

STORIES FOR A STRONGER NATION

Building a resilient American public with diverse documentary filmmakers and public television

By Patricia Aufderheide, Sharon La Cruise, and Garry Denny

SUMMER 2021



TOP TAKEAWAYS

- Independent documentary filmmakers, as uniquely trusted storytellers about the complexities of American life, are critical to the future of the public sphere and a healthy democracy.
- At a moment of intertwined crises in America, public television and independent filmmakers are crucial partners in reaching the American public; both need more investment in that relationship: to stabilize it, support it, and ensure their mutual contribution to America's communities.
- Public television urgently needs to strengthen its relationship with BIPOC independent filmmakers, a vibrant resource to address the racial reckoning.
- Increased funding is needed now, and on an ongoing basis, for independent filmmakers and the organizations that directly support their work.

INTRODUCTION

Taking the Pulse in a Time of Crisis

In response to the urgency of the moment, with intertwined public health, economic and political crises that disproportionately impact communities of color and artists, the board of Independent Television Service (ITVS) and the Center for Media & Social Impact (CMSI) conducted a fact-finding mission between June 2020 and December 2020. We examined the relationship between independent filmmakers and public television—and especially ITVS. (By “independent filmmakers,” we mean filmmakers who initiate their own projects outside executive-produced series, and maintain editorial control.) Amid celebrations of PBS’s 50th anniversary, we wanted to look to the future.



Filmmakers engage with ITVS staff during a breakout session at the annual Independents Summit, a gathering to celebrate the bold storytelling that the San Francisco organization supports through its open and transparent funding initiatives and expansive services.

With funding from the Ford Foundation, we conducted confidential interviews with 57 thought leaders in the field of documentary filmmaking for public television, either individually or in small groups. Participants include filmmakers, public television leaders, CEOs of production houses, philanthropists, influencers and non-profit arts organizations. These groups and individuals described some of the unique challenges and opportunities of this moment, and gave us suggestions for short- and long-term improvement.

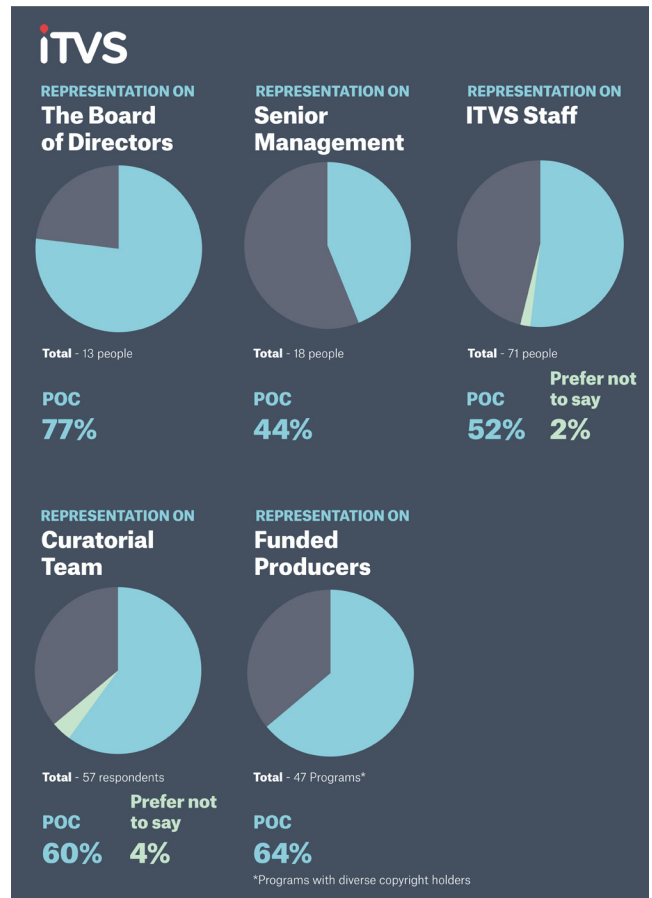
While specific suggestions were enormously helpful in ITVS' own strategic planning, we also discovered a passionate commitment among interviewees to public broadcasting generally. The group was 63% ethnically/ racially diverse, 54% female and included LGBT+ people and people with disabilities. They frankly discussed (with the promise of

confidentiality) weaknesses and strengths of the current relationship between filmmakers and public television, and to the service it provides to civil society.

Because of ITVS' position within public broadcasting and within the public sphere, it is in a unique position to garner these insights. It is a stand-alone organization, created by Congress in 1988 to ensure a pipeline of diverse and independent programming to the public, but funded primarily by federal tax dollars through the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Its job is to produce, independently from CPB, PBS or stations, high-quality, accurate, diverse, creative programs on issues of public importance.

To better reflect America, ITVS has created a racially diverse board and staff. It funds programs that reflect America's ethnic, racial, class, gender and geographic diversity, and the diversity of the disabled.¹ Its independence, integrity, and strong relationships with filmmakers are essential to annually providing hundreds of hours of programming that reflect the complexity of America.

This report summarizes what we heard from interlocutors who want the best for public broadcasting as a bulwark of democracy.



In fiscal year 2020, ITVS demographic data reflected the organization's commitment to racial and ethnic diversity across the board of directors, staff, curatorial and senior leadership teams, and funded filmmakers.

THE STARTING POINT

A Shattered Public Trust

The people we talked to believed they had a role to play in addressing the urgent question:

How do we build back the American people's shared understanding of democratic values?

The situation is dire. Many citizens currently live in a disinformation-structured reality where they perceive that the danger of the COVID-19 virus has been exaggerated, election fraud is rampant, and the government is corrupt by definition.² Indeed, more than a third of Americans approved of the January 6, 2021 siege of the U.S. Capitol at the time it happened.³ Another and sometimes overlapping large minority, including BIPOC, people with disabilities, rural and urban poor, and other under-served groups, finds its experienced reality routinely denied and defied in media and in daily interactions with authorities; today's racial reckoning spotlights that brutal truth and the need to confront it.⁴ At the same time, we see strategic attacks on public knowledge about America's racialized past and present, calculatedly veiled as attacks on "critical race theory" and further polarizing the public.⁵ Social media companies, which in the absence of regulation built a business model that thrives on surveillance and manipulation, have become weapons of disinformation campaigns.⁶ Hedge funds have gobbled up print journalism's claim to informing the public.⁷

America's local newspapers—crucial transmitters of everyday shared reality—have closed their doors at such record rates that we can now map "news deserts" across the nation⁸. Americans experience this disastrous failure of reliable information at a time when they also lack local institutions that can unite them around civic goals.⁹

Forty years of unquestioning faith in the private sector as the engine of innovation in media has resulted instead in engines of conflict and distrust. This market failure has been titanic, and the cost could be fatal for our democracy.

PUBLIC BROADCASTING

A Platform for Shared Realities

Public television in the United States, our interlocutors argued, is worth protecting. Much research backs them up. Democracy requires a reliable flow of information within a context of trust. The catastrophic state of local newspapers, the horrifying polarization in cable news and social media, the predictable and narrow range of news available in commercial broadcast television are all vivid proof of the market's inability to dependably produce a trusted, factually reliable environment for civil discourse. Public broadcasting was established in part, as the 1967 Public Broadcasting Act's legislative language noted, because "the success of our democratic institutions still depends ultimately upon the informed judgments of the citizens of our cities, towns, and local communities."

National and international studies demonstrate a virtuous circle between public broadcasting news, audience trust and public democratic participation. A recent Knight Foundation meta-study noted

"What happens to the least of us impacts all of us. And those are the stories independent filmmakers tell. Public television can help diverse voices, empowering us to tell stories differently."

- Independent documentary filmmaker

that public television news viewers are better informed than those watching commercial television. They're more likely to vote, and to have more factually accurate views on crime and immigration. Countries with strong public broadcasters have higher levels of social trust and people are less likely to hold extremist views.¹⁰

PBS is **the most trusted public institution in the United States**—even by many people who get their news primarily from Fox or Reddit. Its programs, required by law to be balanced and fair, are fully vetted for accuracy. On public television, profit does not dictate content—no clickbait, no data mining for profit, just quality content for communities.



The Academy Award-nominated *I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO* by Raoul Peck exemplifies the high production values of independent documentary storytelling on public television. The ITVS co-production received multiple Emmys, a Peabody, and engaged thousands at local events.

Through local stations everywhere, it reaches more Americans—98% of the population—than commercial broadcast does (at 96%). And broadcasting is still a core medium. More than 96% of American homes have connected televisions.¹¹ Even social media contains a large proportion of links from broadcast sites. Local television is still where people most often turn for their news,¹² even though online sources gain every year.¹³

“These stories help people feel another person’s experience in a way they never could have imagined feeling. These filmmakers find a way into a story that helps us understand our collectiveness—even if it’s completely different from our own experience.”

- Public television programmer

Throughout its history, public television has been an innovative force. Today, there are fewer islands of innovation. Stagnant federal funding has affected public broadcasting’s capacity to address its mission. In public broadcasting’s 50th year, the *New York Times* summarized its challenges with the headline “PBS Showed TV the Future. But What Does Its Own Look Like?” The news article concluded with a sobering note: “for PBS to thrive another 50 years, reinvention seems a necessity.”¹⁴

Our interviewees told us that a critical piece of re-imagining public broadcasting is already available: Storytelling that speaks to basic values of diversity and innovation in a democratic spirit. Scaling that capacity is crucial. Public broadcasting, in concert with diverse independent documentary filmmakers, can help communities across the nation receive and expect media that reflects critical issues and engages citizens in the most constructive ways.

“We should want to hear what’s going on in, say, the middle of America. When people don’t feel you can hear their voices, they don’t care about you either. How do we find the hidden treasures we’re not seeing now?”

- Independent documentary filmmaker

STORYTELLING CREATES SHARED REALITIES

Documentaries are a powerful medium to create shared reality and improve it. We know they work to create shared reality because of cognitive science, research on narrative transportation, and because of the history of public broadcasting’s use of documentaries.

The research findings are clear. People make sense of the welter of clues about reality in their environment by making stories out of them. They extend their knowledge of the world beyond their own experience in the same way. Storytelling is our meaning-making engine.¹⁵

“Narrative transportation” refers to the way in which the emotionally fueled arc of a film transports people out of their lives and into a story. When that journey is anchored to real life, it can provide a profound virtual experience of an issue or problem.¹⁶ “By humanizing the headlines of hot-button social problems, documentaries can disrupt a settled or one-dimensional narrative,” scholar Katy Borum Chattoo notes. Such disruption is critical to the cultivation of “narrative imagination,” which philosopher Martha Nussbaum calls “essential preparation for moral interaction.”¹⁷

Research on the effects of documentary films also shows their ability to create a problem-solving community around shared virtual experience:

Early research findings of [PHILLY D.A.’s](#) community impact showed that the critically acclaimed 2021 docuseries triggered a strong appetite for learning about and discussing how to reform the criminal legal system, not only from individuals who are already steeped in the issues but also from those who haven’t thought much about them before.¹⁸

In one study, social work and teaching professionals joined a screening of a documentary by Anne DeMare and Kirsten Kelly about homeless high schoolers, [The Homestretch](#). They reported that their emotional connection to the intimate stories and shared experience motivated them to rededicate themselves to their challenging work.¹⁹



An anchor of the Stories for Justice public media partnership, PHILLY D.A. galvanized communities to learn about the significant role of district attorneys in the criminal legal system.



Each year, ITVS funds two cohorts of 10-16 filmmakers selected through its open, transparent processes. The “winter 2020” group, pictured here, is producing films set in locations ranging from Wisconsin and Minnesota to Iowa and Texas.

In another recent study, seven groups of Americans—Black and white, older and younger, in red and blue states—gathered at their local public television stations to discuss their shared viewing of Jacqueline Olive’s documentary [Always in Season](#), about the ongoing horrifying reality of lynching. Universally, people left the session with a commitment to the hard work of change within their communities, across racial and other lines.²⁰

Studies of [The Invisible War](#) by Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering a film about sexual assault in the military, showed that hundreds of filmmaker-led private and public screenings for policy makers, advocacy organizations, journalists and military personnel resulted in fundamental changes in the rules governing the military’s response to assault allegations.²¹

AN URGENT NEED TO SUPPORT DOC FILMMAKERS AND PUBLIC TELEVISION

American independent documentary filmmakers are among our nation’s precious creative assets, both journalistically and aesthetically. These are the people who find the untold stories and tell them in distinctive, authentic voices with editorial independence. They are the artists who embody and chronicle America’s diversity. Their stories document our present and past, and become part of our national memory and our educational systems.

The pandemic put that precious resource at risk. Filmmakers like other artists have been disproportionately affected by the economic challenges of Covid-19. In April 2020, nearly three-quarters of film professionals were fully unemployed because of the pandemic. Filmmakers who identify as BIPOC, LGBT+ or as living with disabilities are unemployed at particularly high rates.²² In October 2020, Californians for the Arts reported that a third of cultural sector employees were unemployed.²³ By contrast, national unemployment rates overall fell from about 15% in April to less than 7% in December 2020.²⁴

These short-term losses have turned into career and field-threatening crises. In April 2021, a national survey of documentary filmmakers showed how deep the pandemic crisis is in the field. Two-thirds of all filmmakers reported significant losses from the pandemic, and nearly half of those reported those losses as profound.²⁵ The crisis for filmmakers imperils the pipeline of production, particularly for those most vulnerable—emerging, BIPOC, and other marginalized groups, the very groups that public broadcasting has, through ITVS and minority initiatives, historically supported.

The pandemic has delivered a body blow to independent filmmaking ecology. This puts the pipeline at risk, particularly for marginalized voices.

Documentary production has grown dramatically in the last three decades as production fueled by Discovery, National Geographic, Amazon, Netflix, Hulu and niche content providers shows us. Yet too little of this content serves the needs of a democratic public. Commercial imperatives of course set priorities. As filmmaker Amy Ziering noted in *The Hollywood Reporter*, “As the streamers consolidate, the options become more limited...Now they’re chasing algorithms much more, and it’s more clickbait than integrity. It’s less investigative journalism getting funded.”²⁶ And sometimes, filmmakers tell us (as does the *New York Times*), big streamers avoid films on important issues—such as the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, and the death of Kim Jong-un’s brother—that might complicate their global businesses.²⁷

U.S. public broadcasting has long been a trusted outlet for independent filmmakers. In fact, documentary filmmaking and public broadcasting have grown up together, and mutually built strength and creative approaches to tell meaningful American stories. It was independent filmmakers who pioneered such innovations as *cinéma vérité*, the historical mini-series, the personal essay documentary, and the hybrid documentary—all on public television. It was independent filmmakers who brought home to all Americans, with Blackside Productions’ *Eyes on the Prize*, the truth that Civil Rights history was core to American history—on public television. It was independent filmmakers who brought to public television the commitment to community engagement on important social issues, using independently-made documentaries as a platform to launch transformative discussions both nationally and in local communities.

The filmmakers we interviewed sometimes used the term “PBS Baby” to describe the way they came up within the system. They love what public television delivers in terms of reach, branding and local engagement at the station level. “I get to make the film I want to make, and I get help with [civic] engagement, which no commercial outlet will do,” said one filmmaker who co-produced a documentary with ITVS.

But too often they experienced public television as an obstacle course, rather than a service that is designed to support the production and distribution of their work. We listened to filmmaker after filmmaker describe the need for public broadcasting to have a more consistent, supportive approach to ensure that inclusive documentary storytelling reaches Americans where they live. “What does public media look like, when BIPOC people are 40% of the population?” one BIPOC filmmaker asked. “We need to be in that conversation.” Filmmakers living with disabilities told us that their community—the largest minority group in the country—is routinely ignored, and needs to be seen and heard in all its creativity and diversity. “We’re over being your afterthought,” one said. Shortly after interviews closed, this issue became more public. In spring 2021, BIPOC filmmakers from a newly formed organization, Beyond Inclusion, challenged PBS to provide full data on PBS’



The challenge of accessing health care rings true throughout America as evidenced by the 2.6 million people who tuned in to watch the PBS broadcast of **THE PROVIDERS**. The ITVS co-production catalyzed civic dialogue at 98 local community screening events throughout the country.

history with BIPOC production, calling for “meaningful dialogue and action, and to engage BIPOC filmmakers as we chart a course forward.”²⁸ Although we do not yet have PBS data, ITVS data, analyzed independently by scholars, shows that public TV programming by independent producers, through *Independent Lens* and *POV*, is remarkably more racially diverse than other programs on public TV. Indeed, some commercial series are more racially diverse than some leading public TV series.²⁹



A 2021 Peabody Award winner, the five-part film series *ASIAN AMERICANS* led by producer Renee Tajima-Peña came to life through the collaborative efforts of WETA, PBS, and the Center for Asian American Media in association with ITVS. It examines the impact of Asian Americans in shaping America’s history and identity.

The gap in support extends to public television’s production budgets, which are no longer competitive. “Public television is stuck at a budget level from 15 to 20 years ago. It’s a much more competitive landscape today,” one filmmaker told us. “It’s not working to spend 10 years to make a movie while you’re putting funding together,” another BIPOC filmmaker said. Filmmakers were frustrated with lack of support between films, as well, and with the need to piece together budgets from different parts of public television and private funders.

Documentary filmmakers who intend their work primarily as a catalyst for civic engagement told us that their strongest motivation is contributing to meaningful social change. Few documentary films on social issues make a profit.³⁰ Inconsistent support from public television meant that social-issue filmmakers often had to find commercial projects with cable or streamers, take up gig work using their technical skills, or find other ways to survive.

Public television leaders often agreed with these complaints; indeed, they also expressed frustration with being under-resourced to compete for viewers, especially post-Gen X generations, in a streaming world. Independent documentaries attract younger, more racially diverse audiences than typical PBS demographics, Nielsen research shows; but often those same audiences don’t find follow-up programming that commits them to public broadcasting in time to keep them from moving on. The challenge, filmmakers and public television staffers alike told us, is delivering a deep menu of diverse content to keep these desperately needed audiences from turning away after one bite.

“PBS was the only place that would let me use my Black voice and creative ability to tell the stories I wanted to tell. I wish PBS did a better job of letting the world know that.”

–Independent documentary filmmaker

As well, PBS’ broadcast model doesn’t fit well with younger viewing practices; PBS’ streaming options are various, incomplete, and inconsistent. “Our audiences are walking away from us,” one said. “Young people aren’t even finding our programs.”

Interviewees knew that public television would need a bigger budget, to develop the multiplatform strategy and tools necessary for survival.

Filmmakers wanted faster turnaround times on funding decisions, agility to address timely topics in ways that reach younger audiences on social media, and recognition from public broadcasting of their role as storytellers in serving American publics. “We are your success stories,” one said.

“You could be celebrating us, and celebrating your role in showcasing us.” Overall, they thought public broadcasting takes too little credit for its unique commitment to diverse filmmaking. “Where is the marketing that shows off what public television does really well?” asked one. That diverse programming is, filmmakers pointed out, a crucial competitive advantage, particularly in a time of social crisis. As well, making filmmakers themselves aware of public television’s unique capacities—its granting of authorial control and its engagement strengths—could show newer generations of makers why public television could be an option for them.

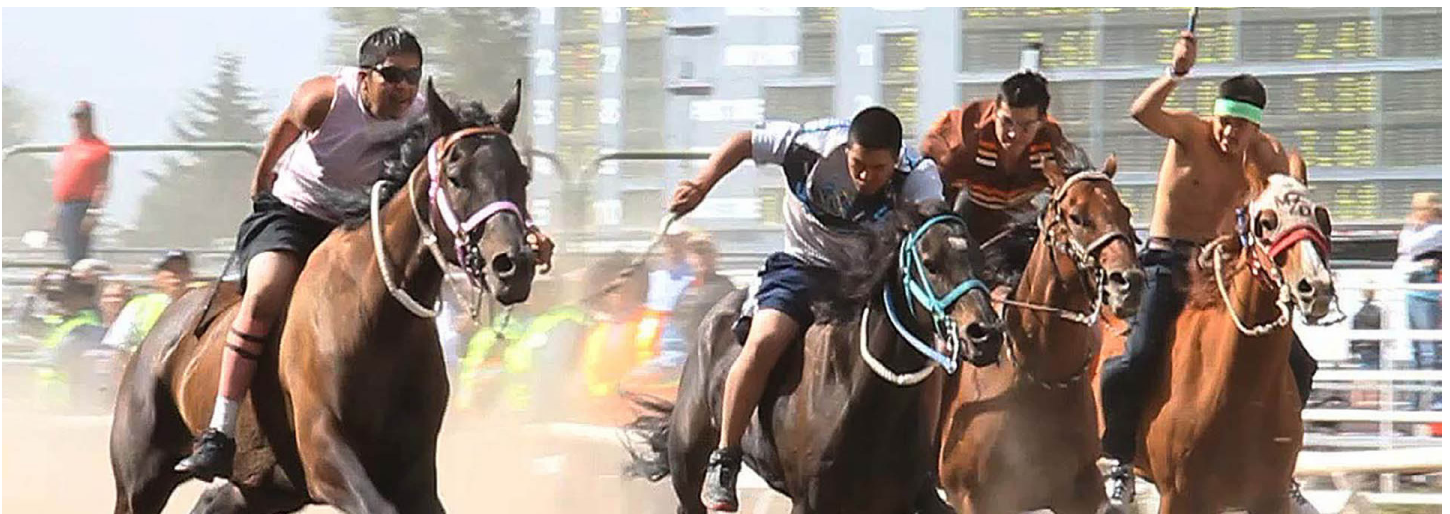
Our interlocutors noted that the critical role of filmmakers in providing core civic programming is often entirely left out of the funding model for public television.

Independent filmmakers who create programming for PBS have not received any portion of the \$75 million CPB allocation from the CARES Act or the \$175 million from the American Rescue Plan emergency funding. They were also not beneficiaries of any of the \$2 billion in spectrum sale dollars as PTV stations sold public spectrum rights.

When we asked interviewees to “dream big,” outside the constraints of today’s reality, they showed both great creativity and a passionate commitment to public television. Interviewees imagined, among other things, an expansion at scale of federal, state and local taxpayer resources for cultural agencies such as the National and state-level Endowments for the Arts and Humanities, the Institute for Museum and Library Services and of course, public television. They imagined a public television where diversity, equity and inclusion was more visible, in both programming and publicity. They thought public television could hold up diverse creators as exemplars, across the ecology, including stations, CPB and PBS. Interviewees pointed to the many intersectionalities addressed and embodied by independent producers, but also highlighted specifically racial diversity in a time of racial reckoning.

“We have the ideals of democracy, but then the reality kicks in of how much it costs to do this and sustain oneself.”

- Independent documentary filmmaker



Along with *Vision Maker*, ITVS champions films about Native American communities and culture like *INDIAN RELAY* by Montana-based filmmaker Charles Dye.

Participants dreamed of specific additional support and services designed to help filmmakers at all stages of their development, from emerging to mid-career to seasoned. Their ideas included:

WAYS TO CREATE AND MAINTAIN FILMMAKER COMMITMENT TO PUBLIC TELEVISION, SUCH AS:

- Fellowships for those who finished a film and are in pre-production on another;
- Partnerships between public television entities and other creative support organizations to offer professionalization;
- Mentoring programs that strengthen the pipeline of talent and link it to public television;
- A job service that connects filmmakers in the public television family to temporary opportunities while they line up their next film;
- A first-look option for public television that goes along with the institution's commitment to sustain filmmakers.

WAYS TO MAKE PUBLIC TELEVISION A MORE ROBUST AND COMPETITIVE SERVICE:

- A unified streaming service, with a deep library that could be curated in a timely way to address current realities and deepen public discourse;
- Expand national capacity to produce with regional filmmakers, in order to better serve diverse and rural markets;
- Production partnerships between public television and public radio and podcasters to create multi-faceted, serialized projects;
- Invest more in promoting public television and filmmakers for their shared capacity to showcase America's diversity;
- Generate taxpayer revenue for public media services with taxes on, for instance, commercial streamers, on mergers or on social media services.

The “dream big” discussions showed us the faith of filmmakers and public television staffers alike in the capacities of this unique public ecology to expand and respond to the challenging market environment, if given the chance and the resources.

Even in their thinking about opportunities to improve within the current realities, our interlocutors never argued for shifting funds within an already bare-bones budget in public television. They were acutely aware of the scarce resources available currently. They wanted to see **more** government investment in both creators and their public institutions. Increased investment certainly makes

“I dreamed of being in the ITVS family.”
- Independent documentary filmmaker

sense economically. Small documentary production businesses typically have several full-time employees, serving as the apprenticeship system for the next generation of filmmakers. They draw upon a wide range of other small businesses and professional service contractors to fuel the local economy and tax base. Creative businesses also contribute substantially to the national economy.³¹

It also makes sense within the American tradition. Government investment in the arts has had positive immediate and long-range outcomes. Several of our interviewees pointed to the long-term cultural wealth generated by the federal government’s Depression-era Works Progress Administration (WPA) Federal Project Number One, which supported 40,000 creatives in visual arts, music, theater and literature.³² Others noted that in LBJ’s Great Society initiative, federal arts funding³³ launched public broadcasting, the National Endowments for the Humanities and the Arts, and the Institute for Museum and Library Services.

PBS President and CEO Paula Kerger also agrees that documentaries are crucial to public television’s long-term survival. Coining PBS as “America’s Home for Documentaries,” she has pledged to “continue to look for ways to bring in more and more new voices,” including as leaders within PBS. “I think these documentaries are what defines public broadcasting,” she said.³⁴

HOW PUBLIC TELEVISION CREATED THE PRODUCTION ENGINES FOR INDIES

Public television is actually built to efficiently and effectively absorb new funding. ITVS exists to co-produce independent documentary films in service of American democracy. Other public television entities including the National Multicultural Alliance’s five entities—Black Public Media, Center for Asian American Media, Latino Public Broadcasting, Pacific Islanders in Communication, Vision Maker Media—also receive government funding to bring ethnically and racially diverse voices to the public. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting’s work with the private production house Firelight Media could serve as an example for other partnerships as well.

ITVS CREATED BY FILMMAKERS, WITH EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE

Filmmakers have recognized the crucial importance of public television in working to create all these opportunities. From the founding of today’s public television in 1967, independent filmmakers have carved out spaces on public television for diverse American voices. The Public Telecommunications Financing Act of 1978 mandated dedicated funding for public broadcasting to support independent filmmaking in the service of a more robust, resilient democracy. In 1988, CPB, as a result of a Congressional mandate, created ITVS “to expand the diversity and innovativeness of programming available to public broadcasting.”³⁵ Programming by minority independent producers was mandated in part to attract more minority viewers to public television.³⁶ ITVS’ production decisions were

“ITVS staffers are experts at how to curate and shepherd new voices.”

- Commercial television programmer



The 2020 film **CHARM CITY** by Marilyn Ness kicked off the ITVS led **Stories for Justice** film series about the effects of the criminal justice system rolling out over the next five years on public television and in communities. Other titles include the 2021 eight-part docu-series **PHILLY D.A.**

specifically protected from editorial interference by CPB or others in public TV. Congress did this because it trusted the independent filmmakers who, over a ten year period, explained their role in civic media. Congress believed that independent filmmakers' work solved a problem for public broadcasting stemming from a funding model that impeded diversity and innovation, even though its founding legislation required it to deliver both.³⁷ Today, documentary filmmakers routinely participate in the ITVS-led public panels and review processes that select programs for funding, and six or more sit on the 13-member ITVS board at any given time. Congress also invested in a national, not a local strategy, knowing that the economics of broadcasting do not permit routine development of nationally-distributable programs on local budgets.

This production model has proven remarkably efficient in delivering programming that reflects a breadth of diversity: race, ethnicity, class, gender, geography, and disability. Looking at ITVS, for example, its overhead is an unusually low 10%, and its board, staff, filmmakers, and films show a much higher level of racial diversity than average for the field.³⁸

ITVS productions have won over 100 Emmy and Peabody awards and garnered 21 Academy Award nominations, including [The Mole Agent](#) by Maite Alberdi Solo, [Minding the Gap](#) by Bing Liu, and [I Am Not Your Negro](#) by Raoul Peck. Through these awards, ITVS has brought far more accolades to public television than any other funder or co-producer. It is an industry leader in engagement strategies. For instance, the 2019 film [The Providers](#) by Laura Green and Anna Moot-Levin focused on the challenge of providing rural health care and the building of trust between doctor and patient, was shown nationally in primetime and at community screenings to 5,000 people in 98 events in spring 2019. Another 8,000 watched together online and conversed with healthcare workers in rural America. The audience members talked about volunteering or job shadowing at a clinic. "We think we can reduce opioid addiction in the next generation by 50%," said a New Mexico PBS event participant.



BLIND LOVE, a short-form episodic series co-produced by filmmaker Patricia Zagarella and ITVS, follows four single, blind millennials hoping to change their relationship status from "looking" to "taken." Storytelling by and about people living with disabilities is on the rise in the independent documentary field.



Hispanics and Latinos comprise an estimated 15.3% of the U.S. population, and Latino Public Broadcasting and ITVS have been important partners for Latino American storytellers and audiences. One of many projects by and about Latino Americans is DOLORES, a film about Dolores Huerta.

CONCLUSION

The filmmakers we talked to—across three generations—all agreed that public television has created unique institutions in American media ecology for authorial films for civic engagement. At the same time, like the independents who worked for the creation of ITVS and the National Multicultural Alliance, they imagined these institutions at a much larger scale.³⁹

Their vision was a generous one, of a society that could support civic engagement and cultural expression in the service of a more resilient community. They wanted to be able to work more productively in a supportive relationship between filmmakers and public television, for the benefit of a shared mission of public culture. Together they wanted to attract new and more diverse audiences to programming that justifies a government investment in public media. It was also a practical vision, which both recognized the civic danger of a documentary ecology in which commercial priorities led by streamers dictates content, and the threat to the economy from starving out its diverse creative talents. At a time of national cultural and political crisis, their vision—developed over decades of work together—can make a difference for a democratic future.

The relationship between independent filmmakers throughout the diversity of American experiences and our nation's public television ecology—and particularly between indies and public television's production entities—is vital to the future of both. It is also a precious and proven vehicle to share the stories that can rebuild democratic communities. That relationship must be treasured, built upon, and strengthened, both on an emergency basis, to recover from pandemic damage, and to build a stronger mutual future.

THE AUTHORS

Patricia Aufderheide is University Professor of Communication Studies in the School of Communication at American University in Washington, D.C. She founded the School's Center for Media & Social Impact, where she continues as Senior Research Fellow. She serves on the board of directors of the Independent Television Service, and has served on the board of Kartemquin Films. Her books include *Reclaiming Fair Use: How to Put Balance Back in Copyright* (University of Chicago), with Peter Jaszi; *Documentary: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford), *The Daily Planet* (University of Minnesota Press), and *Communications Policy in the Public Interest* (Guilford Press). She has been a Fulbright Research Fellow twice, in Brazil (1994-5) and Australia (2017). She is also a John Simon Guggenheim fellow (1994) and has served as a juror at the Sundance Film Festival among others. Aufderheide has received numerous journalism and scholarly awards, including the George Stoney award for service to documentary from the University Film and Video Association in 2015 and the International Communication Association's 2010 Communication Research as an Agent of Change Award.

Sharon La Cruise is the former Vice President of Admissions, Programs & Resident Life at International House NYC. She previously worked as a program manager and consultant for the Ford Foundation for 10 years. She has worked in television and film for 20 years, both in the corporate and production aspects of the business. In 2011, she completed her first film *Daisy Bates: First Lady of Little Rock*, a feature-length documentary on civil rights activist Daisy Bates, which was broadcast on February 2, 2012 on PBS' Independent Lens. She began her television career with ABC primetime sales. She has worked for Blackside Inc., Firelight Media, Roja Productions, The Faith Project, The Coca-Cola Company, the 1996 Summer Olympic Games, and the Cable News Network (CNN). She has worked on: *Dixie Chicks: Shut up & Sing*, *Going Up River: The Long War of John Kerry*, *Beyond Brown: Pursuing the Promise*, *Citizen King*, *Matters of Race*, *This Far By Faith: African-American Spiritual Journeys*, *Zora Neale Hurston: Jump at the Sun*, and CNN's *Through the Lens*, *The Road to the White House* and *The Planetary Police*. She is the recipient of the 2015 Adelphi University Distinguished Alumnae Award, a board member of ITVS, a member of International Documentary Association, the Brooklyn Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, and the National Museum of African American History and Culture. She holds an M.A. degree in television journalism from New York University, and a B.A. in history from Adelphi University.

Garry Denny is currently the Director of Programming for PBS Wisconsin. Garry's career in public television began in 1982, while attending Howard University in Washington, D.C. as a traffic assistant at WHMM (now WHUT). In his second year at WHMM, Garry worked as assistant to the Director of Programming while continuing to serve as traffic assistant. Upon graduation with a B.A. degree in film directing, Garry moved to Madison, WI, to be the traffic supervisor for WHA. A number of promotions and organizational changes have led to Garry's current position of Director of Programming. In his tenure as chief programmer for PBS Wisconsin, Garry has served on numerous system-wide committees, including the PBS Communications Advisory Committee and the CPB-funded Programmers' Research Council. Garry has also served on panels directly associated with content selection, including POV editorial committee and Open Call activities for ITVS. Garry served as a board member and President of the Public Television Programmers Association and is currently chair of the ITVS Board of Directors. In 2001, Garry was named PBS Programmer of the Year.

NOTES

1. Borum Chattoo, C., Aufderheide, P., Alexander, M., & Green, C. (2018). American Realities on Public Television: Analysis of Independent Television Service's Independent Documentaries, 2007–2016. *International Journal Of Communication*, 12, 28. Retrieved from <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/7826>
2. For instance, between Nov 13-17, 2020, 55% of Republicans believed that Trump had rightfully won the presidential election. See: Kahn, C. (2020, November 18). Half of Republicans say Biden won because of a 'rigged' election: Reuters/Ipsos poll. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-poll/half-of-republicans-say-biden-won-because-of-a-rigged-election-reuters-ipsos-poll-idUSKBN27Y1AJ>
See, for patterns and historical background: Benkler et al, *Network Propaganda*. (2018). New York: Oxford University Press; Bennett & Livingston, eds. (2020). *The Disinformation Age*, New York: Cambridge University Press; and Jurkowitz, M. et al.(2020), "U.S. Media Polarization and the 2020 Election: A Nation Divided," Pew Research Center, Retrieved from: <https://www.journalism.org/2020/01/24/u-s-media-polarization-and-the-2020-election-a-nation-divided/>
3. The YouGov poll from Jan. 7, 2021, is available at <https://today.yougov.com/topics/politics/articles-reports/2021/01/07/US-capitol-trump-poll>. A PBS/ Marist poll, also from Jan. 7, asks different questions and shows a substantial minority of Republicans in support of the action. For analysis, see Bump, P. (2021, Jan. 9). "Most Americans reject the attack on the Capitol—but millions empathize with the mob," *Washington Post*. Retrieved at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/01/09/most-americans-reject-attack-capitol-but-millions-empathize-with-mob/>
4. Today's racial reckoning, led by movements such as Black Lives Matter and with eloquent leaders such as Rev. William J. Barber II, is built on a long civil rights movement. The vast chasm of experience between BIPOC and White realities is the subject of great African-American literature, including by James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Ta-Nehisi Coates and Toni Morrison.
5. Flaherty, C. (2021, June 9). "Legislating against critical race theory", *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/06/09/legislating-against-critical-race-theory-curricular-implications-some-states>
6. Vaidhyanathan, S. (2019) *Antisocial Media : How Facebook Disconnects Us and Undermines Democracy* New York: Oxford University Press; West, S. (2017) "Data Capitalism: Redefining the Logics of Surveillance and Privacy." *Business & society* 58.1: 20–41; Suzor, N. (2020) *Lawless : the Secret Rules That Govern Our Digital Lives*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
7. At the Nieman Lab, Ken Doctor's work has followed the rise of hedge funds in daily journalism. E.g., Doctor, K. (2020). *Newsnomics: Worried about Alden taking control of Tribune? It's already pulling strings inside*. Retrieved from <https://www.niemanlab.org/2020/01/newsnomics-worried-about-alden-taking-control-of-tribune-its-already-pulling-strings-inside/>
8. See Abernathy, P. (2020). "The Expanding News Desert". Retrieved from: <https://www.usnewsdeserts.com/> and Grieco, E. (2020) "U.S. newspapers have shed half of their newsroom employees since 2008," *Pew Research Center*, April 20, 2020, Retrieved from: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/20/u-s-newsroom-employment-has-dropped-by-a-quarter-since-2008/>
9. Sifry, M. (2020, Nov. 24). "Where is the next Andrew Carnegie? The case for funding America's civic infrastructure," *Inside Philanthropy*, Retrieved from: <https://www.insidephilanthropy.com/home/2020/11/24/where-is-the-next-andrew-carnegie-the-case-for-funding-americas-civic-infrastructure>
10. Gardner, S. (2017) "Public broadcasting: Its past and its future," *Knight Foundation*. Retrieved from: <https://knightfoundation.org/public-media-white-paper-2017-gardner/>.
11. Nielsen. (2020, August 28). Nielsen Estimates 121 Million TV Homes in the U.S. for the 2020-2021 TV Season. Retrieved from <https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/article/2020/nielsen-estimates-121-million-tv-homes-in-the-u-s-for-the-2020-2021-tv-season/><https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/article/2020/nielsen-estimates-121-million-tv-homes-in-the-u-s-for-the-2020-2021-tv-season/>
12. *Pew Research Center*. (2019, December 31). Americans almost equally prefer to get local news online or on TV set. Retrieved from <https://www.journalism.org/2019/03/26/nearly-as-many-americans-prefer-to-get-their-local-news-online-as-prefer-the-tv-set/>
13. Gottfried, J., & Shearer, E. (2020, May 30). Internet closes in on TV as a source of news in U.S. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/07/americans-online-news-use-vs-tv-news-use/>
14. Jensen, E. (2020, October 13). *PBS Showed TV the Future. But What Does Its Own Look Like?* Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/13/arts/television/pbs-future.html>
15. Hogan, C. P. 2003. *Cognitive Science, Literature, and the Arts a Guide for Humanists* New York : Routledge.
16. Borum Chattoo, C. (2020). *Story Movements: How documentaries empower people and inspire social change*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 103-4.
17. *Ibid*, p. 122.
18. Anglin, G. & Castillo, B. Philly D.A. and the Power of the Prosecutor. San Francisco: ITVS. Retrieved from <https://www.itvs.org/blog/philly-d-a-and-the-power-of-the-prosecutor>
19. Borum Chattoo, C. & Freeman Howe, C. (2016). *Connecting Audiences with OVEE, an Online Screening Platform: An Assessment of The Homestretch PBS Documentary*. Retrieved from <https://cmsimpact.org/resource/connecting-audiences-ovee-online-screening-platform-assessment-homestretch-pbs-documentary/>
20. Conrad, D., Borum Chattoo, C. & Aufderheide, P. (2020). *Breaking the silence: How Documentaries can shape the conversation on racial violence in America and create new communities*. Retrieved from <https://cmsimpact.org/report/breaking-silence-documentaries-can-shape-conversation-racial-violence-america-create-new-communities/>
21. *Britdocs*, n.d. (2013). *Impact Report: Invisible War*. Retrieved from <https://impactguide.org/static/library/InvisibleWar.pdf>; *Film Independent* (2016, March 14). *Case study: The Invisible War*. Retrieved from <https://www.filminddependent.org/blog/case-study-the-invisible-war>
22. Lindahl, C. (2020, April 24.) "Survey Shows Grim Coronavirus Impact to Film Creatives; 71 Percent Fully Unemployed." *Indiewire*. Retrieved at <https://www.indiewire.com/2020/04/coronavirus-film-industry-creative-impact-1202226997/>
<https://www.californiansforthearts.org/talking-points-blog/2020/10/25/statewide-and-nationally>
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/273909/seasonally-adjusted-monthly-unemployment-rate-in-the-us/>
23. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/273909/seasonally-adjusted-monthly-unemployment-rate-in-the-us/>
24. Chattoo, C.B. & Harder, B. (2021, April). "State of the Documentary Field," *Center for Media & Social Impact*, Retrieved at https://cmsimpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/CMSI_KeyFindingsReport.pdf.
25. https://cmsimpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/CMSI_KeyFindingsReport.pdf.
26. Seigel, T. (2021, Jan. 6). "Documentary Roundtable: Producers Stacey Abrams, Kerry Washington and More Talk Big Tech's Hold on Distribution and Fighting the "Fake News" Label," *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved at <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/features/documentary-roundtable-producers-stacey-abrams-kerry-washington-and-more-talk-big-techs-hold-on-distribution-and-fighting-the-fake-news-label>
27. Sperling, N. (2020, Dec. 24)c.. *An Oscar Winner Made a Khashoggi Documentary. Streaming Services Didn't Want It*. Accessed at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/24/business/media/dissident-jamal-khashoggi-netflix-amazon.html>
28. *Beyond Inclusion*, "A letter to PBS from Viewers Like Us," Retrieved at <https://www.bipocmakers.com/>.
29. Aufderheide, P., Chatto, C., & Merrill, K. (2015, Sep. 16). "Diversity in independent TV documentaries: Is public TV different?" *Center for Media & Social Impact*. Retrieved from <https://cmsimpact.org/resource/diversity-in-independent-tv-documentaries-is-public-tv-different/>
30. Borum Chattoo, C. & Harder, W. (2018) *The State of The Documentary Field: 2018 Study of Documentary Professionals*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://cmsimpact.org/report/state-documentary-field-2018-study-documentary-professionals/>
31. *Americans for the Arts* (2019, May 15).. *AEP5: National Findings*. Retrieved from <https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/reports-and-data/research-studies-publications/arts-economic-prosperity-5/learn/national-findings>. See also Florida, R. & Seman, M. (2020, August). *Lost Art: Measuring Covid-19's devastating impact on America's creative economy*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution. Also see Farago, J. "The arts are in crisis. Here's how Biden can help," *New York Times Magazine*, Jan. 13, 2021. Retrieved at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/13/arts/design/arts-stimulus-biden.html>.

32. Award-winning New York Times critic Jason Farago also noted this historical precedent in Farago, J. "The arts are in crisis. Here's how Biden can help," *New York Times Magazine*, Jan. 13, 2021. Retrieved at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/13/arts/design/arts-stimulus-biden.html>.
33. Zelizer, J. E. (2015). *The Fierce Urgency of Now : Lyndon Johnson, Congress, and the Battle for the Great Society*. New York: Penguin Press.
34. Wyllie, J., & Everhart, K. (2020, December 03). In PBS' 50th year, Paula Kerger sets a course to 'speak to the moment of what is happening now'. Retrieved from <https://current.org/2020/12/in-pbs-50th-year-paula-kerger-sets-course-to-speak-to-the-moment-of-what-is-happening-now/>
35. Ivers, S. (1989) "Congress, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and Independent Producers: Agenda Setting and Policy Making in public television," paper presented at Broadcasting Education Association Annual Convention, Las Vegas, Nevada. Sen. Daniel Inouye's remarks on passage of the Act further emphasized the mission of reaching an American public with diverse programming. He called ITVS "an entity developed for the sole purpose of funding independent productions, to provide producers increased access to the public television system, foster an improved, cooperative working relationship between the independent production community and the public broadcasting system and bring innovative programming to the American people." He further noted that Congress expected the service to show "a special commitment and effort to produce programs by and about minorities in addition to continuing its support of the minority consortia [now the National Multicultural Alliance]. Minority programming is an essential foundation of public broadcasting....[ITVS should] improve incorporation of minority programming and producers into the system and to help cultivate and further increase the participation of ethnic and racial audiences in public broadcasting." *Ibid*, pp. 48, 49.
36. The legislative language entered by Sen. Daniel Inouye (Oct. 7, 1988) into the Congressional Record noted, "Greater effort is required to fulfill the congressional intent and achieve the statutory objective of promoting greater innovations and diversity of opportunity and expression •in the programming supported by the CPB...IPS [later ITVS], [is] an entity developed for the sole purpose of funding independent productions, to provide producers increased access to the public television system, foster an improved, cooperative working relationship between the independent production community and the public broadcasting system and bring innovative programming to the American people...It is also recommended that the CPB ensure that the IPS make a special commitment and effort to produce programs by and about minorities in addition to continuing its support of the minority consortia [now National Multicultural Alliance]. Minority programming is an essential foundation of public broadcasting."
37. The 1967 Public Broadcasting Act (Sec. 396. [47 U.S.C. 396]) finds, among other things, that an alternative broadcasting service to commercial broadcasting is in the public interest, that "expansion and development of public telecommunications and of diversity of its programming depend on freedom, imagination, and initiative on both local and national levels;" that the "general welfare" is furthered by programs that are "an expression of diversity and excellence," that it should "encourage the development of programming that involves creative risks and that addresses the needs of unserved and underserved audiences;" that it should "address national concerns and solve local problems through community programs and outreach programs." *Public Broadcasting Act 1967 (Sec.396. [47 U.S.C. 396])*.
38. Borum Chattoo, C., Aufderheide, P., Alexander, M., and Green, C. (2018). "American Realities on public television: Analysis of Independent Television Service's Independent Documentaries, 2007–2016". *International Journal Of Communication*, 12, 28. Retrieved from <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/7826>
39. Ivers, S. (1989) "Congress, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and Independent Producers: Agenda Setting and Policy Making in public television," paper presented at Broadcasting Education Association Annual Convention, Las Vegas, Nevada.