

How to make a film for the AIA Film Challenge

The AIA Film Challenge provides a unique and powerful forum for architects to share stories of important projects and initiatives.

This year's theme, Blueprint for Better, seeks out films featuring architects partnering with civic leaders to have a positive impact on their communities.

About this guide

This document includes information on choosing a story, creating a treatment, connecting with filmmakers, and activating your network to promote your film. Our goal is to guide you through the process of creating and promoting an impactful short film.

Resources

Details on how to participate in the AIA Film Challenge can be found at [AIAfilmchallenge.org](https://aiafilmchallenge.org). Find the official rules [here](#).

Contact

If you have additional questions about the Film Challenge after reading this guide, our team is here to help.

Caitlin Reagan

senior manager of public affairs, AIA
(202) 626 7548 | caitlinreagan@aia.org

Gaby Suarez

manager of public affairs, AIA
(202) 626 7560 | gabrielasuarez@aia.org

AIA FILM CHALLENGE 2019 PROMPT:

The AIA Film Challenge 2019 invites architects and filmmakers to collaborate to tell stories of architects, civic leaders, and their communities working together to create resilient and sustainable communities. Show us your Blueprint for Better.

Why you should participate in the AIA Film Challenge

1. Raise money for causes and projects you care about

2016 Grand Prize Winner and architecture professor at Louisiana Tech, Brad Deal, AIA, experienced this first hand. At a single screening, his team's film raised more than \$52,000 for MedCamps, a camp for kids with chronic illness and disabilities. To put it in perspective, that's more than three times MedCamps' typical project budget—pledged in just 10 minutes.

[Watch ARCH 335 – Rebuilding Medcamps](#)

2. Raise awareness of projects and organizations that positively impact your communities

Los Angeles filmmaker and 2017 participant, Sarah Barker, entered the Film Challenge to raise awareness of organizations battling homelessness. She was stunned to learn that Las Vegas had the nation's highest homeless youth population. "We really wanted to support what these organizations are doing, and if this film can help convey the message in a more visceral way... outstanding!"

[Watch Brazen Conversations](#)

3. Advance your business

The well-told story of a unique project can help attract new types of clients. After creating her film, architect and 2017 finalist Sharon Samuels noted, "We have been approached about projects whose first goals are to solve a problem or address an urgent need that may not be solved by conventional 'architecture' or building."

[Watch Inside the Box – The Story of Boxville](#)

4. Inform the public about the role of architects and architecture in your community

A 3-to 5-minute film makes messages easy to digest and share, and allows architecture to be accessible for more people. 2015 runner-up Jeff Durkin explains that "most people don't know the secret power [architecture] has to shape culture, improve the environment, and enhance people's lives. By telling stories about design we can reveal the 'secret power' by giving the architecture a voice."

[Watch The Red Office](#)

Creating your film

Ready to join the AIA Film Challenge? There are three key phases to film production, pre-production, production, and post-production. This guide will walk you through the steps for each.

Pre-production

Selecting your Blueprint for Better story

Come up with 3-5 potential story ideas and run them by your team. If you already have a filmmaker partner, get their perspective on the storyline and visual approach. Don't be afraid of everyday stories, either. There is real power and purpose in small but mighty moments.

Keep these factors in mind when selecting your story:

- Highlight community impact.** Focus on telling a story of the positive change that architects and their work have created. Ground your story with the perspective and anecdotes of community members—relate it to the human experience.
- Introduce architects as part of a solution.** Make the role of architects clear in creating a Blueprint for Better. Rather than portraying architects as solo contributors, think about them as thought and action leaders who are a vital part of creating solutions.
- Support your story with civic/community leaders.** That doesn't just mean elected officials, it could also be a non-profit director, a head librarian, or a parks director.
- Seek out diverse voices.** AIA champions a culture of equity, diversity, and inclusion. We encourage you to highlight the diverse voices surrounding your story. From ethnic to socioeconomic, from gender to cultural diversity, a strong film will capture the various people and perspectives involved in bringing projects to life.

Create a film treatment

Documentary films don't normally have traditional scripts, since you can't predict what will happen on camera in a real-life setting. Instead, they use a treatment, or outline, to describe the intent of the film.

Before starting your treatment, do your research. Learn everything you can about the project and all those involved. Pre-interview key contributors by phone. Understand the impact the project has on its intended users and community. You should also make a list of key people to interview.

A strong documentary treatment should :

- Tell a compelling story
- Present a unique perspective
- Both inform and emotionally connect with an audience

Sample film treatment

As an example, here is the treatment that was developed for the 2018 Film Challenge seed film, [Caño Martín Peña: A Blueprint for Better](#).

Puerto Rico's Path Forward: Caño Martín Peña & Beyond

NEIGHBORHOODS BUILT ON COMMUNITY

The Caño Martín Peña and its surrounding areas are tight-knit, underserved neighborhoods in the San Juan region. Many homes in the Caño were built generations ago, without deeds or permits. In the past few years, community leaders led the charge to ensure that the community kept control of its land. Though it faced economic challenges, the neighborhood was moving in a positive direction. Then the hurricane hit.



DEVASTATION AND PROGRESS INTERRUPTED

As with much of Puerto Rico, Caño Martín Peña and other nearby neighborhoods were hit hard by Hurricane Maria. The polluted canal flooded the neighborhood. The power grid was severely damaged. And since most homes were built without permits or deeds, they didn't qualify for FEMA assistance. Many cement structures survived, but their roofs were destroyed, leaving residents with uninhabitable homes.

ARCHITECTS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS TURN IDEAS INTO ACTION

After the hurricane, architects, residents and community leaders moved quickly to rebuild. Many homes lost their roofs, so architects like María Gabriela Flores, AIA, mobilized to design and install new roofs through an initiative called Roofs for the Canal. Power was another major issue. Architect Jonathan Marvel, FAIA, and his team designed and installed solar units for the roofs of community centers to provide electricity for vital services.

These architects have a deep connection to both architecture and Puerto Rico. María Gabriela is from Puerto Rico, and Jonathan's father was a well-respected architect in San Juan. Although Jonathan is in New York, he was born in Puerto Rico, and his firm has an office in San Juan.

BEYOND RECOVERY: A ROAD TO RESILIENCY

The efforts of architects and community members go beyond just immediate storm relief. They are working to develop better structures and solutions so communities like Caño Martín Peña can be more resilient as stronger, more regular storms become a reality. Mayors and other community leaders are dedicated to creating more resilient housing. There is much still to do. The neighborhood and the island face many more challenges. But through the dedicated, coordinated efforts of architects, community members and leaders, they continue to push forward to achieve a shared goal – a thriving, healthy community for all.

Connecting and working with filmmakers

You have your story. Now what? Here are some effective ways to connect with filmmakers.

- Connect with local film festivals and organizations.
- Connect with nearby film schools. Some notable programs include USC, UCLA, American Film Institute, NYU, Columbia University, Chapman University, Loyola Marymount University, Wesleyan University, Ithaca College, Emerson College and Stanford University.
- Leverage your personal network. A Facebook post or a Tweet asking for help can lead to connections.
- Use video sharing sites, such as Vimeo and YouTube, to discover filmmakers in your area, find a style you like, and reach out to potential partners.

Contact a filmmaker

When contacting a filmmaker, having a story in mind from the start can be helpful. It will help to share your vision and will also give them early direction. Below is a sample email. We encourage you to customize it to suit your needs.

Dear [name]

My name is [your name], and I'm an architect here in [city name]. I'm planning to enter the AIA Film Challenge, a short documentary film competition. Sponsored by The American Institute of Architects, the Film Challenge encourages architects and filmmakers to team up in telling stories of positive change through architectural projects.

I'm writing to see if you would be interested in partnering with me to create a short 3-5 minute documentary film on [your project here]. This project has given me the opportunity to [describe your involvement], and it has had a significant impact on the community through [describe community impact].

Attached is the treatment for my film idea [attach treatment]. I'd like to set up a phone call or meeting to discuss the possibility of working together to bring this story to life.

You can find more information on the AIA Film Challenge at AIAfilmchallenge.org

Thank you,
[your name]

Once you've connected with a filmmaker, you'll want to align on the storyline, style and tone of your film, which can dictate editing, filming, interview questions, and music choice.

Creating a timeline

The next step of the process is developing a timeline for each stage of the project. Depending on the complexity of your story, the number of interviews, and the locations, your film's timeline could vary greatly. Here is an example of what should be included in a timeline.

WEEK 1: STORYLINE AND TREATMENT DEVELOPMENT	WEEK 2-3: PRE-PRODUCTION	WEEK 4: PRODUCTION	WEEK 5-6 POST-PRODUCTION
<p>Finalize the key themes and stories that you want to capture and make sure your team is aligned on goals. See the downloadable resources for a sample treatment that you could follow.</p> <p>Week 1 checklist:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify key stakeholders in your project• Create a treatment• Create a shot list of the types of images your film requires• Schedule kick off call with key stakeholders to discuss project	<p>Have a kick off call with key stakeholders and your filmmaking team to review the treatment, goals, and timeline. Secure interviews and schedule them for when your film crew is available. Determine shooting locations (you may need a permit). By the end of this stage, you should have a clear vision of who you are interviewing, and where and when you are shooting – all with necessary approvals.</p> <p>Week 2-3 checklist:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop realistic timeline• Kick-off call with stakeholders• Request and secure necessary interviews• Confirm locations that you need to use for filming• Secure necessary permits (research local requirements)• Secure necessary talent and location release forms (Here's some useful information on this from No Film School)	<p>These are the shoot days where your filmmaker will capture all the interviews and b-roll (shots of the neighborhood, architectural details, etc.). Keep the team in constant communication so there is clear alignment on how the narrative is unfolding and how interviews are aligning with the vision. This will make the editing process much easier.</p> <p>Week 4 checklist:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make sure crew is aligned on the interview times and shot locations• Confirm shot list against the captured footage on a daily basis• Make sure there is food available for the crew	<p>An editor will need a few days to organize the footage and provide a first edit (or rough cut) based on your treatment. Discuss feedback, and give the filmmaker a few days to incorporate changes and create a second cut. From there, you can finalize your film. If time and budget permit, you can arrange for sound and color correction to give the film an added level of polish. Timing can vary widely, so clarify schedules in advance.</p> <p>Week 5-6 checklist:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure you and your editor have agreed on a realistic timeline• Confirm the number of reviews you'd like to see• Complete color correction and sound design for your film (if time and budget permits)

Other pre-production resources

Online resources such as budget, creative brief, and storyboard templates, are available to download at sites like studiobinder.com. Many documents are free with sign-up.

Production

Once your story, crew, locations, interviews, schedule, and timeline are set, it's time to begin shooting your film.

Speaking the language of film

When working with filmmakers, it's important to be able to use and understand their terminology. When creating your film, you'll want to capture a wide variety of angles. Here are some common types of camera shots.

Common types of camera shots

EXTREME WIDE SHOT



Shows the subject from a distance, or the area where the scene happens. Particularly useful for establishing a scene (sometimes called an **Establishing Shot** when used to start a film), and a character's relationship to the environment.

WIDE SHOT



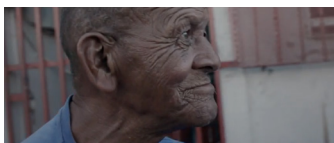
Shows the subject from top to bottom (head to toe for a person), though not necessarily filling the frame. The character becomes more of a focus than an Extreme Wide Shot, but the shot is still dominated by the scenery. This shot often sets the scene and people's place in it. This can also serve as an **Establishing Shot**.

MEDIUM SHOT



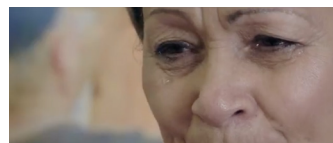
Focuses on part of the subject in more detail. Waist up, for a person. One of the most common shots in films, it focuses on the people in a scene, while showing some environment.

CLOSE-UP



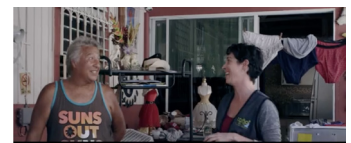
Fills the screen with the subject's face, framing them tightly, so their emotions and reactions to others dominate the scene.

EXTREME CLOSE-UP



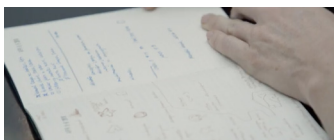
Emphasizes a small area or detail of the subject, often the eyes.

TWO SHOT



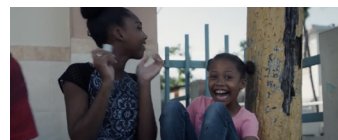
A shot of two subjects in frame.

CUTAWAY



A shot of something away from the main scene. Useful for avoiding a jump cut (action out of sequence) when editing dialogue, or editing together two separate takes.

REACTION SHOT



Shows a person's reaction to the previous shot.

FILMING TIPS

Film during the day. Capture a variety of angles: close, wide, and even drone shots. Capture footage of people engaging with the architecture.

Consider using old video footage and photography that might add context to your story. Virtual renderings and graphics can also help tell the story in a more dynamic fashion.

Tips on interviewing

The people you choose to interview and the questions you ask will be key to the success of your film. Here is some helpful information on getting the most out of your interviews.

- Stay relaxed whether in front of or behind the camera.
- Have the interviewee repeat the question in a sentence when answering.
- Share colorful details and anecdotes to enrich your story and make editing easier.
- Allow the interviewee a bit of silence to formulate and complete their thoughts.
- If you have an important point to make or capture, repeat it a few times so that you get the perfect take.
- After an interview, make sure you have your subject sign a release form to allow you to use their image and voice in the film.

How to ask interview questions

1. Don't ask "yes" or "no" questions

For example, if you are interviewing a non-profit director about a program, don't ask, "Are you proud of this program?" Instead ask, "What makes you proud of this program?"

2. Ask people to tell you their stories

Stories capture a viewer's imagination. A personal story from an interview subject will make your interview more human and more compelling. For example, "Tell me the story of how this project came to be."

3. Ask how your subject feels about a topic

Rather than asking an architect about technical details that may confuse an audience, remember that nearly anyone can relate to how a person feels about something. By asking "How do you feel about this project?" a subject is more likely to give a response the audience can relate to.

4. Ask questions that begin with "why"

This helps communicate the benefits of certain decisions, actions, and design choices.

For example:

- Why did you decide to get involved?
- Why is this project important to you?
- Why should people care about this?

5. Ask questions that begin with "how"

This helps you get more detailed information. Often a good follow-up to asking "why."

For example:

- How did you get started on this project?
- How did this project impact the community?
- How can others get involved?

Post-Production

Once you've wrapped shooting, the process of editing, submitting and promoting your film begins.

Tips on editing

Editing is when your film really takes shape. Before beginning the edit process, make notes for your editor (who may also be your filmmaker) on which interviews, quotes, stories and shots resonated with you most strongly during production.

- Organize footage by date and subjects.
- Reference the storyline in your treatment, when deciding what to keep and what to cut.
- Consider creating shorter promotional cuts to support your longer film.

When providing feedback on an edited rough cut, make the feedback as specific as possible. This will help reduce the number of edits and will save time for both you and the filmmaker (see the downloadable Timeline resource for more tips).

Music resources

Free/inexpensive music can be found at: Epidemic Sound, PremiumBeat, Pond5, Marmoset and Audiojungle. You can also reach out to an artist directly if you really want a specific song.

Submitting your film

The Film Challenge site is AIAfilmchallenge.org, where you can upload your short film directly. We will provide specific directions and parameters, making it very simple for you to get your film to us.

Mobilizing your network

Your network can serve as a powerful tool to amplify your message throughout the Film Challenge. Here are some techniques to help you leverage social media and local events to raise awareness for your film, boost engagement, and encourage votes for your submission during the public voting period.

Attend community events and share information about your film

Community events provide an opportunity to make connections and spread the word about your film and the work you are doing.

Get your partners involved

Encourage your filmmaking partners and film subjects to spread the word about your film as well. For example, if you're making a film about a client's project, ask them to promote the film on their social channels and with their network.

Social media and online promotion

Use hashtags

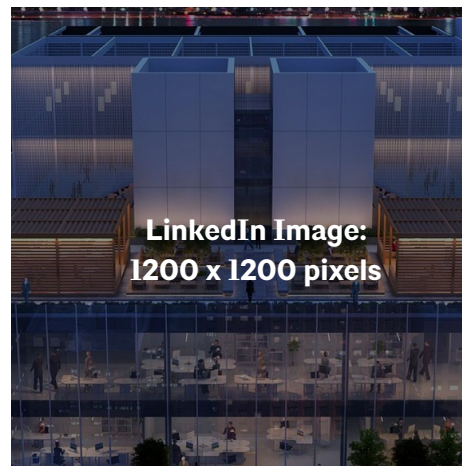
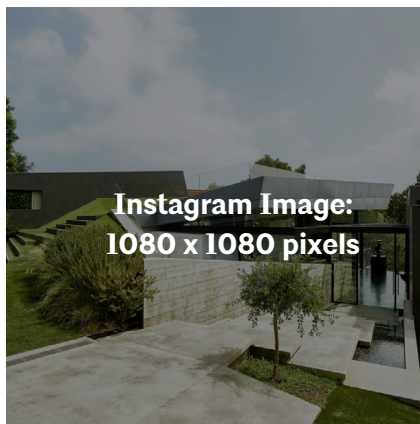
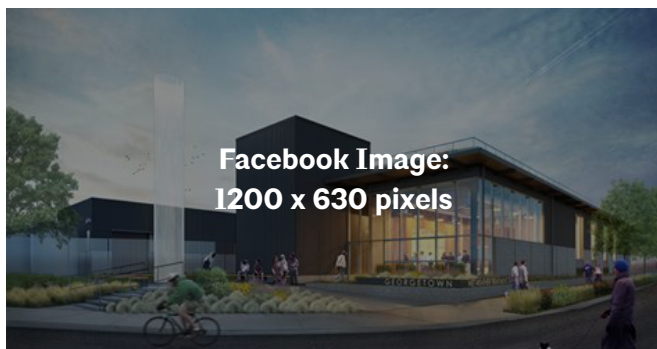
Using hashtags allows others on social media to easily find, view, and engage with all AIA Film Challenge posts, including yours.

Use the AIA Film Challenge hashtags on all relevant posts:

[#AIAFilmChallenge](#) [#BlueprintforBetter](#)

Types of content

You can share videos, pictures, and other interesting information related to your submission. When sharing pictures the following image sizes are recommended.



Video files can be uploaded to social media by using .MP4 or .MOV video formats. Each platform has video length requirements, shown below.

Facebook Video: 120 minutes, max.

Twitter Video: 140 seconds, max.

Instagram Video: 60 seconds, max.

LinkedIn Video: 10 minutes, max.

Sample social posts

Here are some examples of social posts you can use as a template to promote your film.

During filmmaking sample posts:

"We are making a film! Check out this BTS shot from our #AIAfilmchallenge shoot. Stay tuned to see our finished short!" (tag appropriate people in photo, filmmaker, people on set, yourself, location, etc.)

Topic or location specific:

"We are making a difference in [your community]. We partnered with [x filmmaker] to tell the story. Look at this BTS shot of our upcoming short film. Stay tuned for more!"

"We are telling the story of [your project] in a short film. Here's a BTS shot of our upcoming short film. Stay tuned for more!"

During public voting sample posts:

"We need your help. Our film [film name] is up for a People's Choice award for the AIA Film Challenge, and we need your votes! Click the link, and share if you can. Thanks!" (add link to voting site, and include video in the post)

"Hi friends! Our film based right here in [community name] is up for a People's Choice award in the AIA Film Challenge this year. Please help us by voting and spreading the word!" (add link to voting site, and include video in the post)

Engage with your followers

Build relationships with your audience by starting and joining conversations related to the AIA Film Challenge.

When your followers engage with your posts, show them appreciation by liking, answering questions, and replying to their responses.

Engage with others using the AIA Film Challenge hashtags, too.

Remind and encourage

During the public voting phase, encourage your followers to share and vote for your submission.

Share your submission regularly throughout the challenge, and remind your followers that they can vote every hour, and add urgency to your posts as the deadline approaches.

Follow AIA Film Challenge profiles

Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook: @AIANational

We're looking forward to your film!