



HOW DID THEY FUND IT?

CASE STUDY 02

Last Day of Freedom

AN ANALYSIS OF PROJECT FUNDING
FOR THE LIFECYCLE OF A FILM

First-time filmmakers Dee Hibbert-Jones and Nomi Talisman tell the story of making the animated documentary short that won an Emmy and scored an Oscar nomination.

CASE STUDY INCLUDES:

- Filmmaker Narrative
- Action Items for Filmmakers & Organizations
- Resource Map: Analysis of Project Support
- About the Film: Synopsis & Relevant Statistics

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FILMMAKER CASE STUDY

Last Day of Freedom



photo: Living Condition LLC

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Narrative Overview

In this case study, San Francisco-based artists Dee Hibbert-Jones and Nomi Talisman share how they completed their first documentary by tapping into a variety of financial and non-financial resources through their existing networks of issue-oriented nonprofit organizations, advocacy and legal groups, and academic institutions. While Hibbert-Jones and Talisman did not pay themselves directly for their work on the project, they were able to cover basic living expenses and avoid accumulating any significant debts by following an innovative grant application strategy and leveraging their employment situations to secure additional project funding and incorporate elements of the film's development and production into their paid work time.

Research & Development

The research and development approach for *Last Day of Freedom* was unique, as Hibbert-Jones and Talisman initially set out to produce a museum/gallery installation entitled [Living Condition](#), which featured a series of animated short vignettes describing the impact of capital punishment told through the eyes of families directly affected by it. Support for *Living Condition* eventually led to the development of *Last Day of Freedom* as a stand-alone animated documentary.

Early in the process of developing *Living Condition*, Hibbert-Jones and Talisman were selected to participate in [Bay Area Video Coalition's National MediaMaker Fellowship](#), a ten-month artist development program that provides support for nonfiction filmmakers primarily working on projects about community and social justice issues ([read more about their experience here](#)). This formative professional development opportunity was critical, as it offered a paid stipend, opportunities to workshop the project in progress with peers, and a direct line to a range of mentors and industry contacts.

The ability to leverage professional affiliations in their work lives was a key element to the research and development phase of *Last Day of Freedom*. Talisman's position working as in-house media staff for [Community Resource Initiative](#) (CRI), a grassroots investigation office and resource center that provides mitigation services for prisoners on death row and their families, was instrumental in the project's evolution. With CRI's support, the filmmaking team were able to establish and build trust with the families of prisoners on death row and develop relationships with prospective film subjects. Since CRI was equally invested in the potential impact of the project as an educational and outreach tool, it made sense for the organization and the filmmakers to submit a project proposal to the [Creative Work Fund](#), a foundation that supports the creation of new work through collaborations between nonprofit organizations and artists. Their project was awarded \$40,000, which further solidified their partnership

The ability to leverage artistic networks and professional affiliations were a key element in making the film.

CRITICAL RESOURCES

Participation in these programs were critical to the film's success and bolstered additional resources:

- [Bay Area Video Coalition: MediaMaker Fellowship*](#)
- [Creative Work Fund](#)
- [Full Frame Documentary Film Festival*](#)
- [MacDowell Colony*](#)

Programs supported by the National Endowment for the Arts are marked with an asterisk. Full list of resources according to project phase is featured on page 06.

Artist residencies provided the focused time and space for the filmmakers to refine and complete their project.

and enabled the formalization of a co-funded position on-staff at CRI to specifically work on the project and pay Talisman a stipend to conduct audio-visual interviews with potential subjects, purchase equipment, and develop a proof of concept.

Furthermore, Hibbert-Jones's position as associate professor at the University of California at Santa Cruz (UCSC) enabled access to a number of university-sponsored grants, such as the UCSC Art Research Institute, the UCSC Art Dean's Research Fund & the Arts Dean's Excellence Fund, and the UCSC Committee on Research. These resources were compounded by additional support from the greater University of California system through a competitive cross-UC Institute for Arts Research (UCIRA) award. These academic funds allowed Hibbert-Jones to compensate UC student assistants for their time working on the early animation prototypes and cover travel to meet with film subjects.

In addition, developing relationships with legal advisors was essential before going into full production due to the sensitive and complex nature of the film's subject matter. Through a relationship with the Austin Law Group, who offered early stage pro-bono legal services to the team, the filmmakers were able to connect with advocacy organizations such as the ACLU, Death Penalty Focus, and Equal Justice USA, who supported their research on trauma impact, race politics, and legal issues, and further bolstered their contacts in the field. Building these relationships early in the process was integral to the development of their proof of concept and boosted credibility for the film's potential impact as they headed into production. Compensation for their team of advisors was secured through grant funding received from [CalHumanities](#), a state humanities agency supported through the National Endowment for the Humanities.

ARTS & HUMANITIES FUNDING

Filmmakers and organizations should routinely check available grant opportunities, which vary by locality, state, and region.

Each year, the [National Endowment for the Arts](#) and the [National Endowment for Humanities](#) awards federal funding in every congressional district across the United States and dedicates a significant portion of their federal grant-making budgets towards State Arts Agencies, State Humanities Councils, and Regional Arts Organizations.

RESOURCE TIP

Filmmakers seeking dedicated time and space to work on a creative project should consider applying to an artist residency program.

According to the [Alliance of Artist Communities](#), seventy percent of artist residency programs are multidisciplinary, serving visual artists, writers, composers, filmmakers, choreographers, and others. Stay up to date with upcoming artist residency deadlines by subscribing to their free monthly newsletter or search for film and new media opportunities through their residency database.

Overall, the clarity of their project's themes and topics made it easier to identify strategic relationships and tap into a range of academic, arts-based, and professional development resources throughout the various phases of the project. This strategy cultivated early support for the project from diverse networks and allowed the filmmakers to develop their storytelling style and treatment along the way. Additional funding support for the *Last Day of Freedom* was received from the Pacific Pioneer Fund and the [Center for Cultural Innovation](#), an arts organization with a mission to promote knowledge sharing, networking, and financial independence for individuals in the arts by providing business training, grants, and incubating innovative projects. The film also received grants from a private social justice foundation, Left Tilt Fund (also known as the Lynn Handleman Charitable Foundation), and a local arts agency, the [San Francisco Arts Commission](#).

Production & Post-Production

From 2009-2014, the artists were engaged with the labor-intensive process of animating the film, which included frame-by-frame rotoscoped interviews and illustrated recreations of archival footage, totaling more than 30,000 drawings. This animation approach was deliberately selected to give viewers a symbolic and sensory viewing experience that reflect the subjects' intense emotional states. In 2011, the production was temporarily halted as the filmmakers became parents, adopting their newborn son. The following year production resumed.

The filmmakers exhibited segments of their work-in-progress as *Living Condition* in galleries and museums. In its initial stages, the artists exhibited *Living Condition* in a museum space in Dallas, Texas, through a partnership with [Make Art with a Purpose](#), a resource organization dedicated to support creative projects that seek to transform the world in positive ways. They also exhibited at SOMArts in San Francisco and at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, among others.

Statewide broadcast on KQED through a showcase for independently produced documentaries enabled the filmmakers to receive a nomination for a regional Emmy® Award (and a win).

Artist residencies provided the focused time and space for the filmmakers to refine and complete their project. During their time at the [MacDowell Colony](#) in New Hampshire, the filmmakers immersed themselves in production. The residency provided studio space, accommodations, community input, and meals. They were also awarded an artist residency at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, [which included a \\$10,000 award, a three-month residency, and a public exhibition opportunity.](#) Finally, *Last Day of Freedom* was completed as a 32-minute short documentary in 2014 and ready for distribution.

Impact & Distribution

Last Day of Freedom premiered at the [Full Frame Documentary Film Festival](#), where Talisman and Hibbert-Jones won the Filmmaker Award as well as the Full Frame Jury Award for Best Short (2015), which qualified the film for the [88th Academy Awards](#) and landed them a nomination for Best Documentary – Short Subject. After receiving the Full Frame Jury Award, they were contacted by festival programmers with offers for fee waivers for festival applications or even automatic acceptance. During this period, the film continued to screen in film festivals internationally, winning 12 other awards, including a Gideon Award for Outstanding Work in the Representation of the Indigent, the CA Public Defenders Association, and a Congressional Black Veterans Award. Funding from UCSC and other private funders helped them travel with the film.

During this point of rising visibility, the filmmakers had multiple options for distribution. In addition to festivals, the filmmakers applied for and secured statewide broadcast on the PBS-member station KQED through “[Truly CA: Our State, Our Stories](#),” a showcase for independently produced documentaries representing the spirit of California. Alongside a modest screening fee of \$500, this broadcast enabled the filmmakers to receive a nomination for a regional Emmy Award (and a win). After being contacted by [ShortsTV](#), a cable and satellite television channel dedicated to short films, the film received theatrical distribution in nearly 200 theaters across the country via a ShortsTV touring program. For streaming rights, the filmmakers were contacted by Netflix, which paid \$16,000 for a two-year-licensing deal in the U.S. Through international sales agent SND Films, the short was also broadcast internationally in Finland, Spain, and Canada, as well as on Canadian Airlines. SND also forged a deal for educational streaming rights on [Kanopy](#).

The filmmakers credit these distribution channels for giving the film a larger audience and also helping them generate a small amount of revenue—ShortsTV paid an initial \$2,000 for two years for theatrical rights, and then overall royalties of just over \$4,900. They also received \$1,200 from SND. In addition, the film was also shown at a number of academic conferences, including at Duke University, Northwestern University, and Equal Justice USA in Scottsbluff, Nebraska. It was also shown at several other outreach and issue-based advocacy events, from Allentown, Pennsylvania, to Kenne, New Hampshire, to Santa Cruz, California. One recent highlight included a special outdoor screening at Pennsylvania’s Eastern State Penitentiary for an audience of approximately 600 inmates.

DID YOU KNOW?

Three separate organizations run the prestigious Emmy® nomination process:

- [National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences](#) (NATAS) recognizes excellence in news and documentaries, sports, daytime, public service and technology. In addition, nineteen chapters of NATAS, conduct regional Emmy® awards and Student Awards for Excellence.
- [Academy of Television Arts & Sciences](#) (ATAS) recognizes excellence in national primetime programming, which also includes several categories for nonfiction programming.
- [International Academy of Television Arts & Sciences](#) (IATAS) recognize excellence in television programming produced outside of the United States.

Each organization publishes a rulebook with submission guidelines and criteria, which may vary from year to year. It is recommended to research past awards and see what kinds of programming are nominated for each category.

Action Items

FOR FILMMAKERS

RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Make a multi-year calendar with estimated deadlines for application-based opportunities, such as filmmaker labs, artist residencies, pitch sessions, academic institution support, and even submission deadlines for festivals or broadcast distribution. Know the eligibility requirements and work sample requests so you can plan accordingly. Align project goals and production timelines with application deadlines so your team doesn't miss an opportunity and is prepared to submit competitive applications without rushing. Start your research using Media Arts Resources page from the National Endowment for the Arts or International Documentary Association's Grants Directory.

TAP EXISTING RESOURCES

Know what types of resources or funding you or your team may have access to through existing networks, affiliations, and geography or location of residence. For example, local, regional, and/or state arts and cultural funding opportunities may be available to assist in creating or distributing the work.

FOCUS ON THE ISSUES

Early in development, outline broad themes and topics of your film. Use this info to identify potential audiences and research local, regional, state, or national entities and networks that may share an interest in relevant themes and topics and have a direct line to reaching your desired audiences. Build relationships with these like-minded organizations and communities to increase community investment on the ground, help secure additional resources or partners for production, and build anticipation for the film's release.

CREATIVE COMPENSATION

Get clever with ways to incorporate or align components of your project into an already existing job or compensated gig. If this isn't possible, include the development of existing partnerships within project-based grant proposals or funding opportunities that support collaborations between nonprofit organizations and artists, such as the [Creative Work Fund](#).

MAKE A SUBMISSION STRATEGY

Awards from Oscar-qualifying festivals and regional and national television broadcast can amplify your films distribution strategy and have long-term career impact. While it is easy to identify opportunities that may lead to meaningful awards, submission and nomination fees can get costly. Research opportunities and past award-winners to determine if your film is a good fit before pressing submit.

FOR ORGANIZATIONS

STRENGTHEN INDUSTRY PARTNERS

Emerging and established filmmakers benefit from initiatives that offer time, space, and industry mentorship to develop professional networks. What initiatives exist in your area? If you are a resource provider, are your artists getting the most relevant support or could improvements be made through new industry or organizational partnerships? What steps could you take to build coordinated support if such initiatives do not exist in your area?

PAVE THE PATH FOR AN EMMY®

Television broadcasters can provide crucial support for local filmmakers by packaging curated programs for regional and national distribution. In addition to connecting filmmakers with audiences, this can offer a pathway to a potential Emmy® nomination. How do you connect local filmmakers to existing regional and national broadcast opportunities? If there are a lack of impactful broadcast opportunities for independent filmmakers in your area, what role can you play to strengthen this?

SUPPORT DISTRIBUTION

The distribution of an independent film requires a significant investment of time and money. What models exist that provide direct support for your local filmmakers to promote, publicize, and travel with their film at community screenings or film festivals? Is it possible to adopt practices that support outreach and distribution activities?

SHARE RESOURCES

Help prepare filmmakers to navigate real-world challenges and make informed decisions by incorporating current materials and educational tools within existing film curriculums or initiatives. Suggested resources include articles within International Documentary Association's [Documentary Magazine](#), Doc Society's [Impact Field Guide](#), and Sundance Institute's [Creative Distribution Case Studies](#) and [Co//ab: Sustain](#), a resource portal curated in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts.

Project Resource Map

USE THIS RESOURCE MAP TO ANALYZE PROJECT SUPPORT RECEIVED DURING EACH PHASE OF THE PROJECT.

DEVELOPMENT	PRODUCTION	DISTRIBUTION
AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION, DEATH PENALTY FOCUS, EQUAL JUSTICE USA Provided professional and academic consultation on relevant issues on trauma, race, and law.		Equal Justice USA provided outreach and publicity support during impact campaign.
CALIFORNIA HUMANITIES Supported stipends for film advisors.	Supported costs associated with animation and post-production.	
THE CREATIVE WORK FUND Funding supported Nomi's position at Community Resource Initiative to work on the film, and stipend for Dee.	Supported production cost, purchase of equipment, and hiring staff such as animators and an editor.	
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA CRUZ Various university faculty research grants supported early-phase development and production, including equipment, contractors, and student support for animation prototyping.		Supported hiring of public relations agent and travel to present the work at festivals and conferences.
	BAY AREA VIDEO COALITION (BAVC) The MediaMaker Fellowship program offered a small stipend, professional development, and support of peer network over the course of 10 months.	
	EMBREY FAMILY FOUNDATION Supported hiring of sound designer.	
	THE MACDOWELL COLONY Residency program supported time and space for post-production.	
	PACIFIC PIONEER FUND Supported costs associated with animation and post-production.	
	PRIVATE DONATIONS Supported hiring of composer.	
	YERBA BUENA CENTER FOR THE ARTS Supported substantial artist fee for the public exhibition of work-in-progress with community groups.	
		GRASSHOPPER FILM Managed educational distribution in the US.
		KQED CALIFORNIA Local broadcast partner; aired on <i>Truly CA: Our State, Our Stories</i> , which earned the film a regional Emmy.
		NETFLIX One-time, flat acquisition fee; funds dispersed throughout online streaming distribution period.
		SHORTS TV Supported theatrical screenings in more than 200 theaters, mostly in the United States.
		SND FILMS Managed international distribution of the film.

LAST DAY OF FREEDOM 2015

Film Synopsis

When Bill Babbitt realizes his brother Manny has committed a crime he agonizes over his decision—should he call the police? *Last Day of Freedom* is a richly animated personal narrative that tells the story of Bill's decision to stand by his brother, a veteran returning from war, as he faces criminal charges, racism, and ultimately the death penalty. This film is a portrait of a man at the nexus of the most pressing social issues of our day—veterans' care, mental health access, and criminal justice.

 [View Film Trailer](#)

 [View Official Website](#)

Statistical Overview

PRODUCTION BUDGET

\$100,000

TIMELINE

7-8 Years

1.5 Years
Research &
Development

4 Years
Production & Post

2 Years
Impact &
Distribution

SCREENINGS + IMPACT CAMPAIGNS

60+
Community and
Education-based
Screenings

30+
Film Festival
Screenings

250+
Theatrical
Screenings

BROADCAST

KQED local California PBS affiliate, **YLE TV** Finland,
Canal+ Spain, **TVO** Canada

DISTRIBUTORS

Domestic: Grasshopper Films

Theatrical: ShortsTV

International: SND Films

Digital Streaming/SVOD: Netflix

PRIMARY TEAM

Producer/Directors/Editors/Animation Design:
Dee Hibbert-Jones, Nomi Talisman

Executive Producers:
Vivian Kleiman, Pamela Harris, Corey Tong, Alex Austin

Consulting Editor: Robert Arnold

Consulting Editor & Story Advisor: Elizabeth Finlayson

SELECTED AWARDS & HIGHLIGHTS

Academy Awards
Nominee, Best Short Documentary Subject (2016)

John Simon Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship
Film (2016)

Northern California Area Emmy® Award
News and Program Specialty – Documentary-Topical (2016)

United States Congressional Black Caucus
Veterans Braintrust Award (2016)

Full Frame Documentary Film Festival
Jury Award, Best Short (2015), CDS Filmmaker Award (2015)

Hamptons International Film Festival
Jury Award, Best Short Documentary Film (2015)

International Documentary Association (IDA) Awards
Best Short Documentary Award (2015)

(in)Justice for All International Film Festival
Impact Award (2015)

San Francisco Documentary Festival
Audience Award, Best Short (2015)

Tall Grass International Film Festival
Golden Strands Award, Outstanding Documentary Short Film
(2015)

Washington DC Independent Film Festival
Best Documentary Short (2015)

Acknowledgments

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THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS was established by Congress in 1965 as an independent federal agency whose funding and support gives Americans the opportunity to participate in the arts, exercise their imaginations, and develop their creative capacities. Through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector, the agency supports arts learning, affirms and celebrates America's rich and diverse cultural heritage, and extends its work to promote equal access to the arts in every community across America.

Learn more about grant opportunities and additional resources at [arts.gov](https://www.arts.gov)