
TREES IN TROUBLE

FIVE BASIC STEPS FOR PLANNING AND BUILDING PARTICIPATION INTO YOUR EVENT

Before you get started we want to encourage you to have a look at the following Five Basic Steps. We put them together to make it easy for you to plan your event and build in as much participation as possible. The steps are tried and true, so use them to engage your planning team and partners.

#1: THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT ACCOMPLISH

Figuring out what you want to accomplish is the first step in planning a great event. To create your event goal(s), ask yourself how this film relates to and will advance the mission of your organization or campaign.

- Are you interested in building community and regional awareness about the consequences of invasive pests?
- Are you interested in educating the public about the importance of trees in your community?
- Do you want to engage your community leaders and politicians in a dialogue about tree policy issues?
- Do you want to heighten your organization's profile?
- Do you want to build a coalition or bring in new partners?

Once you are clear about what the film can do to advance your goals, you will have a better sense of what you would like people to take away from their screening of *Trees in Trouble*. This will be critically important to help you plan and set a good tone for your event. Ask yourself what a successful outcome for your event would look like.

Here are some sample outcomes:

- **Build coalitions and forge new alliances “beyond the usual suspects.”** If you represent a new organization or effort, this may be an important goal for you. Be sure to recruit co-sponsors for your event, and think outside the box! Identify new stakeholders and potential leaders.
- **Make sure that commitments and expectations between co-sponsors are clearly defined.**
- **Raise public awareness:** If your main objective is public education, create focused talking points to guide the panelists so that the message is focused. Also, plan to set aside at least half an hour for Q&A with the audience.

#2: IDENTIFY YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE AND RECRUIT PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Do you hope to engage an audience that is motivated around the issues and ready to get more involved? Local civic organizations can be powerful allies and partners. Think of where people gather on a regular basis such as business organizations, Rotary Clubs, churches, cultural groups, rural development organizations, planning organizations, environmental groups and conservancies, and women's clubs. Networking organizations like business, professional, and minority associations, faith-based groups and ecumenical church alliances, as well as Masonic organizations and school associations can also be effective. Partners can get involved in a variety of ways. Ask them to contribute ideas, time, and resources. Every little bit helps, even if it's as simple as getting the word out about the event through their listservs, websites, or Facebook pages.

#3: GET THE WORD OUT

Publicizing your event is really important and will attract participation from unexpected places! Here are five basic things you need to do to publicize your event:

- **Make personal contacts.** The surest way to secure the desired attendance for your event is for you and your partners to identify who needs to be in the audience and reach out to them

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through phone calls or one-on-one meetings. Encourage all of your partners to commit to making sure there is good sized audience that is full of the people you all have identified as important.

- **Publicize online.** The simplest way to promote your event is to create an email blast and send it out widely via listservs. We recommend you send out the email twice: the first two weeks before, followed by a reminder several days prior to your event. If your organization has a website, be sure to post information about your event there, and ask any co-hosts to do the same.
- **Post fliers in your community.** Create a *Trees in Trouble* flyer to advertise your event. Make copies (in color if your budget permits) and post them in high traffic areas, such as shopping malls, grocery stores, churches, public libraries, college campuses, and recreation centers.
- **Contact local media.** Two weeks before your event, send a press release to local media outlets, including ethnic media. Try to target reporters who cover issues that reflect your event's goals - such as civil rights, economic development, land use, transportation or political issues - and customize your press release to highlight the film's relevance to your community. If your event will feature prominent panelists or local heroes, make sure to mention them! Several days before, send out a press advisory, repeating the critical aspects about the event that will be of interest to the media.
- **Make calls to local television and radio programs,** including local news, public affairs programs and talk radio stations. Let them know about your event, explain its importance to your community, and if possible direct them to a local expert or advocate who can be available for interviews. Try contacting assignment editors (for local TV news) or producers (for public affairs programs or talk radio).

#4: SET THE MEETING AGENDA

Once you have done your planning, partnership building and publicity, think about what will actually happen at the screening. What kind of event do you want your screening to be? You may want to decide on the agenda before you do publicity so you can publicize a special speaker or panel. You can always send out a second press release. Here are some ideas for how to structure the event:

- **Invite filmmaker Andrea Torrice.** She can talk about a range of topics, from the history of urban forestry, to the making of the films, and will tailor her comments to fit your needs.
- **Invite a Keynote Speaker.** Invite a local leader, scholar or someone who has been personally impacted to speak about some of the themes the film raises.
- **Host a Panel Discussion.** Panelists can help put the film in context, whether it's providing historical background or connecting the issues in *Trees in Trouble* to current conditions and to your local community. It is always a good idea to have a range of perspectives represented.
- **Hold a Public Reception.** Plan a special post-screening meet-and-greet to allow opportunities for networking and continued discussion after the screening. (If you have a budget for refreshments, even better.)
- **Suggest Further Outlets for Action.** Offer audience members concrete ways they can get involved and support the work of the organization(s) hosting the screening. These might include visiting your website to find out about upcoming events, volunteering for a specific initiative, becoming a member or making a donation.
- **Stay In Touch.** Have a system for collecting email addresses and phone numbers at your event. Follow up with audience members and co-sponsor organizations in the days after. You have worked too hard to let those relationships disappear. Encourage everyone to connect with other *Trees in Trouble* participants on Facebook by logging into www.Facebook.com and searching for *Trees in Trouble*. You can also take pictures at your event and send them to torricemedia@gmail.com and we will post them on our Facebook page.

#5: FACILITATING THE EVENT

(Make sure you take a look at *Trees in Trouble* Viewer's Guide at www.treesintrouble.com)

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Tips for a Successful Panel

Make sure you carefully think through how each panelist can help provide a critical piece of the message you want to convey. If possible, arrange for them to see the film and receive talking points in advance. Ask them to arrive a half-hour early so they are properly prepared and understand the goal and context of the event.

- Give your panelists an idea of who will be in the audience, so they can tailor their comments to the audience's needs and interests. (For example, if you anticipate a general audience, ask panelists to avoid any sector-specific jargon.)
- Provide talking points for the panelists that help track them to the goal of the event. Depending on time, you may want to ask each speaker to give a brief reaction to the film; suggest that they choose specific scenes from the film and link them to their message. If time is limited, just jump straight into the discussion.
- Have an experienced moderator keep the discussion moving and field questions from the audience.
- Remember to reserve as much time as possible for Q&A with the audience!

Facilitating Group Discussions

This is the exciting, interactive part. If you are hosting a large screening of *Trees in Trouble*, breaking out into small groups of 6-8 people may be a good way of generating more intimate conversations. If you go this route, identify a handful of facilitators well in advance and make sure to go over these guidelines with them before your screening. The facilitators' basic job will be to guide interesting conversations and ensure that everyone participates. Ask facilitators to encourage people to share their reactions, provide some background information, and help the group generate ideas for continuing engagement with the issues by determining their "next steps." This also encourages future networking! Please review both the sample facilitation sheet used for a community engagement discussion in Pittsburgh following a screening there as well as the Viewer's Guide. Additional tips:

- **Explain the purpose of the conversation.** To keep the group on track, clearly articulate your goals for the dialogue at its outset. Why did you bring everyone together?
- **Take a Minute to Reflect.** Right after you screen *Trees in Trouble*, ask people how they felt about it. Let people speak from their hearts before you move the conversation into the discussion questions. *Trees in Trouble* is a powerful experience, and sharing it on an emotional level is one great way to build group cohesion.
- **Set ground rules.** Encourage people to participate, actively listen, and leave enough time for others to speak.
 - **Consider the structure of the question and answer section.** Make sure you have a contingency plan for circumventing audience members who have an "axe to grind" and take over the floor to move their own agenda. One strategy that can be a helpful way of avoiding this common problem is to ask audience members to write their questions on index cards which are given to the moderator for screening.
 - **Distribute options for follow up to every audience member.** The goal of most screenings will be to move attendees to consider participating in the "next steps." Ending your session by creating a set of actions or next steps is a good way to ensure that the conversation does not end with your screening event. You can provide a simple follow up survey with three or four options to check off. In addition, you can create a calendar or list of community events that are linked to the regional issues explored at your event

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PLANNING CHECKLIST

Hosting a public *Trees in Trouble* screening event is easy if you plan ahead. Use this checklist to keep track of where you are in your planning.

1. PURCHASE THE FILM

A note about purchasing the film: Independent public interest films like *Trees in Trouble* are very labor intensive and expensive and would not be possible without the support of institutions and communities who use the work. This is why we ask that you purchase a “community licensed DVD” for your community event. The film’s distributor is offering a special discount rate of \$75 for community organizations, which gives unlimited use for public screenings. DVDs licensed for educational and for home viewing uses are also available. Bullfrog’s official price list (subject to change) is:

Institutions/Universities/Corporations - \$250 plus shipping

Community Groups/Unions - \$75 plus shipping

Individuals - \$25.00 plus shipping

Shipping and handling \$7

Special rates available for multiple purchases.

For more information or to obtain the discounted DVD visit www.bullfrogfilms.com or call 800.543.3764.

2. 10 WEEKS PRIOR | PRELIMINARY PLANNING

- Create a Participatory Planning Process:
 1. Meet with representatives of local organizations who might be interested in participating in the planning of an event.
 2. Show them the film and discuss why it might be important to their organizational mission.
 3. Develop a specific goal with partnering organizations about what the event will accomplish for all of you. Discuss how the planners may work together, what resources they might bring to the process, what is expected of each, and how they will be represented in the media and events.
 4. Create lasting relationships without misunderstanding. Create a brief Memo of Understanding describing what each will be doing, the benefits, and media representation.
 5. Determine whether you want to work with a local PBS station or hold an independent community screening.
- Book the venue and date for your screening.
- Recruit more local organizational partners to broaden your reach and help identify roles for each partner, such as publicity, panelist coordination, and reception planning (reference #3 above).
- Determine speakers, panelists, and moderator (if applicable).
- Develop a plan to make sure audience turn out is sufficient to meet your goal.

3. 3-4 WEEKS PRIOR | LOGISTICAL PLANNING AND INITIAL OUTREACH

- Begin personal outreach to desired audience members.
- Create an email blast and get the word out electronically. Make sure to include your website, Facebook page, and/or RSVP information, as applicable.
- Choose the format for your screening (TV broadcast or DVD), and check out your equipment well in advance.
- Find your local TV station and search for broadcast times on the local PBS website or purchase your copy of *Trees in Trouble* DVD licensed for community screenings through Bullfrog Films at www.bullfrogfilms.com or by calling 800.543.3764.
- Secure food for reception.

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- Draft event agenda and vet with partners.
- Contact community calendars about your event.

4. **2 WEEKS PRIOR | MORE LOGISTICAL PLANNING**

- Contact press, including local television stations and/or radio programs. (See “Step #3: Get the Word Out” for more information.)
- Create a flyer to publicize your screening, and post in high-traffic areas.
- Confirm all details with event staff (caterer, venue, IT, etc.).

5. **10 DAYS PRIOR | MEDIA OUTREACH**

- Send out press releases to media outlets.
- Make calls to local television and radio programs.
- Write talking points for panelists and the moderator and distribute for their review and comment.

6. **SEVERAL DAYS PRIOR | FINAL DETAILS**

- Test screen your event equipment one last time to avoid any glitches.
- Send a reminder email blast.
- Follow up with press who expressed an interest in covering the story and send out a media advisory.
- Finalize agenda.
- Make copies of handouts (facts, partner profiles, panelist bios, Work Plan Grids, web site info) to distribute at the event.
- Organize registration table with name tags, sign in sheets, organizational information and campaign information if relevant.

7. **DURING THE EVENT**

- Take photos!
- As people arrive, ask them to sign up to receive updates from your organization.
- Have a timekeeper so that panelists/speakers remain within their assigned time.
- Announce planned follow-up activities and have materials about coming opportunities for action and additional resources available for attendees at the end of the event.
- Let audience members know that they can learn more about the film on *Trees in Trouble* website – www.treesintrouble.com, and invite them to host screenings of their own!

8. **AFTER THE EVENT**

- Distribute the participant information to everyone who attended.
- Follow up with audience members to invite them to participate in activities that grow out of the event. Encourage them to organize a screening, panel discussion, or meeting.
- Ask everyone to join the Facebook page.
- Send your event photos to torricedia@gmail.com. View them and connect with other participants and fans on *Trees in Trouble* Facebook page.

Need more info? Contact us at: <http://www.treesintrouble.com/#contact-us>

“Trees in Trouble tells the story of Cincinnati’s response to the threat to its trees posed by the emerald ash borer. However, the film’s message is not limited to southern Ohio: across the country, from Massachusetts to San Diego, Minneapolis to Charleston, thousands of communities face the same threat: valuable and beloved trees being killed by non-native insects or diseases. While the trees and killers differ, the cost to the communities is the same: destruction of trees that provide shade and other important ecosystem services and create our sense of home. Trees in Trouble helps us understand what we are losing and links us to actions we can take to counter this tragedy.”

--Faith Campbell, Vice President, Center for Invasive Species Prevention