are the people who like independent movis' and then over time validate that." In other words, this mini-studio or collective, could create pretty accurate profile of someone who likes independent movies in general, "and then generalize it for lots of promotion afterwards."

7. Regarding regionalism and touring:

The case study of Jay Craven is instructive in how a non-traditional and time-tested regional circuit approach to theatrical distribution can earn filmmakers loyal fans that are willing to manifest their loyalty through attendance and advocacy time and time again.

Jay Craven developed his own grassroots screening circuit in the specific New England region whose culture, history, and stories take center stage in his films, which often take place in rural Vermont and New Hampshire. For screenings, Jay focuses on small towns, some of which have populations as small as 300. These towns are so small they typically can't support a movie theater, and so locals typically look to church theater productions and high school sporting events for entertainment. This provides Jay with a unique

opportunity to cultivate his own audience instead of competing against big budget films at the box office.

Jay has used three grassroots methods to establish a circuit of town screenings: 1) engaging the audience early on to grow a list of supporters 2) turning town screenings into a community event and 3) using offline and online sign-ups to grow his audience. The main question Jay's town distribution model raises is whether independent filmmakers are better off trying to reach a demographic beyond indie and blockbuster audiences through local or regional screenings. Not only is this method cost effective, but it also provides filmmakers with an opportunity to tap into support from people in small towns that are not lured into high budget Hollywood movies and more likely to appreciate the regionally specific cultural aspects of independent film.
However, Jay's town circuit is dependent upon a very specific region of northern England where the setting of most his films take place. Could town screenings for independent films be effective in other rural and medium sized towns across U.S? Should independent filmmakers consider making screenings more accessible to people in small towns where the cultural themes and setting of their film resonate? By knowing that his film will connect with a specific audience that he knows he's going to target, Jay can avoid the problematic bottleneck "gatekeepers" of independent film festivals.

In general, there becomes more of a premium on the live or multi-faceted experience that a film could bring – the same way that concerts are able to charge more these days because it's a more valuable experience than the music itself in digital form (which is accessible for nothing these days). Film is heading in the same way. "Indie Game: The Movie" filmmakers James Swirsky and Lisanne Pajot agree:

As we watch how digital media has changed the music industry it's all about hearing them in person, and that's where bands are making money. It's not the easiest life touring and you have to be a special kind of person to do it. Even with the internet and having access to everything you want, people are still looking for cultural experiences or artistic

experiences in person. We live our lives on our smartphones connecting with people that we don't actually connect with in person, so I think that's what films are going to do. [http://cri.nyu.edu/?p=3369].

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Our year of research in grassroots distribution has given us a much clearer understanding of what has been accomplished in this field in the past as well as an exciting sense of possibility in terms of what can be accomplished going forward. We've identified many exciting and innovative techniques that are currently at work and, over the course of our research, have honed in on the ways in which those tools can be used to reach even wider audiences and with greater efficiency.

There are a slew of companies and individuals for whom grassroots campaigns are a key strategy for engaging audiences. Some of these filmmakers are doing remarkably creative work and succeeding at reaching a wider audience, but the fact that filmmakers tend to works in isolation from others undertaking similar campaigns significantly reduces grassroots' potential for institutional growth. We hope that the work we have done documenting so many of these films and campaigns can serve as a turning point, as knowing what has been done and what is both possible and effective is a important first step for anyone looking to launch a grassroots campaign of their own. We aimed for our research to be as comprehensive as possible so that grassroots aspirants would get a thorough overview of the field; in an ideal world, these people would read our case studies and, through education, be inspired to build on existing grassroots efforts and create new strategies for their own films.

One major issue, however, is that, when it comes to campaigns like these, knowing what you want to do is only half the battle. This sort of effort often requires a great deal of resources (money, time, labor, etc.—the types of things indie movies tend to be short on

anyway). Having to re-invent the wheel as far as tools and systems go can be an extremely costly endeavor, to the point that it could reasonably discourage someone from trying to develop nontraditional audience engagement methodologies. But the truth is, while running a grassroots campaign requires a unique set of skills and perspective, some of the most important tools are actually very basic in concept. As such, in order for grassroots to flourish, we have concluded that what is need is a forum of sorts for filmmakers to share and build upon each other's ideas, tools, and resources.

An optimal starting place is a free open source toolset that would allow anyone to share and access tools. To this end, a website hub for all things grassroots-film could be an enormously helpful resource to have out in the world. This website would host open source tools for everything from data collection (which would allow filmmakers to gather information about their audience) to local screening locators to call tools for organizing offline campaigns. A website with this structure would also allow (and strongly encourage) that filmmakers and programmers upload their own tools, which other filmmakers could then tailor to their films. By reducing these barriers to entry, we believe filmmakers would be empowered to focus on other aspects of their grassroots campaigns and hopefully spend time creating new tools that could be added to the community forum. As far as an online dialogue is concerned, the website could be the home to our blog, starting with our posts from the past year with CRI, and continuing on with broadened scope and detail.

Another important conclusion of our research: for filmmakers to succeed in their own grassroots outreach campaigns and beyond, a greater degree of transparency is required, especially when it comes to distributors. Today, distribution is an arm of the entertainment business cloaked in secrecy—it's not a stretch to say it is designed to subordinate filmmakers and keep them in a disadvantaged position. Distributors are the keepers of valuable data, which makes it difficult for filmmakers to ensure they are being properly compensated, not to mention it makes it impossible to know if distributors are properly exploiting their films. Information is the key to broadening the horizons for filmmakers trying to get their films out into the world in effective and innovative ways

(not to mention it being key for investors). If filmmakers know what is working in the market—which mediums are reliably generating revenue, which aren't—it gives them the best chance to find their own path and model for their film. Luckily, as we speak, several high-powered and well-intentioned organizations like the Sundance Institute and Cinereach are combining their powers and resources to try to address this very issue with The Transparency Project. While this project is in its nascent stages and its work thus far is based on too small a sample size, their goals for the project and the tenacity with which they are going about attacking the problem are extremely encouraging. My instinct is that this type of work could be a major boon to the independent film world in general and, more specifically, when it comes to addressing the lack of information about distribution. This coming year could be a critical one when it comes to The Transparency Projects' work and the implications it has for filmmakers.

The lack of information issue extends beyond distribution, though. Filmmakers also need to share process information with each other. It is not yet clear what mechanisms could be implemented to address this, but philosophy is very clear to us: indie filmmakers cannot view one another as competition, they need to realize that they can and should build each other up through a network of mutual support. This may sound like a "Lets all hold hands" kind of statement, but we mean it much more practically than that. The truth is that, for many reasons, the audiences that show up for innovative, high-quality indie films are not nearly as robust as they ought to be. This results in major limitations when it comes to getting films out into the world. This then leads to increased difficulty when it comes to making innovative, high-quality indie films because financial sustainability built on audience support has become unstable.

There are many ways that we could work to expand this audience base (which could be the subject for an entire Cinema Research Institute study in itself) but for starters we as filmmakers need to start figuring out ways to share information with each other. There are ways that films' audiences can build upon each other so that the audience for one indie film to another can be taken as a whole and can grow into a sustainable one. And, with this, more people going to indie films in leads to an incentive and means to create

more quality work, along with more venues for sharing this work and, ultimately—hopefully—leading to indie filmmakers enjoying longer, healthier, more sustainable careers. If each of us works as an island, any momentum and building our films can achieve may be gone by the time (often a long time) that our next film is ready.

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ONE-PAGE DESCRIPTION

YouScreen is a web-based app that acts as a bridge between indie movie-goers, filmmakers and exhibitors. Its communication platform will allow filmmakers to rate, review, access, and search for grassroots exhibition venues to screen their films. Similar to Withoutabox's relationship to the film festival circuit, filmmakers will be able to input information about their film and then click to submit to different venues making it easy and efficient for filmmakers to screen their film. In addition, this app will enable audiences to search for independent films that they would never get to see at conventional movie theaters.

This app could serve as a spin-off from a broader central website where filmmakers can find information and tools to distribute their film through grassroots means. Beyond a text-based guide, it will contain a grassroots toolkit based on open source technology so that anyone can contribute widgets, apps, or tools that will expand the greater good of the tools provided by the website.

For Filmmakers

Using YouScreen, a filmmaker can build their own distribution path for their film. Instead of relying on a conventional movie theater run, which is often too expensive and requires more resources than indie filmmakers can provide, YouScreen will enable filmmakers to search for non-traditional film venues like art houses, concert halls, churches, community centers, libraries and non-film festivals. With the venues' information publically available, filmmakers will be able to see if their film would be a good fit based on an easy classification and filtering system, and

contact these exhibitors very easily to discuss the possibility of screening their film. Filmmakers will also be able to rate the grassroots exhibitors and write reviews. This process will hold exhibitors accountable to the interests and needs of filmmakers while also giving publicity and credit to distributors that run a good program. The site will also allow filmmakers to privately upload screening quality versions of their film so venues can show a film without print traffic headaches or costs. Furthermore, the site could contain a resource tab where filmmakers can find information about how to target their audience and spreadsheets and surveys to gather data from screenings in order to effectively distribute their film through grassroots means.

For Exhibitors

Exhibitors will be able to create their own profile similar to the profile pages that businesses create on Yelp. Exhibitors will be able to fill out a profile page with a brief physical description of their theaters(s), financial terms, address and contact information. Exhibitors will also be able to define what types of films they are open to screening so only relevant films can be submitted to any given venue. Filmgoers will also be able to order tickets directly from the website. Exhibitors will pay a 5% service charge for every ticket sold through the website. This process will allow indie filmgoers an opportunity to discover grassroots exhibition venues in their area while making the website profitable, and to no cost to them.

For Audiences

Indie filmgoers will be able to easily type in their zip code and immediately find independent films screening close to them in non-traditional venues. Once they click on a film they are interested in, they will be lead to the film's profile page where they can read reviews, see the trailer and click on a link to order to buy tickets from the exhibitor, via our site. Filmgoers will also be able to rate films and venues. This will help indie filmgoers determine which grassroots exhibitors run a good program, create a good filmmaking experience, provide amenities that some filmgoers are looking for (the purchase of food and beverages for example). This will also provide us with valuable information about the movie preferences of our users on the backend. This information can be sold or used in the future to help market and distribute independent films.

WORKFLOW

1. Registering with YouScreen

I. The Filmmaker, Distributor and Indie movie fan goes to YouScreen.com. The front page will have three options.

II. Register (for new users).

- The user will enter his or her name in blank text fields.
- The user will then enter his or her ID and password in blank text fields.
- The user will enter a password into a blank text field with at least 7 characters.
- The user will enter his or her email address into a blank text field.
- The user will check a tab to indicate whether they are a filmmaker, distributor or a filmgoer. The tab that they check will lead them to three different dashboards that will be described below.
- The user clicks the "Register" button and advances on to their respective Dashboard pager.

2. Filmmaker Dashboard

The Filmmaker's Dashboard is a map with dots that mark grassroots exhibition venues in a certain mile radius of the zip code the filmmaker types in. From the Dashboard the filmmaker can do five things.

I. Create a new project for a film. By clicking new project tab the filmmaker is led to a new page where they can fill out a profile for their film including a brief synopsis, a link to the trailer, etc.. Filmmakers will also be able to upload a screening quality version of their film in a secure server setting so exhibitors can screen their film without having to worry about the cost and hassle from print traffic.

Similar to Withoutabox, once a filmmaker creates a profile for their film it will be a once click process to submit to venues. This will allow filmmaker to submit their film to many different venues in a short amount of time.

II. Filmmakers will be able to search for new venues to screen their film in whatever area

they want to target. The filmmaker can type in a zip code and new screening venues will appear within a defined radius on a map. The filmmaker can then click on the exhibitors profile and call or email the exhibitor to get in touch with them about screening their film

III. The filmmaker will also be able to rate and review grassroots exhibitors based on their experience screening their film. This will help filmmakers keep distributors in check with their interest and needs and also give publicity to distributors and festivals that run a solid program. If the sound is bad, filmmakers and filmgoers will know it.

IV. Filmmakers will also be able to create their own online survey for their film in order to gather useful information from audiences related to why they came to see their film. This will help filmmakers gain an understanding of how to effectively target their audience in certain kinds of areas amongst certain kinds of populations, and promote their film accordingly.

The website would also gather information from the online surveys on the back-end of the site which could become valuable data for marketing independent films in the future.

V. Lastly, filmmakers will be able to click on the resource tab to read blogs and articles related to grassroots film distribution. The links will lead to blog posts in our research and will be organized by topics like Data in Film, Finding your Audience etc. to make it easy for filmmakers to browse through. Furthermore, a "Grassroots Tools" section will be available for filmmakers to post links to widgets and other online/grassroots tools that independent filmmakers can use to distribute their films.

3. Grassroots Exhibitors Dashboard

I. Grassroots Exhibitors will be led to a dashboard where they can write a brief description about their screening venue, what kind of films they are open to screening and list their contact information. Technical specs, including what kind of equipment and capability they have, would certainly be included.

II. Grassroots Exhibitors will then be led to a page that lists the top indie movies of the month being screened at grassroots exhibition theaters similar to Kickstarter's homepage.

This will help grassroots exhibitors discover new indie films that are doing well at other grassroots venues that they might want to screen at their own theater.

III. Exhibitors will also have a search box where they can type in the description terms of films they are interested in screening in their theater and browse the project profiles of independent filmmakers on the website.

IV. Once an exhibitor agrees to screen a film at their venue, filmgoers will able to order tickets directly from the website. Exhibitors will pay a 5% service charge for each ticket sold through the website. This will help the site make revenue without charging filmmakers, exhibitors or filmgoers for using the site.

V. Exhibitors will also have a message box where they can read and respond to messages sent to them directly from filmmakers interested in screening at their venues.

4. Indie Filmgoers Dashboard

I. Indie filmgoers will be led to a map where they can type in their zip code and enter keywords and tags (or titles, or best reviewed) for the kind of independent movies they are interested in seeing.

II. A list of films being screened in their area will pop up and they will be able to scroll down and click on the films they are interested in seeing.

III. This will lead them to the filmmakers project page where the indie filmgoer can watch the trailer and read a brief description about the film.

IV. If they are interested in seeing a movie, they can click on a link and they will be led to a page that displays which grassroots exhibitor are showing the film and at what day/time. Here they will be able to order tickets online similar to the website Fandango.

V. Filmgoers will also be able to rate films and venues after they go to see a film. This will help create a community of indie filmgoers who recommend different indie films and grassroots venues. It will also provide us with valuable information about the movie

preferences of filmgoers on our site. This information can be sold or used in the future to help market independent films.

VI. A list of recommended films based on the indie filmgoers previous searches will also pop up in a box below the users search, similar to the "Because you watched" list on Netflix. This will help indie filmgoers discover films related to their previous movie choices.

5. Marketing Plan

The marketing plan for YouScreen will focus on a three-pronged approach to attract filmmakers, grassroots exhibitors and indie filmgoers. We will first approach grassroots exhibitors about joining our site. We will meet with grassroots exhibitors personally to explain how the website will work and send them a link to the beta site where they will be able to create their own profile before we send the site to independent filmmakers.

We will also use our personal connections in the independent film industry to recruit potential exhibitors and filmmakers to join the site during the early development phase. For example, we interviewed Kate West and Jacob Perlin for our blog and both have a wealth of experience and information related to grassroots exhibition working as the managing directors of Artist Public Domain and the Cinema Conservancy, respectively. Through cold calling and our personal contacts we will recruit over 100 grassroots venues in the New York and L.A. area to register on our site.

Lastly we will reach out to indie filmgoers by encouraging filmmakers and exhibitors to advertise our site to their supporters via their email listservs, social media sites, web pages, and blogs. Similar to how Kickstarter took off, our website will gain publicity largely from diligently spread and deliberate word of mouth among filmmakers and exhibitors.

6. Proposed Timeline

Phase 1: First 3 months.

In the first 3 months we plan to hire our key web staff that would be in charge of both creating and managing website. This would include the designer, programmer, project manager and a

legal advisor. We would also purchase the domain name, content management system and content generator. Finally, we would begin outreach to an initial beta list of exhibitors, filmmakers and indie moviegoers whose feedback will be critical in app development.

Phase 2: 3-6 months

The content generator would collect and organize information about grassroots exhibition venues and film festivals into a database that filmmakers would later be able to search through by area code to find grassroots exhibition theaters that will screen their films. We would also continue to grow our beta users and and begin to test early versions of the app.

Beyond 6 months

We would launch the website and reach out to our personal contacts and media outlets like Indiewire to promote the website. All three of us would continue to researcher and blog about new distribution methods for independent filmmakers. We would publish a minimum of one post a week. This would help us gain publicity for the site and allow us to actively engage with the independent film community about new distribution ideas.

7. Estimated Budget

Below is our breakdown for the 2 years it would take to create and manage the website.

$500,000 to get website operational via hires such as program manager, website designer, content generator, and legal advisor.

$115,000 to hire 3 researchers/bloggers to continue to write about new distribution methods and contribute to the grassroots toolkit, and one operations/business manager to work towards making the website revenue positive (18 months)

$115,000 for general operational costs beyond first 6 months.

Total cost = $750,000

8. Conclusion:

Overall the site would act as a bridge between filmmakers, grassroots exhibitors and indie filmgoers. Filmmakers would visit the site to gain resources and knowledge to help distribute their films and grassroots exhibitors/festivals would use the site to promote their events. Filmgoers would go to the site to search for independent movie screenings in their area. The purpose for the site would be to make information and tools for grassroots distribution more accessible. This hopefully will empower more filmmakers to distribute their film in a grassroots way instead of losing hope or going the conventional route.