



Trouble the Water

Where Are We Now Tour

EVENT
PLANNING
TOOLKIT

FILM DIRECTED
AND PRODUCED BY
Carl Deal and
Tia Lessin

BROUGHT TO YOU BY

ACTIVE **voice**

ENGAGEMENT
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Trouble the Water

Where Are We Now Tour



A scene from
Trouble the Water,
courtesy
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

2	About the <i>Trouble the Water: Where Are We Now</i> Tour	6	Framing Your Event
3	About This Toolkit		Tips for Post-Screening Discussion
	Getting Started with Your Event in Four Steps	7	Panel Discussion
4	Define Your Objectives	8	Q&A
4	Identify Your Target Audience	8	Facilitated Dialogue
4	Determine Venue Options	8	Meeting Your Objectives with Post-Screening Discussion
5	Recruit Partner Organizations		
6	Tips for Reaching Out to Groups You've Never Worked with Before	9	Getting the Word Out
		10	Planning Checklist
		11	Acknowledgments

"*Trouble the Water* serves as an immediate call to action. It requires you to question what you have been told, to seek real truths, and to engage others to fight social indifference and neglect."

-NICOLE LEE,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
TRANSAFRICA FORUM

About the *Trouble the Water: Where Are We Now* Tour

Nowhere has the need for more equitable development been so starkly demonstrated than in the Gulf Coast region. Yet, nearly five years after Hurricane Katrina—as the nation grapples with the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression, the continuation of war abroad and the worst environmental catastrophe in U.S. history—we've seen no national call to action to promote equitable development and job creation, the elimination of poverty and ongoing racial disparities.

The *Trouble the Water: Where Are We Now* Tour is an effort to foster dialogue, mobilize communities and build support for policy reform around equitable development in the Gulf Coast, especially in areas where those displaced by Hurricane Katrina have resettled. The cornerstone of the tour is *Trouble the Water*, an Academy Award® nominated documentary and winner of the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance, about an aspiring rap artist and her husband who survive the flooding of New Orleans and seize a chance for a new beginning. The film is an intimate portrait of a community abandoned long before the hurricane hit, and a redemptive tale of a couple surviving failed levees, bungling bureaucrats and their own troubled past. It's not about a hurricane — it's about America.

In partnership with PolicyLink, a national non-profit “do tank” (as opposed to a “think tank”) dedicated to advancing economic and social equity, Active Voice is spearheading the Gulf Coast screening tour that will serve local communities in the Gulf and support the work of and boost the membership in your organization. We also hope it will engage local media, generate press coverage and lead to a broader base of support for and mobilize constituents to support equity-focused initiatives.

- Where one lives determines one’s access to quality education, livable wage jobs, adequate health and healthcare services and protection from criminal activities. Since most people living in poverty lack access to these opportunities, conditions of poverty are often self-replicating.
- Approximately 200,000 people were evacuated from the Gulf Coast Region to places such as Texas, Florida, Mississippi, Georgia and Washington, D.C.
- Of the more than 400,000 residents who lived in New Orleans prior to Katrina, the overwhelming majority lived in areas that were damaged by the storm and about one-third lived below the federal poverty line.
- Thousands of former residents of low income housing have not yet been able to return to their homes and continue to live in temporary housing or even emergency shelter far from their homes.
- Advancing equitable development means providing economic opportunity, secure jobs and sufficient affordable housing. It means providing avenues for residents to build assets and creating opportunities for community reinvestment. An equitable development approach strengthens political power and social cohesion for all residents. It also ensures that all residents have a voice in the major decisions that affect their lives.

About This Toolkit

This toolkit is intended to help you build upon the emotional power of *Trouble the Water* to foster positive change in your community. The tips included in this kit are meant for a range of groups – from churches to community-based organizations, from city agencies to informal neighborhood committees – who are interested in engaging audiences “beyond the choir” and helping their communities build broad based support for equitable development. Depending on your needs, some sections may be more relevant to your event than others. After reading through this kit, feel free to take what applies to you, and consider how what you accomplish with your event can contribute to longer term efforts.

A scene from *Trouble the Water*,
courtesy Elsewhere Films. ©2008



Getting Started with Your Event in Four Steps

1) DEFINE YOUR OBJECTIVES

Figuring out your objectives is the first step in planning a great event. Think about how your event can support some bigger picture objectives. Having a sense of what you'd like people to take away from their *Trouble the Water* experience will help you plan and set the tone. Here are some possible objectives (these are not mutually exclusive):

If you are interested in hosting a screening of *Trouble the Water* and want to know how to purchase a copy of the film and secure rights for a screening, please contact Zeitgeist Films' Director of Non-Theatrical Distribution, Benjamin Crossley-Marra, at 212.274.1989 or ben@zeitgeistfilms.com.

- Educate community members, especially those "beyond the choir," about obstacles preventing or limiting equitable development in your community
- Foster safe and productive dialogue among people who may not be aware of the connection between where one lives and one's access to quality education, livable wage jobs, adequate health and healthcare services and personal safety
- Prompt coalition-building between local and state groups working on community building and civic engagement
- Inspire new leaders by offering motivated viewers easy ways they can get involved
- Build bridges and engage audiences
- Spotlight the work of your organization and generate donations and press attention

2) IDENTIFY YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

Once you define your objectives, you'll have a better sense of who your target audience is. Do you hope to engage people who are concerned about the issues but want to get more involved? Would you like to reach "beyond the choir," and introduce the issues to civic groups or business clubs? Are you interested in engaging communities of faith or local decision makers? Even if your organization does not have direct connections to your target audiences, you can partner with organizations that do.

3) DETERMINE VENUE OPTIONS AND MAKE SURE YOU HAVE THE PROPER A/V EQUIPMENT

Before confirming a venue, you should contact Zeitgeist Films about purchasing a copy of the film and securing rights for the screening you have in mind (please see contact info in the left hand margin of this page). Where you screen depends on your budget, the expected size of your audience and the impression you want to give. For example, if you want to host an intimate dialogue, a church basement or large living room would suffice. If you want to engage college students or high school students, an auditorium or classroom would work well. If you want to put on a more professional event that attracts VIPs and press, you may consider doing your screening in a private screening room (at a library or museum, for example) or in a theatre. Theatres and screening rooms often have rental fees, which can range between \$450 and \$1200. However, you might be surprised to learn that there are organizations in your area that have screening rooms available for little or no cost. Local universities, community centers and libraries might be good places to start.

You may also find out if there are any organizations that do a regular screening series, as they might be interested in partnering with you and including *Trouble the Water* in their line-up. (See next section on recruiting partner organizations.) Remember to do a "tech check" and preview your *Trouble the Water* DVD on the equipment you will be using the day of your event.

4) RECRUIT PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

It's always good to invite other groups and organizations to partner with you on your event. Partner organizations can not only help reach your target audiences, but also lend credibility and contribute to your event planning. In some instances, event-based partnerships can even pave the way for longer term relationships that will benefit your mutual efforts.

Partners can get involved in a range of ways, depending on their interest and capacity. At the very least, they can help get the word out about the event on their listservs or websites, but some partners might be able to get more actively involved and contribute ideas, time, resources and/or panelists for the event. For *Trouble the Water*, you might consider the following groups as potential partners:

- Civic organizations
- Churches, mosques, synagogues and other faith organizations
- Civil rights groups and groups committed to economic justice
- Community colleges
- Departments, clubs or institutes at local colleges or universities
- High school and college student groups
- Community foundations
- Local developers, community and urban planners
- Policy institutes
- Local government officials
- Local businesses
- Libraries, museums and media/film centers

To really broaden your reach, try contacting an organization you've never worked with before that will share an interest in *Trouble the Water*. This will help you reach new potential supporters and bring your messages to new audiences beyond the choir.



A scene from *Trouble the Water*, courtesy Elsewhere Films. ©2008

Tips for Reaching Out to Groups You've Never Worked with Before:

- Offer background and context. You can get more information about the film and the issues at: www.troublethewaterfilm.com, www.policylink.org and www.gulfcoastfund.org.
- Make it relevant to them. Highlight elements of the film and your objectives that are most relevant to their interests. For example, if you're reaching out to local youth, they might be interested to know that the film focuses on an aspiring rap artist and her husband and features music by Massive Attack, Mary Mary, Citizen Cope, John Lee Hooker, The Roots, Dr. John and Black Kold Madina.
- Let them know about partner benefits. Getting involved in your event can be a good opportunity for other groups to spotlight their work, raise their visibility and reach new audiences. If you are open to a more collaborative partnership, invite them to get more involved in event planning and design, such as suggesting panelists for the discussion, brainstorming target audiences, etc.
- Remember that groups have different capacities so involvement will vary. Some will simply just send your email blast to their listserv, others might get more involved in logistical planning and some might even be able to contribute funds. Be mindful of what your partners are capable of and make sure you're not asking them for too much (or too little!) as you plan your event.

Framing Your Event

Consider what you want your audiences to walk away with – deeper knowledge of affordable housing programs in your community, for example – and frame your event accordingly. Remember that the film is just a springboard for deeper engagement, so it's important to provide locally relevant information and resources to help viewers delve deeper. This could include any combination of the following:

- **Panel Discussion:** Panelists can help put the film in context, whether it's providing actionable steps audience members can take to eliminate discrimination in rental and homebuyer markets or building broad based support for continued federal assistance and local equity-focused initiatives. It's always a good idea to have a range of perspectives represented, but try not to invite more than five people, including the moderator, to participate. Possible panelists might include a community organizer, a developer, a representative from a community foundation and a government official responsible for economic development who could talk about initiatives to spur equitable development in your community, or a long time resident and a new neighbor displaced by Hurricane Katrina or Hurricane Ike and resettled in your town who can speak about their differing experiences. Partner organizations are also great resources for potential if they're being represented. See the next section for more detailed tips on how to run a successful panel discussion and audience Q&A.
- **Interactive Ideas:** Engage the audience in activities that heighten their senses and connectivity to the issue. For example, if you're providing food, consider a menu that's representative of your community's diverse populations. If you have access to a large map, you might want to put it up and ask people to insert pins where they lived at in 2005 when Hurricane Katrina hit and where they live now. This will provide a visual representation of the number of people in your audience who have had to leave their homes as a result of the hurricane.



A scene from *Trouble the Water*, courtesy Elsewhere Films. ©2008

- **Action Opportunities:** Offer audience members concrete ways they can get involved with and support your and your partner organizations' work. These might include visiting your website to find out about upcoming events, volunteering, becoming a member, signing a pledge, making a donation, etc.
- **Showcase Your Work:** Save some time after the screening for you and/or your co-sponsors to give a brief presentation about the work you do and how audience members can support it. You and your partner organizations can also display literature outside of your screening venue so that audiences can learn more about your work. And there's nothing wrong with making a funding pitch at the event, especially if your audience includes potential big-time donors.
- **Distribute Materials and Resources:** Present audience members with fact sheets, flyers about upcoming events and other relevant materials. Organizations like the Gulf Coast Fund and PolicyLink have helpful resources on their websites that are available for easy download.
- **Reception:** A public post-screening meet-and-greet will allow opportunities for networking and continued discussion after the screening. Or, host a VIP reception with local leaders and funders. Whichever way you decide to go, refreshments are always a good idea!

No matter what format your event takes, make sure to have a system for collecting email addresses at your event, and follow up with audience members and co-sponsor organizations in the days after. You've worked too hard to let those relationships disappear!

Tips for Post-Screening Discussion

A film like *Trouble the Water* can raise a range of emotions, questions and/or concerns from the audience, and we recommend you address this with a post-screening panel discussion, Q&A and/or facilitated dialogue. Below are some tips and ideas for having a productive conversation no matter what your format:

Panel Discussion

- The themes of your panel discussion will vary depending on your event objectives, but it's always a good idea to have a range of perspectives represented on the panel.
- Make sure your panelists get a chance to see the film prior to your event.
- Give your panelists an idea of who will be in the audience, so they can tailor the discussion to the audience's needs. For example, if you anticipate a younger audience, ask panelists to tone down any sector-specific jargon.
- If you can, have an experienced moderator present to keep time and prompt the speakers with questions. A moderator should be someone who has: (a) your trust, (b) proven public speaking abilities and (c) knowledge of the issues addressed in the film. Potential candidates include community leaders, members of your organization or members of the press, to name a few. An experienced moderator can help a panel go smoothly, and should have experience addressing tensions between audience members.
- A good length for a panel discussion is usually about 20-30 minutes, depending on how many panelists you have. After that, it's always a good idea to open it up to questions from the audience (see below).
- If you'll be in a large auditorium or theatre, make sure there are microphones!



A scene from *Trouble the Water*, courtesy Elsewhere Films. ©2008

Q&A

- Leave as much time as possible for audience questions.
- As *Trouble the Water* is very evocative and emotional, you might consider prompting the audience with a question first. If you go this route, make sure the moderator says, “Let’s get two or three short, personal impressions from the audience to get us going,” “What jumped out at you in the film?” or “Which characters did you identify with?” That way the discussion won’t be derailed early on.
- Given the subject matter of the film, some audience members may be compelled to give long accounts of their personal experiences. If their comments exceed a minute or two, respectfully thank them and ask them if they have a question for the panelists.
- If your group is large, you may consider either passing around a couple of microphones for those who have questions, or simply setting up mics in the aisles and having people line up to ask questions. You might also consider having a volunteer walk around the room and hold the mic for audience members while they ask their questions (to prevent overly wordy questions and commentary).
- A good Q&A lasts around 30-45 minutes. If your audience seems like they still want to talk after the time is up, invite them into the lobby or a nearby restaurant or café to continue the conversation.

Facilitated Dialogue

- If your group is small enough (under 20 people) it might be a good idea to do a facilitated dialogue, where all participants have an opportunity to share their feelings and experiences.
- Even with a large group, if your space permits, you may want to break into small groups for dialogue. (And, if you have only one facilitator, s/he can float among the different groups.)
- Always start the dialogue by asking the group to share their immediate reactions to the film, e.g., what jumped out at them or particularly moved them. But again, establish some limits by requesting short and concise comments.
- You must be ready in case the film or speakers come under scrutiny. For example, there may be audience members who are highly frustrated with the current economic climate and place blame on demographic changes. A neutral moderator can help make sure that the conversation remains productive and many perspectives are heard. Guide any comments or concerns to a positive end that applauds the benefits of sharing information in an open forum. Encourage critical audience members to think about how the film or the available community resources might be a helpful way to address the tensions that they are feeling.

Meeting Your Objectives with Post-Screening Discussion

The way the discussion is framed can be helpful in meeting your objectives.

- If you’d like to build coalitions, feature panelists from various organizations or churches in the community, identify common themes in your work, and emphasize those points in the discussion.
- If your goal is to have a safe space for open dialogue, break into small groups, ask each group to share their concerns or opinions, and have several experienced facilitators on hand.
- If your main objective is to give voice to immigrant or resettled community members, work with a local cultural or resettlement agency and identify one or two good speakers who are willing to share their own story.

Offer your audience members ways to get involved, whether it’s as simple as visiting your website to find out about upcoming events, or joining a task force on economic development.

Getting the Word Out

Getting the word out is one of the most important things you can do in your event planning. Even a well thought-out event with prominent speakers can suffer low attendance if you don't cover your bases.

Below are some additional tips for getting the word out:

- **Check out materials and downloadable artwork** at http://www.troublethewaterfilm.com/content/pages/download_materials.
- **Nail down the details.** Confirm the exact time, location, venue and ticketing/RSVP procedure before you send out notices to anyone. (If you're taking RSVPs, plan to accept 30% more RSVPs than you have room for and let late responders know you might be able to squeeze them in if people earlier on the list don't show.) And, as a nod to your partner organizations, include a mention of them in all of your outreach.
- **Hit the inboxes.** The simplest thing you can do to promote your event is to create an email blast and send it out widely via your listserv and those of your partners. Send out two emails: the first at least two weeks before your event, and then a reminder several days before.
- **Use Social Media.** You can also create a Facebook event and invite all your friends, and encourage them also to invite their friends. Continuously update your Facebook status with short notes and link to the event page so that it will appear in your friends' newsfeed. Send out a reminder message via Facebook to all confirmed and undecided attendees at least one week prior to the event. If you have a Twitter account and a following, Tweet about the event as well - you can use free URL shortening applications such as <http://bit.ly/> to link to the Facebook event page. Search through Twitter for like-minded organizations or individuals (especially those with a lot of followers) and follow them and re-Tweet (RT) their posts, this will help increase your own Twitter following and the likelihood of your posts being re-Tweeted.
- **Get it on community calendars.** Try to get calendar listings in your city's weekly publication(s) and on the web. If you have a website of your own, make sure to post information about your event there and ask any partner organizations to do the same. Publicize your screening on the official film website at: <http://trouble.bluestatedigital.com/page/event/create>.
- **Post flyers.** Make flyers and post them in high traffic areas, such as college campuses, shopping malls, grocery stores, places of worship and recreation centers.
- **Start the presses.** Ten days before your event, send a press release to local newspapers. Try to target reporters covering community issues, and remember to customize your press release to highlight the film's relevance to local issues.

A scene from *Trouble the Water*, courtesy Elsewhere Films. ©2008



Planning Checklist

Once you have defined your target audience, objectives and framing, begin planning the event.

Preliminary planning – at least 6 weeks prior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Purchase a copy of the film and secure rights for a screening by contacting Zeitgeist Films’ Director of Non-Theatrical Distribution, Benjamin Crossley-Marra, at 212.274.1989 or ben@zeitgeistfilms.com. <input type="checkbox"/> Book the venue and date for your screening. Make sure the venue has the proper equipment for the audience you have in mind. <input type="checkbox"/> Recruit local organizational partners to broaden your reach, and help identify roles for each one (for larger community events) <input type="checkbox"/> Determine speakers, panelists and facilitator (if applicable).
Logistical planning and initial outreach – 3 to 4 weeks prior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Create a flyer to publicize your screening (use template provided by AV). <input type="checkbox"/> Send out press releases to media outlets (for larger community events). See “Getting the Word Out” on p.9 for more information as well as AV’s press release template and recommended placements. <input type="checkbox"/> Publicize your screening on the official film website at: http://trouble.bluestatedigital.com/page/event/create. <input type="checkbox"/> Confirm the appropriate format for your screening (most likely DVD). <input type="checkbox"/> Secure food for reception (if applicable). <input type="checkbox"/> Draft event agenda.
More logistical planning – 2 weeks prior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Create an email blast to publicize your event electronically (template provided by AV). <input type="checkbox"/> Again, send one announcement 2 weeks prior and another several days prior. <input type="checkbox"/> Contact community calendars about your event (for larger community events).
Media outreach (for larger community events) – 10 days prior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Follow up with media outlets to confirm receipt of releases. <input type="checkbox"/> Make calls to local television and radio programs.
Final planning – several days prior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Important: test screen your format version of the film in advance of the event to make sure there aren’t any glitches. <input type="checkbox"/> Send second round of email blasts. <input type="checkbox"/> Remind individual reporters who expressed an interest in covering the story of the pending date (for larger community events). <input type="checkbox"/> Finalize agenda. <input type="checkbox"/> Make copies of handouts to distribute at the event.
At the event itself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Take photos! <input type="checkbox"/> As people arrive, ask them to sign up for your listserv. <input type="checkbox"/> Have a timekeeper so that panelists/speakers remain within their assigned speaking time. <input type="checkbox"/> Be prepared to suggest next steps and have materials available that will make it easy for attendees to learn about other events, become involved in your organization or take action.

Acknowledgments

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Active Voice uses film, television, and multimedia to spark social change from grassroots to grass tops. Our team of strategic communications specialists works with mediamakers, funders, advocates, and thought leaders to put a human face on the issues of our times. We frame and beta-test key messages, develop national and local partnerships, plan and execute high profile, outcome-oriented events, repurpose digital content for web and viral distribution, produce ancillary and educational resources, and consult with industry and sector leaders. Since our inception in 2001, Active Voice has built a diverse portfolio of story-based campaigns focusing on issues including immigration, criminal justice, healthcare, and sustainability. www.activevoice.net



PolicyLink is a national research and action institute advancing economic and social equity by Lifting Up What Works.® Founded in 1999, PolicyLink connects the work of people on the ground to the creation of sustainable communities of opportunity that allow everyone to participate and prosper. Such communities offer access to quality jobs, affordable housing, good schools, transportation, and the benefits of healthy food and physical activity. www.policylink.org

ELSEWHEREFILMS

Elsewhere Films is dedicated to making films of social relevance and artistic vision, and bringing its unique storytelling to audiences far and wide. Founded by Academy Award-nominated filmmakers Tia Lessin and Carl Deal, Elsewhere Films produced *Trouble the Water*, winner of the Sundance Film Festival Grand Jury Prize and the Gotham Independent Film Award and broadcast on HBO in the US and Channel Four in the UK.