

YOUR ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

HOW TO HOST A FILM SCREENING WITH DIGNITY

1

Films engage our minds and emotions and invite us to participate in a story in ways that spoken or written word cannot. Documentaries have the power to change the world, one viewer at a time, by telling stories about larger issues. In this way, films can act as a catalyst for change.

In the death with dignity movement, movies invite people to the conversation about what death may be like and, more importantly, how people may want their own death to go. Film brings people together for discussion. Screenings can foster more power in your grassroots advocacy by growing your ranks, raising awareness, and creating important personal connections. Unless choosing a paid venue, hosting a film event is easy and generally costs little other than a few hours of time to prepare and hold the event.

WHAT TO WATCH

We have selected several films of various genres and lengths that you can use for a film screening event. They are relevant to the death with dignity movement and can be used to engage family, friends, and the public in lively discussion.

[*How to Die in Oregon*](#), 2011, 1h 48m

[*Bill Moyers: On Our Own Terms, 2000; Episode 3 – A Death of One's Own*](#), 2000, 45m

[*The Last Campaign of Governor Booth Gardner*](#), 2009, 37m

[*Alternate Endings: Six New Ways to Die in America*](#), 2019, 1h 8m

[*Here Awhile*](#), 2019, 1h 25m

“Documentaries, by telling the true stories of real people, play an important role in helping audiences making the connection between broader issues or ideas and people’s lives.”

—the Impact Field Guide and Toolkit

Before streaming, renting, or purchasing, check with a local library to see if they can loan you the film for use at your event. They may even be willing or want to host the event at the library itself.

Read: [*Why documentaries have the power to change the world*](#)

BEWARE: COPYRIGHT

Films, like other works of art, are protected by copyright, specifically Title 17 of the United States Code. Before you screen a film to any group of people, be aware of any copyright restrictions on your film. The following are some general guidelines we provide for your information and which does not constitute legal advice.

If you show the film at an event advertised for anyone to attend, whether it's free or paid, it's a public performance for which you should request, and possibly also pay for, a permission (license).

We recommend contacting the film's producers with a request for permission to screen their film. The producers of these films understand the impact of their work and the value of public screenings. In your request, describe how you intend to use the film and request to know any specific restrictions. When using the film, be respectful and follow the limits of the permission granted.

Charging admission or collecting donations are prohibited activities without a written contractual arrangement.

There is an educational exception to needing permission for a public

performance, but your film must be:

- a legitimate copy (e.g. Netflix), and
- part of a course curriculum/syllabus, and
- shown by an instructor (or student educator), who must be personally present during face-to-face teaching activities (i.e. not for recreation, entertainment, or general cultural value) in a classroom or similar place devoted to instruction.

An additional advantage of using libraries to screen your film is their experience with public performances like film screenings.

If you show the movie to a small group of friends, say your core group of advocates, in your room or apartment, it would be a private performance, which is permissible and does not violate copyright.

CHOOSING A VENUE

Unless choosing a paid venue, hosting a film event is easy and generally costs little other than a few hours of time to prepare and hold the event.

Your reasons for wanting to hold a screening will likely determine the best venue. Think about who you would like to invite and why. Is this for a friends-and-family gathering to share your passion for death with dignity? Do you want to have a public event to educate in your community?

Possible locations include:

- Your home or someone else's home
- Local church meeting room
- Public library or meeting room at a town office or municipal location
- Public film venue, such as an independent theatre or restaurant with film screening capability
- Any room with privacy, capacity, and a plain white wall, particularly if you have your own or can borrow audio/visual (A/V) equipment
- Consider an online event using Zoom or another platform

While sometimes free, many meeting places may charge for use of the space and A/V equipment. Local libraries and meeting rooms are generally least expensive, and you may find that a theatre can be rather costly (and may carry some requirements).

DATE AND TIME

Choose a date at least a month or two in the future to have time for reserving the location, sending invitations, and promoting your event.

For the time of the event, consider the audience. Do they work during the day? An after-work/before dinner time might be best. Are they retired? An early afternoon event might be preferable. Is the event at a library or church? Work with their staff to help you determine the most convenient time.

In many instances the availability of a venue will drive the event date.

OTHER LOGISTICS

- Ask friends or colleagues to help you coordinate the event.
- Develop a checklist to help you plan the event (see below).
- Watch the film in advance at your planned location to ensure all equipment functions properly, e.g. video quality is acceptable, sound is fine, internet connection is stable, and so on.
- Learn to use A/V equipment or your selected online platform, or have someone in attendance to provide technical support (your venue may have a staff person or volunteer in charge of A/V).
- Have a backup plan for situations like cancellation of venue, equipment failure, power outage, weather event, and so forth.
- Consider a table with hand-outs or take-aways. Drop us a note if you'd like some materials for display.
- Develop a sign-up sheet to capture first/last name, zip code, and email address for those wanting to be on your mailing list. An online venue can capture this information.
- Designate a capable friend to take photos at the event.

- For public screenings, consider tracking numbers with an electronic free-ticketing platform like Eventbrite.
- For private in-home screenings, consider using the Death over Dinner planning tool to add a unique twist to your event. Host a wine-tasting, or pot-luck luncheon/dinner.
- Plan an extra 30 to 45 minutes for Q&A following the film.

PROMOTING YOUR EVENT

Whether your screening is public or private, you'll want to promote it so the right people show up. Consider these possibilities for promoting your event:

- Set up an online ticketing system, using tools like Eventbrite. Even if you don't charge for admission (which we recommend avoiding so not to face additional copyright challenges), ticketing will help you keep track of and contact your attendees.
- Private screening: send invitations well in advance and ask for RSVPs (or ticket reservations). Follow up a few days prior to the event to confirm those attending.
- Public screening: design a flyer or other announcement with details about your event (date, time, location, map, parking instructions, contact information, tickets) and post in appropriate locations where your target audience congregates (libraries, coffee shops, bulletin boards, various hangouts).

- Post event announcements on social media (and ask collaborators to do so as well), online calendars, and use in a press release if planning one.
- Send reminders to your attendee list one week and one day before, as well as the morning of the event. Be sure your reminder repeats basic information (date, time, location, map, parking instructions, and contact information).

DURING A FILM SCREENING EVENT

The length of the film will help set the duration of your event. No matter the run time of the movie, make sure to plan an extra:

- 5-10 minutes for the welcome,
- 30-45 minutes for questions and answers following the film (do not be surprised if you get so many questions or such a good discussion you'll run out of time), and
- 30 minutes before and after the event for setup and breakdown/cleanup.

Welcome Guests

After attendees take their seats, welcome them to the event and introduce yourself. If you are part of a group or an organization working to enact death with dignity, briefly introduce it, offering details like your mission, activities, and website.

Next, provide housekeeping details, like the location of restrooms, sign-up sheets, and snacks, if any.

Wrap up by describing the event itself, what is about to take place. You can give a brief description of the film and advertise the Q&A at the end.

Screen the Film

In most cases, your event will feature a single film ([How to Die in Oregon](#) is the most common).

If you choose to screen a combination of films, e.g. the death with dignity-related segment of *Alternative Endings* and the Bill Moyers episode, use the break to offer attendees a chance to stretch their legs, go to the restroom, or have a snack.

Hold a Q&A

It is a good idea to begin the Q&A portion of your event by stating that all comments are welcome and should be respectful and welcoming of differing perspectives. Remarks should be personal in nature and should relate to the film. This will encourage people to speak about their own values and beliefs regarding self-determination at the end of their own life.

Most importantly, don't rush the discussion. Allow people to discuss back and forth. It's important to encourage people not to speak in generalities, but to reflect on what they want for their own death.

Consider opening the discussion with open-ended movie prompts like:

- What issues or questions came up for you during the film?

- How were you affected by [SPECIFIC PART/STORY OF THE FILM]?
- What did you notice about [SPECIFIC CHARACTER OR PART OF THE FILM/STORY]?
- What, if anything, has changed for you since seeing this film?

The discussion that follows may evolve into that of larger, deeper issues like

- If you had a relative who wanted this option, how would you support their decision?
- How might you respectfully respond to someone who disagrees with this choice?
- How do you envision your own death?

If there is a death with dignity bill pending in your legislature at the time of your event and you (or a member of your organizing committee) are very well versed in it, you may want to speak about the bill, its elements (who can use it, what are the safeguards, what is the process), and its current status.

If an opponent of death with dignity shows up at your event and attempts to hijack the discussion, we suggest the following tactics:

- invite them (respectfully) to mind their own death;
- ask them questions like "How do you respond to someone dying with

extreme difficulty?” or “How will you support your own dying family member if they want this choice?”

You may also find that other participants take care of the party crasher for you with their own comments or questions, though it is possible you may need to remind everyone to be respectful of all views.

AFTER A FILM SCREENING EVENT

As soon as possible after your film screening, share photos captured during the event on social media.

If appropriate (and if you have their contact information), send a thank you note to all those who attended your event. If you had any special guests or speakers, thank them as well.

Alternatively, send a letter to the editor of your local newspaper recapping the event.

SAMPLE TIMELINE FOR ORGANIZING A FILM SCREENING EVENT

You may need more time for a larger event and less time for a smaller one. This example can help you develop your own event ideas.

1 to 2 months before

- Develop budget as needed
- Make an event checklist of to-do and to-get needs.
- Confirm and reserve location and A/V equipment.
- If public, develop messaging and

publish your event.

- If private, mail invitations w/ RSVP.
- Preview film at the venue, making note of equipment operation and wireless access as needed.

2 weeks before

- Plan meal and refreshments, if serving.
- Purchase food and other supplies as needed.
- If potluck, remind people what they agreed to bring.
- Prepare and practice Q&A remarks and questions.

5 to 7 days before

- Private event: Confirm attendance with follow-up phone calls.
- Public Event: Email contact list for reminder.
- What have you forgotten?

1 to 2 days before

- Private event: Follow up as needed.
- Public Event: Email contact list for final reminder. Make it exciting!
- Pack up/load materials, DVD, sign-up sheet, etc.
- What have you forgotten?

Event Day

- Arrive early, set up, test equipment
- Start on time
- Have someone taking photos, if desired
- Welcome people as they arrive
- Introduce self and give brief opening remarks
- Show film
- Q&A
- Wind up, thank people for attendance
- Call to action (ask people to sign petitions, write lawmakers, hold a future event in another community, etc.)
- Mingle, answer private questions, provide food and beverage
- End on time
- Clean up the venue as required

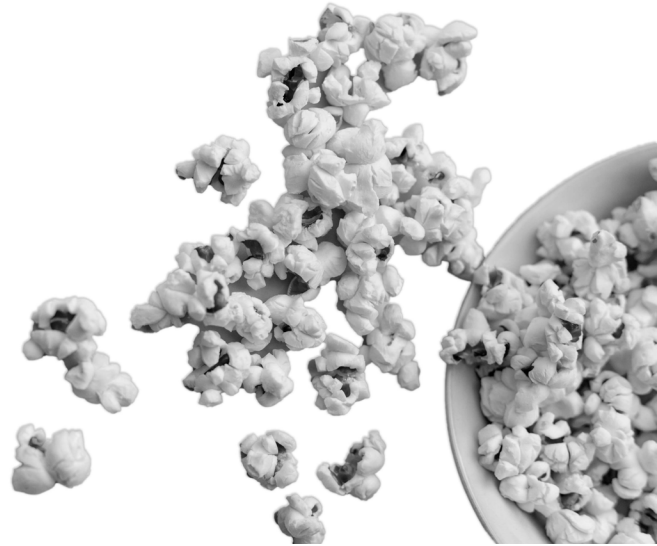


Photo by Yulia Khlebnikova on Unsplash

After the event

- Send thank-you notes to attendees if appropriate
- Communicate successful event via email and social media, w/photos