

How to create a film for the AIA Film Challenge

Design has the power to solve some of the biggest issues facing cities today. We believe these stories are among the most important stories we can tell.

Part of the American Institute of Architects' Blueprint for Better campaign, the AIA Film Challenge provides a unique and powerful forum that amplifies the stories of architecture projects that are transforming communities through the power of design and collaboration.

The AIA Film Challenge 2022 invites you to share stories of a Blueprint for Better – how architects are working with civic leaders to design sustainable and/or equitable communities.

About this guide

This document includes information on choosing a story, creating a treatment, setting a timeline, gathering footage and interviews, and editing your film. Our goal is to guide you through the process of creating and submitting an impactful short film.

Resources

Additional resources can be found in your participant portal on AIAfilmchallenge.org, such as FAQs, sample films, and the Film Challenge official rules.

Questions

If you have additional questions about the Film Challenge after reading this guide, our team is here to help. Contact Ro Hensley, our community manager, through the chat function in the participant portal any time. You can also email Ro at challenge@wearespence.com.

AIA FILM CHALLENGE 2022 PROMPT:

The AIA Film Challenge 2022 invites you to share stories of architects working with civic leaders to design sustainable and/or equitable communities.

Why you should participate in the AIA Film Challenge

1. Invest the prize money into causes and projects you care about

Filmmaker and 2019 Grand Prize winner Weston Waugh invested his winnings back into his community. "The prize money enabled us to be able to tell more stories and create more videos for community groups on the east side [of Oklahoma City]. There are a number of projects that are in the works right now that I'm really excited to share."

[Watch The Eastpoint Project](#)

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

Honolulu-based filmmaker and 2018 People's Choice winner, Marq Morrison, entered the Film Challenge to raise awareness of cultural projects on the island. "Winning the People's Choice Award and a screening at Chicago Ideas was a breath of fresh air. I now feel like people want to see and learn more about the Hawaiian culture and indigenous architecture."

[Watch Ka Hale: A Revival](#)

3. Make connections and advance your business

After creating his film, filmmaker and 2020 Grand Prize winner John Gordon noted, "Participating in the film challenge opened up so many doors for me, specifically doors into the minds of others. In some way, it gave me reason to make connections I wouldn't have made on my own."

[Watch Dallas Holocaust & Human Rights Museum](#)

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

A short film makes messages easy to digest and share, and allows architecture to be accessible for more people. 2020 finalist Nastassja Lafontant explains that "the most impactful moments weren't just seeing the history of the architecture come to life but mostly how it affected the people. For me, interviewing the residents, employees, architects, contractor, etc. is what really made the film animated. Understanding how much their hearts were connected to the building and why it needed to be cherished is what gave the film its power."

[Watch Building New Hope in Bellflower](#)

Creating your film

There are three key phases to film production, pre-production, production, and post-production. While partnerships may be helpful to bring the creative vision to life, teams are not required. We encourage you to use the resources and tools provided below to make a compelling film. This guide will walk you through the steps for each.

Pre-production

Selecting your story

Come up with a few potential story ideas. If you are working with others to produce your film, 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.
- Keep your story concise.** In a 1:30- to 3-minute film you will not be able to tell the full story, but rather focus on a particular angle of the story that is most compelling.

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

Creating a treatment or story outline will help you stay focused and determine which are the most important footage and subjects to seek out. Here are some things to keep in mind when developing the plan.

- Subjects.** Begin by making a list of the key individuals involved with the project – that may include decision makers, clients, beneficiaries, and partners. You may not have time to feature all of these individuals in your film, but you can make the final call in post-production once the story starts to come together. Aim to have at least one architect, one civic or community leader, and one beneficiary from the project represented.
- Story arc.** Even in a short film, you'll want to identify a beginning, middle and end. What is the problem you are solving? What work happened to try and address the problem? What were some outcomes of the initiative?
- Footage.** To bring to life the key moments of the story, what supporting footage will be important? What building, community, and project images do you have access to or need help tracking down? Though real footage is always preferred to keep the story authentic, some stock footage and imagery is permitted.

Sample film treatment

As an example, here is the treatment that was developed for the AIA Film Challenge 2018 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 Maria 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. Maria 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 Martin 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

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 and the number of interviews, your film's timeline could vary greatly. Here is an example of what should be included in a timeline.

WEEK 1: STORYLINE & 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 feature, using the film treatment guidance above. If you're working with others to produce your short film, make sure you are all aligned on goals.</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 kickoff call with everyone involved in the production of your film, on which you review the treatment, goals, and timeline. Secure and schedule interviews. Request any necessary footage or images. If you are filming on location, make sure you secure all necessary permits and 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 filming locations• Secure necessary permits• Secure necessary talent and location release forms, as well as image licenses (here's some useful information on this from No Film School)	<p>This will be the process of capturing new footage and gathering existing footage for your film. With interviews scheduled, be sure to have your questions ready and clear goals for each conversation. If you are traveling to a filming location, make sure you have permission to be there.</p> <p>Week 4 checklist:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Confirm your interviews, and let them know they will be recorded• Ask each interview subject to sign a release form• Confirm the points of your story arc against your interviews, images, and footage to ensure you are hitting your key points	<p>Carve out a few days to organize your footage and produce a first edit (or rough cut). All involved should give feedback and incorporate changes into 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.</p> <p>Week 5-6 checklist:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organize and label your footage so you can easily sift through it during the editing process• Build in time for feedback, if necessary• Collect any outstanding release forms• Add music to your film• Complete color correction and sound design (if time and budget allow)

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, interviews, schedule, and timeline are set, it's time to begin producing your film.

Speaking the language of film

When shooting new footage, you'll want to capture a wide variety of angles. Here are some 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



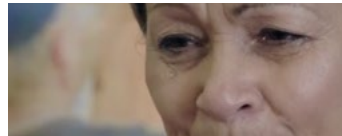
Focuses on part of the subject in more detail. Waist up, for a person. One of the most common shots in films, it focuses on the people in a scene, while showing some environment.

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



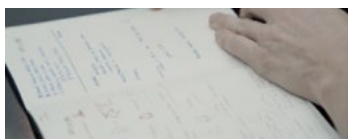
Emphasizes a small area or detail of the subject, often the eyes.

MEDIUM 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 gathering footage

In addition to shooting new footage, we allow up to 50% of the footage in your film to have been previously shot. If applicable to your story, collect footage of both the exterior and interior of your project. Virtual renderings and graphics can also add a nice touch and help tell the story in a more dynamic fashion. If you still don't have enough footage or imagery, consider including stock footage, which will be allowed in this year's challenge. In requesting footage, it will be important to be clear on what specific shots or soundbites you are looking for.

To gather necessary interviews, you can either interview your subjects in-person, record your subjects through a video-conferencing platform, or request existing interview footage from relevant parties. Though you may only use about 10–15 seconds in your short film, you should schedule 30 minutes to an hour for the interview.

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 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?

Other production resources

Recording Virtual Interviews

To record a virtual interview you can use a tool like Zoom, but you may get higher quality results with a tool like Screenflow or Screengrabber. Both will allow Youtube to export the video and audio files and import into editing software. For more on this process see [here](#).

- [Screenflow](#) is a tool to use for Mac platforms
- [Screengrabber pro](#) is a tool for PC platforms

Stock Footage

Bring in stock footage when necessary to help fill visual or story gaps. Make sure to use royalty-free images or make appropriate purchases. Use sites like:

- [Adobe Stock Videos or Photos](#) - One month free trial available
- [Pexels](#) - Free high quality videos and photos
- [iStock](#) - Affordable high quality videos and photos

Equipment

Use a tripod to keep the video steady. A couple of good, inexpensive options are:

- [Extendable tripod with remote](#)
- [All-in-one Rig](#)

Audio is very important. With so many accessible tools to capture quality audio, it's easy to record well.

- [Lav mic that connects through your phone](#)
- [Recording Microphone](#)

When it comes to lighting, you should either use as much natural daylight as possible, or use a light kit to ensure the subjects are properly lit.

- [Tripod with light ring](#)

Post-production

Once you've gathered your footage, the process of editing and submitting your film begins.

Tips on editing

Editing is when your film really takes shape. Before you begin the editing process, make notes on which interviews, quotes, stories, and shots resonated the most with you.

First, you will want to create a rough cut of the film. This may be much longer than 3 minutes, but it gives you a loose framework to start from. From here you will continue to edit the piece down to fit within the timeframe, while making sure your key points are intact.

- 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.
- Seek feedback when appropriate. It can help in the editing phase to get an outside opinion to make sure the story holds together.

Music resources

Music will be very important to the final piece. Free/inexpensive music can be found at: [Epidemic Sound](#), [PremiumBeat](#), [Pond5](#), [Marmoset](#), and [Audiojungle](#). If you have someone who can compose music for your piece, please make sure to have necessary licensing rights. You can also reach out to an artist directly if you really want a specific song.

Editing resources

Free/inexpensive platforms that can be used to shoot and edit videos between your cell phone and laptop: [iMovie \(Apple\)](#), [Power Director \(Android\)](#), [Adobe Premiere Rush](#), [Splice](#).

Other post-production resources

Additional best practices can be found here:

- [University of St. Andrews](#)
- [VTRep](#)
- [NY Times](#)
- [Wave.Video](#)
- [iPhone Filmmaking](#)

Submitting your film

You will submit your film, and all accompanying information, through your portal account on [AIAfilmchallenge.org](#). Along with a link to your film, you will need to submit a film profile, release forms, still images, and a list of collaborators. Once all information has been uploaded to the portal, you will be able to submit your film!