Event Planning Toolkit

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Contents

About *Barbershop Punk*

As the future of our nation's internet communications policy hangs on a balance, the once nebulous concepts of net neutrality and media consolidation have been thrust into the forum of public debate. From *The New York Times* to *The Washington Post*, recent headlines nationwide have indicated a dramatic shift of consciousness towards this increasingly hot-button issue, making the plays of heavy hitters like Google and Verizon Wireless ever more relevant.

A new documentary from Georgia Archer and Kristin Armfield, *Barbershop Punk* engages this changing tide and enters the conversation in a time when net neutrality couldn't be more of a priority. By telling the groundbreaking story of Robb Topolski, the man who innocuously set out to share his turn-of-the-century barbershop quartet recordings only to uncover the illegal blocking of files by his telecommunications provider Comcast, *Barbershop Punk* sheds light on where the future of the internet may lead.

Although the issues of open internet and net neutrality have been actively debated in policy settings and board rooms for years, few tools have been available to prompt productive discussions among people who depend on the internet every day. For this reason, the nonprofit media strategy organization Active Voice is working with organizations around the country to use this edgy film – featuring a cast ranging from the Christian Coalition to Damian Kulash from OK Go – to put a human face on the intricacies of telecommunications policy and what it means for the future of the internet.

As part of a series of screenings and discussions on campuses and communities nationwide, *Barbershop Punk* brings these very timely issues to light and inspires audience members to speak up and join the fight for open internet.

About this Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to help organizations and individuals host *Barbershop Punk* events that jumpstart campus and community conversations around open internet issues and media justice. Film can be a powerful tool to engage and move audiences, but often requires careful planning and framing. The tips included in this kit are meant for a range of groups – from campus organizations to city agencies to informal neighborhood committees – who are interested in educating communities about the importance of net neutrality and helping build broad-based support for open internet and technology reform. Depending on your needs, some sections of the toolkit may be more relevant to your event than others. Feel free to use what applies to you and your needs, and always consider how your event can fit into your organization's bigger goals.

Active Voice uses film, television and digital media to spark social change. Our team of strategic communications specialists works with filmmakers, funders, advocates and thought leaders to put a human face on the issues of our times. We frame and beta-test key messages, develop national and local partnerships, plan and execute outcome-oriented screenings and high-profile events, repurpose digital content for Web and viral distribution, produce ancillary and educational resources, and consult with industry and sector leaders. Since our inception in 2001, Active Voice has built a diverse portfolio of film-based campaigns focusing on issues including immigration, criminal justice, healthcare and sustainability.

Free Press is a national, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization working to reform the media. Through education, organizing and advocacy, Free Press promotes diverse and independent media ownership, strong public media, quality journalism and universal access to communications. http://www.freepress.net/

Also coordinated by Free Press, SavetheInternet.com is a coalition of two million everyday people who have banded together with thousands of nonprofit organizations, businesses and bloggers to protect internet freedom. www.SavetheInternet.com

Future of Music Coalition (FMC) is a national nonprofit organization that works to ensure a diverse musical culture where artists flourish and are compensated fairly for their work, and where fans can find the music they want. Guided by a firm conviction that public policy has real impact on the lives of both musicians and fans, FMC advocates for a balanced approach to music in the digital age — one that reflects the interests of all stakeholders, and not just the powerful few. FMC is proud to support projects such as *Barbershop Punk*, which helps inform musicians, fans and the public about an issue crucial to creativity, commerce and free expression. http://futureofmusic.org/

Writer's Guild of America (West) is a labor union representing television, screen, news and new media writers. They advocate on issues important to the success of their members careers including Net Neutrality, Media Consolidation and Labor Reform. http://www.wga.org/politics

1) Define Your Objectives

Figuring out your objectives is the first step in planning a great event. Having a sense of what you'd like people to take away from their *Barbershop Punk* experience will help you plan and set the tone. Are you interested in helping your community understand the meaning of net neutrality? Do you want to capture the attention of local decision makers? Do you want to heighten your organization's profile and build new partnerships? Here are some possible objectives (these are not mutually exclusive):

- Educate campus and community members about technology justice issues facing your community.
- Foster dialogue around an issue that is often misunderstood and difficult to discuss by using a tool that provides many perspectives.
- Build the movement for open internet by inspiring new allies to champion the cause and offering motivated viewers easy ways to get involved.

- Spotlight the work of your organization and generate donations, membership and even press attention.
- Prompt coalition building and policy review among local and state groups working towards media literacy and policy reform, technology justice and the digital inclusion of people of color.

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 local decision makers? Even if your organization does not have direct connections to your target audiences, you can partner with organizations that do.

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 a small dialogue, a large living room or dorm room would suffice. If you want to engage college students or high school students, an auditorium would work well. If you want to put on a more professional event that attracts VIPs and press, you may consider doing your screening in a private screening room (at a library or museum, for example) or in a theatre. Theatres and screening rooms often have rental fees, which can range between $450 and $1200. However, you might be surprised to learn that there are organizations in your area that have screening rooms available for little or no cost. Your own university auditorium, community center and library might be good places to start. 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 *Barbershop Punk* in their line-up. (See next section on recruiting partner organizations.) No matter what, be sure that your chosen venue has the right screening equipment ahead of time (DVD player with screen and audio, and/or LCD projection with speakers).

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 via their social media outlets, 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 *Barbershop Punk*, you might consider the following groups as potential partners:

- Civic organizations like media literacy councils, libraries, museums, media/film centers and technology justice organizations
- Civil rights groups, especially those committed to advancing technology justice

- Relevant campus departments like Media Studies, Information Technology, Civics and Law programs.
- Local student groups like Young Democrats, Amnesty International and American Constitution Society
- High school student groups
- Community foundations
- Policy institutes
- Local government offices like the Department of Technology or the Technology, Trade and Commerce Agency

To really broaden your reach, try contacting an organization you've never worked with before that may share an interest in *Barbershop Punk*. This will 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*. You can get more information about the film and the issues at http://barbershoppunk.com/
- *Make it relevant to them*. Highlight elements of the film and your objectives that are most relevant to their interests. For example, if you're reaching out to students, they might be interested to know that the film features the perspective of celebrities like Damian Kulash of OK Go, Janeane Garofalo and Henry Rollins. If you're reaching out to religious organizations, you might mention the work of the Christian Coalition.
- *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. If you are open to a more collaborative partnership, invite them to get more involved in event planning and design, such as suggesting panelists for the discussion, brainstorming target audiences, etc.
- *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.

Framing and Enhancing Your Event

Consider what you want your audiences to walk away with – deeper knowledge, understanding of relevant policy efforts, a closer connection to local resources, etc. – and frame your event accordingly. Remember that the film is just a springboard for deeper engagement, so it's important to provide locally relevant information and resources to help viewers delve deeper. For example, this could include any combination of the following:

- **Panel Discussion**: Panelists can help put the film in context, whether it's providing action steps to help keep the internet open 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 faculty member well-versed in open internet and technology issues (check IT and Media Studies departments), a communications professional, a supportive government official and many others. 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. (See the next section for more detailed tips on how to run a successful panel discussion and audience Q&A, along with a few suggested conversation starters.)

- **Interactive Ideas:** Engage the audience in activities that heighten their senses and connectivity to the issue. For example, because *Barbershop Punk* is a film about the future of technology, think of innovative ways to incorporate technology into the discussion. Consider prompting audience members to update their Facebook status in unison with a specific message like: "This message brought to you by the Open Internet." Or use a common Twitter hashtag (we suggest #thinkopen) for your event so audience members can Tweet via their mobile devices. You may even consider developing a YouTube channel and prompting audience members to participate in an online video submission contest, calling for creative ways to spread the open internet message. Another way to engage your student body is by inviting local musicians or artists into the conversation. Bring them on as panelists and have them put on a show after the screening and discussion!

- **Showcase 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 donors.

- **Distribute Materials and Resources:** Present audience members with fact sheets, flyers about upcoming events and other relevant materials. Ask Active Voice about our *Barbershop Punk* brochures that provide more background on the issue as well as a timeline and action steps. Also, organizations like Free Press, Save the Internet and the Future of Music Coalition have helpful resources on their websites that are available for easy download.

- **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 and funders. Whichever way you decide to go, refreshments are always a good idea!

- **Maintain the Conversation Online:** Always remember to 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! Also, social media channels like Facebook, Twitter or YouTube can help you keep your audience up to date and engaged with the work you are doing.

Action Opportunities

Offer audience members concrete ways they can get involved by supporting you and your partner organizations' work.

- **Online:** After the initial screening and discussion, move the conversation online.
    - Encourage audience members to visit your website to find out about upcoming events, volunteering, becoming a member, signing a pledge, making a donation, etc.

- At the event, ask audience members to join *Barbershop Punk*'s email list by texting "Bpunk [leave a space] [followed by your email address]" to 69302
- Embed resource links on your site to drive your audience to the important action opportunities your partners may have.
- Use email blasts to keep your audience updated with current events.
- You can also encourage them to join online coalitions like SaveTheInternet.com to help spread the message of open internet via social media and other online tools.
- And don't forget to use social media to engage your own audience with unique status updates, tweets and mentions like: "I just helped save the internet with just two clicks," "this tweet was brought to you by a free and open internet," "keep tweets free for all!" Or simply by facilitating a follow-up debate online or prompting a user generated video contest.

- **Offline:** Follow up with your audience and networks using newsletter blasts and initiative updates. Consider joining a network of organizations fighting to keep the internet open. Ex. National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture, the Center for Media Justice, the Media Literacy Project, etc.

- **Policy:** If meeting policy objectives is your sweet spot, incorporate standardizing your policy work into long-term engagement. Submit policy pieces relating to open internet initiatives. Consider featuring or facilitating an open internet discussion at your next summit.

- **Partnerships**: Collaborate with other student groups, campus organizations and community members to broaden your reach and foster community participation after the event. Consider making open internet issues and concerns more prominent in your regional programming to keep the momentum going. Pursue a long-term partnership with at least one local organization and consider using your national network of allies to assist you with your policy objectives. Consider attending Free Press' National Conference for Media Reform or participating in their internship/fellowship program.

Tips for Post-Screening Discussion

A film like *Barbershop Punk* can raise a range of questions, concerns and even emotions from the audience, and we recommend you address this by holding 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:

What's the Best Format for Me?
Consider your objectives before you consider your event format:

- If you'd like to build coalitions with new allies, feature a panel discussion with speakers from various organizations in the community or on campus, identify common themes in your work and emphasize those points in the discussion.
- If you're hoping to prompt policy review make sure to include a speaker who can speak to relevant policy issues, both locally and nationally.
- If your goal is to have open dialogue, break into small groups, ask each group to share their questions or opinions and have several experienced facilitators on hand.

- If your main objective is to <u>inspire action</u>, offer motivated viewers easy ways to get involved.

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. Ideally you'd feature someone who can provide background on the issue in laymen's terms, someone who can frame the issue in a local context, and if possible, a panelist that can address the urgency of the issue by providing concrete action steps.
- If there's enough time, try to arrange an opportunity for your panelists to see the film prior to the event.
- 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 an audience that does not know much about the complexities of net neutrality (which is very likely), 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. A moderator should be someone who has: (a) your trust, (b) proven public speaking abilities and (c) knowledge of the issues addressed in the film. Potential candidates include faculty members, community leaders or members of the press, to name a few. An experienced moderator can help a panel go smoothly, and should have experience addressing tensions between audience members.
- Even if you don't have a moderator, you can have a productive conversation by just prompting your speakers to reflect on what jumped out for them in 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 even consider prompting the audience with a question, first: "What jumped out at you in the film?" or "Which characters did you identify with?" (see below "facilitated dialogue" for more conversation starters)
- Some audience members may be compelled to give long accounts of their personal experiences or views. If their comments exceed a minute or two, respectfully thank them and ask them if they have a question for the panelists.
- If your group is large, you may consider either passing around a couple microphones for those who have questions, or simply setting up mics in the aisles and having people line up to ask questions. You might also consider having a volunteer walk around the room and hold the mic for audience members while they ask their questions (this can help prevent overly wordy questions and commentary).
- 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. (If you have only one facilitator, s/he can float among the different groups.)
- Always start the dialogue by asking the group to share their immediate reactions to the film, e.g., what jumped out at them or particularly moved them.
- You must be ready in case the film or speakers come under scrutiny. For example, there may be audience members who are highly frustrated with the current framing of open internet/net neutrality issues and place blame on specific corporations or recent policy changes. A neutral moderator can help make sure that the conversation remains productive and respectful. Encourage critical audience members to think about how the film or the available community resources might be a helpful way to address the tensions that they might be feeling.

Conversation Starters & Discussion Prompts

The following are some sample questions that you could use to prompt discussion on your panel or to inspire dialogue and reflection among your audience:

- Which of the characters in the film did you relate to most? Why?
- In your opinion, who are the "punks" in this documentary?
- What was the most memorable moment in the film? Why?
- What do we as global/American citizens have to gain or lose by an open/closed internet?
- What market conditions have changed in the past two years that would justify a dramatic change in policy?
- Can you think of alternative ways the U.S. government could address the concerns of both corporations and individuals using the internet?

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 announcing the event through your partner organizations' mailing lists, newsletters, by posting flyers in the community, securing calendar listings and via a number of social media platforms online.

Below are some additional tips for getting the word out:

- **Check out our materials and downloadable templates** on the box.net site at http://www.box.net/shared/byrogt08sr. There you will find this event toolkit, templates for flyers, email invitations and press releases.

- **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 via listservs. 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. Be sure to post status updates about your event in the days leading up to it.

- **Newsletter mentions.** Ask your partners if they have newsletters or other ways they keep in touch with their members and constituents, and provide them with language about the film that they can use to promote your event. Check out our box.net site for boilerplate language and useful templates.

- **Use Social Media** You can also create a Facebook event and invite all your friends, and encourage them also to invite their friends. Continuously update your Facebook status with short notes and link to the event page so that it will appear in your friends' newsfeed. Send out a reminder message via Facebook to all confirmed and undecided attendees at least one week prior to the event. If you have a Twitter account and a following, Tweet about the event as well - you can use free URL shortening applications such as http://bit.ly/ to link to the Facebook event page. Consider using a hashtag like #thinkopen to keep track of online conversations. Search through Twitter for like-minded organizations or individuals (especially those with a lot of followers like @bannedlibrarian, @culturejedi) and follow them and re-Tweet (RT) their posts, this will help increase your own Twitter following and the likelihood of your posts being re-Tweeted.

- **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 student forums and walkways on college campuses, community bulletins, shopping malls, grocery stores, places of worship and recreation centers.

- **Start the presses.** Ten days before your event, use our template press release to send a press release to local newspapers. (Make sure to get the green light from Active Voice first!) Try to target reporters covering community issues, and remember to customize your press release to highlight the film's relevance to local issues. Consider reaching out to local and/or regional bloggers who may be interested in your event's content.

Once you have defined your target audience, objectives and framing, begin planning the event. (*All asterisked items apply to larger community events.)

Preliminary planning – at least 6 weeks prior

- ☐ Book the venue and date for your screening. Make sure the venue has the proper equipment for the audience you have in mind.
- ☐ *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 (use template provided by AV).
- ☐ Send out press advisories to media outlets (for larger community events). (See "Getting the Word Out" on p.8 for more information as well as AV's press release template and recommended placements).
- ☐ 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 (template provided by AV). Again, send one announcement two weeks prior and another several days prior.
- ☐ Create a Facebook event and send out your first round of Facebook and Twitter updates.
- ☐ *Contact community calendars about your event.

Media outreach– 10 days prior

- ☐ *Follow up with media outlets and if necessary, resend press advisories.
- ☐ *Make calls to local television and radio programs.
- ☐ Contact local bloggers who might be interested in your event's content.

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.
- ☐ Start second round of social media updates.
- ☐ *Send press releases; contact individual reporters who expressed an interest in covering the story of the pending date.
- ☐ 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.
- ☐ If you are encouraging Tweeting, ask that people use a consistent hashtag (e.g., #thinkopen)
- ☐ 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.

☐ Think about innovative ways to use social media. For example, you could live tweet and blog at your event. Or, consider interviewing audience members before the screening to create a YouTube video to upload and share afterwards.