

Event Planning Toolkit

OUT *in the* SILENCE

A film and campaign for fairness and equality
in rural and small town America



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Out in the Silence Event Planning Toolkit

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About *Out in the Silence*

Out in the Silence tells the story of a handful of rural residents struggling for inclusion amidst vehement anti-gay sentiment. The story unfolds when filmmaker Joe Wilson's same-sex wedding announcement is published in the newspaper in the small Pennsylvania hometown he left long ago. Drawn back by a plea for help from the mother of a gay teen being tormented at school, Wilson's journey dramatically illustrates the challenges of being an outsider in a conservative environment and the potential for building bridges across differences in religion, faith and values when people approach each other with openness and respect.

About the *Out in the Silence* Campaign for Fairness and Equality

The *Out in the Silence* Campaign for Fairness and Equality is an effort to use the film to to prompt open, productive dialogue about LGBT inclusion. As part of this effort, the filmmakers are inviting organizations and individuals across the country, especially those in small towns and rural communities, to hold events that use the film as a catalyst to bring people together and build coalitions. We know planning an event is not always easy, so this toolkit is designed to provide all the tools and tips you need to put together a successful event.

Getting Started with Your Event in Four Steps

1) Define Your Objectives

Figuring out your objectives is the first step in planning a great event. This is a good opportunity to think about how your event can support some bigger-picture objectives. Are you interested in sparking dialogue about how your community might be more welcoming to LGBT people? Do you want to capture the attention of local decision makers? Do you want to heighten your organization's profile and build new partnerships? Having a sense of what you'd like people to take away from their *Out in the Silence* experience will help you plan and set the tone. Here are some possible objectives :

- Educate community members** about issues faced by LGBT people in your community.
- Foster safe and productive dialogue** among people who are uncertain about their position on LGBT rights
- Inspire new advocates** by offering motivated viewers easy ways they can get involved, such as holding a screening of their own.
- Build bridges with new allies** who are "beyond the choir."
- Spotlight the work of your organization** and generate donations and press attention.
- Influence diversity and discrimination policies** in schools, workplaces, and places of worship.
- Prompt coalition-building** between local and state groups working on social justice and civil rights.

2) Identify Your Target Audience

Once you define your objectives, you'll have a better sense of who your target audience is. Do you hope to engage people who are motivated around the issues and ready to get more involved? Would you like to reach "beyond the choir," and introduce the issues to new audiences? Are you interested in engaging communities of faith or local decision makers? Even if your organization does not have direct connections to your target audiences, you can partner with organizations that do. See the next section for suggestions.

Get Connected With *Out in the Silence* Online! Network with other *Out in the Silence* fans on Facebook at www.Facebook.com/outinthesilence. Chat with other fans, post updates about your event, upload photos from your screening, and more! You can also go to the *Out in the Silence* website at www.outinthesilence.com to receive email updates.

3) Determine Venue Options

Where you screen depends on your budget, the expected size of your audience, and the impression you want to give. For example, if you want to host an intimate dialogue, a church basement or large living room would suffice. If you want to engage college students or high school students, a university auditorium or classroom would work well. In small towns, the public library is often a good option as they usually have free meeting spaces and are seeking educational events. If you want to put on a more professional

event that attracts VIPs and press, you may consider doing your screening in a theater or private screening room. Although such venues often have rental fees, you might be surprised to learn that there are many organizations such as local universities and community centers that have screening rooms available for little or no cost. You may also find out if there are any organizations that do a regular screening series, as they might be interested in partnering with you and including *Out in the Silence* in their lineup.

4) Recruit Partner Organizations

It's always good to invite other groups and organizations to partner with you on your event. Partner organizations not only help broaden your reach, but they can also lend credibility and contribute to your event planning. In some instances, event-based partnerships can even pave the way for longer-term relationships that will benefit your mutual efforts.

Partners can get involved in a range of ways, depending on their interest and capacity. At the very least, they can help get the word out about the event on their listservs or websites, but some partners might be able to get more actively involved and contribute ideas, time, resources and/or panelists for the event. For *Out in the Silence*, you might consider the following groups as potential partners:

- Local PFLAG chapter
- Local gay-straight alliance
- LGBT inclusive faith-based or interfaith organizations
- Civil rights groups such as NAACP
- Local or regional ACLU chapter
- Planned Parenthood
- High school and college student groups
- Museums, and media/film centers

If you are situated in a small town or rural community, there may be few if any explicitly LGBT or progressive support organizations in your area. Nevertheless you may find allies among groups interested in inclusion as part of education and community development. For example:

- The PTA
- Community foundations
- Local businesses
- Chamber of commerce
- YWCA
- Arts Council

Working with an organization that is not specifically LGBT oriented may help you reach new potential supporters and bring your messages to new audiences “beyond the choir.” Some tips for reaching out to groups you’ve never worked with before:

- *Offer background and context.* Send along a link to the *Out in the Silence* website at www.outinthesilence.com so they can see what the film is all about..
- *Make it relevant to them.* Highlight elements of the film that are most relevant to their interests. For example, a church group might be interested in the transformation of Pastor Micklos and his wife.

- *Let them know about partner benefits.* Getting involved in your event can be a good opportunity for other groups to spotlight their work, raise their visibility and reach new audiences.
- *Remember that groups have different capacities so involvement will vary.* Some will simply just send your email blast to their listserv, others might get more involved in logistical planning, and some might even be able to contribute funds. Be mindful of what your partners are capable of and make sure you're not asking them for too much (or too little!) as you plan your event.

Getting the Word Out

Getting the word out is one of the most important things you can do in your event planning. Even a well thought-out event with prominent speakers can suffer low attendance if you don't cover your bases. We encourage you to spread the word by announcing the event through your partner organizations' mailing lists, posting flyers in the community, and securing calendar listings.

Below are some tips for getting the word out:

Check out our materials and downloadable artwork. Your event is part of a nationwide campaign and we're here to help – so take advantage! Visit our website www.outinthesilence.com to download customizable event flyers and a press kit

Nail down the details. Confirm the exact time, location, venue and ticketing/RSVP procedure before you send out notices to anyone. (If you're taking RSVPs, plan to accept 30% more RSVPs than you have room for and let late responders know you might be able to squeeze them in if people earlier on the list don't show.) And as a nod to your partner organizations, include a mention of them in all of your outreach.

Hit the inboxes. The simplest thing you can do to promote your event is to create an email blast and send it out widely. Send out two emails: the first at least two weeks before your event, and then a reminder several days before. You can also create a Facebook event and invite all your friends.

Get it on community calendars. Try to get calendar listings in your city's weekly publication(s) and on the web. If you have a website of your own, make sure to post information about your event there, and ask any partner organizations to do the same.

Post flyers. Make flyers and post them in high traffic areas such as college campuses, shopping malls, grocery stores and recreation centers.

Start the presses. Ten days before your event, send a press release to local newspapers. Try to target reporters covering community issues, and remember to customize your press release to highlight the film's relevance to local issues. For events in non-urban areas, you may want to emphasize that the film deals with how one small town dealt with a controversial issue. Another good angle is the relationship between diversity and economic development.

Framing Your Event

It's important to frame your event in a way that addresses the issues your audience is most interested in and benefits your organization. Here are some ideas for focusing your screening:

- ☒ **Present a Panel Discussion:** Panelists can help put the film in context, whether it's providing background information about LGBT issues or connecting the film's themes to what's happening in your community. It's always a good idea to have a range of perspectives represented. Possible panelists might include a local LGBT advocate, a parent of an LGBT individual, an attorney with expertise in civil rights issues, or a clergy member from an LGBT inclusive congregation. Partner organizations are great resources for potential panelists for the discussion, and they'll be even more eager to promote the event if they're being represented.
- ☒ **Present Your Work:** Save some time after the screening for you and/or your co-sponsors to give a brief presentation about the work you do, and how audience members can support it. You and your partner organizations can also display literature outside of your screening venue so that audiences can learn more about your work. And there's nothing wrong with making a funding pitch at the event, especially if your audience includes potential big-time donors.
- ☒ **Distribute Materials and Resources:** Present audience members with fact sheets, flyers about upcoming events, and other relevant materials. Organizations like GLSEN and GLAAD have helpful resources on their websites that are available for easy download.
- ☒ **Host a Reception:** A public post-screening meet-and-greet will allow opportunities for networking and continued discussion after the screening. Or, host a VIP reception with local leaders, school administrators and funders. Whichever way you decide to go, refreshments are always a good idea!
- ☒ **Highlight Your Organization's Advocacy Efforts.** Consider what themes in the film can be linked to your existing advocacy efforts. Whether your organization is devoted to issues of LGBT advocacy, school policy or civil rights, think of ways to use the film as a springboard to highlight those issues and provide concrete action steps for audience members.
- ☒ **Suggest Further Outlets for Action:** Offer audience members concrete ways they can get involved and support your and your partner organizations' work. These might include visiting your website to find out about upcoming events, volunteering, becoming a member, making a donation, etc. See the *Out in the Silence* Discussion Guide for further action ideas.
- ☒ **Stay In Touch!** Have a system for collecting email addresses at your event, and follow up with audience members and co-sponsor organizations in the days after. You've worked too hard to let those relationships disappear!

Tips for Post-Screening Discussion

A film like *Out in the Silence* can raise a range of emotions, questions and/or concerns from the audience, and we recommend you address this with a post-screening panel discussion, Q&A, and/or facilitated dialogue. Below are some tips and ideas for having a productive conversation no matter what your format:

Panel Discussion

- The themes of your panel discussion will vary depending on your event objectives, but it's always a good idea to have a range of perspectives represented on the panel.
- Give your panelists an idea of who will be in the audience, so they can tailor the discussion to the audience's needs. For example, if you anticipate a general audience, ask panelists to tone down any sector-specific jargon.
- If you can, have an experienced moderator present to keep time and prompt the speakers with questions.
- Even if you don't have a moderator, you can have a productive conversation by just prompting your speakers to reflect on the film, offer their own perspective, and supplement that with personal stories.
- A good length for a panel discussion is usually about 20-30 minutes, depending on how many panelists you have. After that, it's always a good idea to open it up to questions from the audience.
- If you'll be in a large auditorium or theatre, make sure there are microphones!

Q&A

- Leave as much time as possible for audience questions.
- You might consider prompting the audience with a question, first: "What jumped out at you in the film?"
- Given the subject matter of the film, some audience members may be compelled to give long accounts of their personal experiences. If their comments exceed a minute or two, respectfully thank them and ask them if they have a question for the panelists.
- A good Q&A lasts around 30-45 minutes. If your audience seems like they still want to talk after the time is up, invite them into the lobby or a nearby restaurant or café to continue the conversation.

Facilitated Dialogue

- If your group is small enough (under 20 people) it might be a good idea to do a facilitated dialogue, where all participants have an opportunity to share their feelings and experiences.
- Even with a large group, if your space permits, you may want to break into small groups for dialogue.
- Always start the dialogue by asking the group to share their immediate reactions to the film, i.e., what jumped out at them or particularly moved them.
- For additional discussion questions, please see the *Out in the Silence* Discussion Guide.
- You must be ready in case the film or speakers come under scrutiny. For example, there may be audience members who are homophobic, very resistant to LGBT inclusion, or completely unwilling to engage in conversation. A neutral moderator can help make sure that the conversation remains productive and many perspectives are heard. Guide any comments or concerns to a positive end that applauds the benefits of sharing information in an open forum.

Planning Checklist

Once you have defined your target audience, objectives and framing, begin planning the event.

Preliminary planning – at least 6 weeks prior

- Book the venue and date for your screening.
- Recruit local organizational partners to broaden your reach, and help identify roles for each one
- Determine speakers, panelists, and facilitator (if applicable).

Logistical planning and initial outreach – 3-4 weeks prior

- Create a flyer to publicize your screening.
- Contact press .
- Confirm the appropriate format for your screening (most likely DVD).
- Secure food for reception (if applicable).
- Draft event agenda.

More logistical planning – 2 weeks prior

- Create an email blast to publicize your event electronically. Send one announcement 2 weeks prior and another several days prior.
- Contact community calendars about your event.

Media outreach (for larger community events) – 10 days prior

- Send out press releases to media outlets.
- Make calls to local television and radio programs.

Final planning – several days prior

- Important:** test screen your format version of the film in advance of the event to make sure there aren't any glitches.
- Send second round of email blasts.
- Follow up with press who expressed an interest in covering the story.
- Finalize agenda.
- Make copies of handouts to distribute at the event.

At the event itself

- Take photos!
- As people arrive, ask them to sign up for your listserv
- Have a timekeeper so that panelists/speakers remain within their assigned speaking time.
- Be prepared to suggest next steps and have materials available for attendees to follow up.