PRODUCING AN AMNESTY TV SHOW

A STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH

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Producing a TV shows for your local public-access cable TV is an effective way of doing Amnesty work. With such a program, you can accomplish a number of goals:

- Outreach to local community
  Bring Amnesty's presence into people's living room
- Outreach to other community organizations
  Ask other organizations to participate in our shows (e.g., Catholic Charities on refugee work)
- Campaign work
  See sidebar
- Human rights education
  Guests bring personal experiences in other countries, facts about death penalty, abuses in countries such as Ethiopia, Mexico, and Guatemala
- Casework
  Requested audience to write letters
  Mail video copies to embassies
  Raised consciousness about cases
- Involve group members
  Members tell their experiences and motivations for doing Amnesty work
  Another way to get involved (Be TV talent!)
- Involve other interested individuals in the production process
  Give non-Amnesty people a way to support our cause

It is easier than you think. A lot of people and resources in the community are available to help.

TV Show Elicited Response from Turkish Consul General

On March 3, the local cable channel broadcast Group 19's second half-hour show on the Turkey Campaign. The program featured country expert Stephen Finlan of Group 30 in San Francisco. The Turkish Consul General in Los Angeles, H. Hayret Yalav, happened to be in town at the time, speaking at Stanford University.

When Yalav learned about the Amnesty in Action episode, the Turkish Consulate called the station to insist that the show not run again. Refusing to be intimidated, the station instead offered the Consul General an opportunity to respond. On March 7, he taped a 24-minute response.

Here is a step-by-step manual for producing a TV program

PRE-PRODUCTION FOR TV PROGRAM

Planning a TV production is important. In preparing a program, the basic question to answer is: What is the message to be delivered to viewing audience? The goal of *Amnesty In Action*, Group 19's public access cable TV show, is to put a human face to the work of Amnesty International and to show that the people who are subjects of action files and the members of the local

Amnesty chapter who work on the cases are not any different that the members of the viewing audience.

1. Come up with an Idea for the show

- Ask members of your group to discuss their action files or local activities.
- Call the Regional Office for current and future campaigns and human rights issues for possible program topics. Examples of issues presented on *Amnesty in Action* are: Women's Campaign, China Campaign, Turkey Campaign, and Refugee Campaign. Among other issues presented were human rights education, disappearances and political killings, and human rights in Ethiopia and in Mexico.
- For possible guests, ask group members if they are willing to appear on the program.
- For specific issues, ask the Regional Office for a list of possible speakers and contact those provided by the Regional Office.
- Decide if you want a host with several guests or a single guest
- Decide if you want a live format or a tape format. (Check out commercial television for format ideas.)
- Check the Regional Office for Amnesty International videos on program topics. These videos provide background information and make programs more interesting and compelling. Whenever possible, use Amnesty video and public service announcements.

2. Recruiting a crew (8 persons)

Crew members DON'T have to be Amnesty members!!! One or two AI members can produce the show with the help of willing community volunteers.

Option 1:Your public-access TV provider will often recruit a studio crew for you (cost is nominal)

Option 2:You recruit a crew using your public-access TV provider's list of volunteers

Option 3: You call public-access TV provider staff and line up a studio production class for your friends and associates. If there are eight or more they may run a special class just for your group. If there's less than eight, they can sign up for the next available class and you will need to round out your crew by recruiting off the volunteer list.

3. Keeping a crew

Remember you are trying to get people to work with you voluntarily, giving you their valuable time and skills.

- Sell them on the concept.
- Invite their participation in program design.
- Be very organized and clear about the times and dates and crew roles.
- Always lead by example. Pitch in to studio set-up and breakdown.
- Be the first to arrive and last to leave.
- Voice your appreciation often.
- Schedule a group viewing of your show once in a while - with pizza!

4. Line up your guests and hosts.

- When the guest list has been finalized, compile a list of possible discussion questions and issues. Send that list to the guests.
- Talk the show over with them, so they know what you're looking for.
- Send them a letter listing time and place.
- Send them directions if necessary.

5. Reserve studio time slot(s) and Schedule your playback times

- Do this by calling your local public-access TV provider staff
- Be sure to say whether you want the show to be live or taped
- **You should schedule your show three - five weeks ahead** unless it's a live show, as often public-access TV provider print out their schedule a month at a time.

6. Decide how to format and design your show.

- You may schedule a meeting with your public-access TV provider staff to help you make these decisions.
- **Visit the public-access TV provider studio to** see what set materials they have and what you might want to add to your set. Note where the action will take place.

7. If you plan to have a studio audience, begin to recruit one asap.

- Contact groups or school classes with an interest in your topic.
- Do not rely on press releases or posted flyers to get an audience.

8. Make a list of titles you want superimposed during the show

- Bring it or fax it at least 90 minutes before the show.

9. Procure any set pieces you plan to bring in

(plants, furniture, props; banners & posters)
Sometimes a merchant will loan you things in return for a credit on the show.

10. Gather any A-V materials relevant to your show

(photos, pre-produced videos, graphs. art objects, momentos etc.)

11. Select theme music for beginning and end

- Your public-access TV provider may have a library of non-copyright music on CDs.
- It’s probably okay to use copyright music published by ASCAP if it’s only for playback over your public-access TV provider’s channel

12. Meet with your director and host

Go over all the details - how many guests; how many titles; audience or not; etc. etc.

ON THE DAY OF THE TAPING

1. **Arrive at the studio at least 90 MINUTES before taping.** Depending on how elaborate

your set will be, you may need to come earlier. Bring any desired props, decorations, banners, extra chairs, etc.

2. With advice from the studio tech on duty, **move the risers and set pieces into place.** It will take about an hour. The tech will light the set.
3. Appoint a **HOST to greet your guests and** guide them to studio or into waiting room
4. Get appropriate **release forms** signed. (see sample release which you may copy)
5. Make sure that **no guests stay who are disruptive** or under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Neither should any children be unsupervised in the halls.
6. If you **are bringing food** for crew or guests, ask where you can store them (probably not in the studio--except for special pre-arranged events).
7. After the taping, help clean the studio of anything you brought in. Help put back chairs and set pieces.

SCHEDULING YOUR PROGRAM

1. Your public-access TV provider will have rules on scheduling your program. At Palo Alto's MPAC, we submit a "Program Scheduling" form to the Director of Programming by the 15th of the current month to be scheduled for the following month.
2. Speak to the Director of Programming if you are videotaping a news related issue that requires an immediate playback. Your provider may be able to find an open slot.
3. Projects which require editing should not be submitted for scheduling until completed, unless you are an experienced editor who has made a number of programs already.

PUBLICITY

1. Know your program's playback times.
2. Write a press release that can be sent to newspapers and organizational newsletters two weeks before the program's 'air date.'
   Remember to put who, what, and where info in the beginning. Follow up with a call to the reporter. Include a black & white photo if available
3. Create a flyer to distribute to target groups or to post at targeted spots
4. Send out an announcement online and with e-mail.
5. Send out postcards with the program info.
6. If you produce an ongoing series, then produce a 60 second video promo which can be played frequently on your public-access TV.

DISTRIBUTION – MAKE THE MOST OUT OF YOUR SHOW

Check other Public Access Channels who may play your programs.

- Usually they will require a 'local sponsor', meaning somebody from their town who wants to have it played on their channel.
- In most cases you should submit U-matic or S-VHS copies.
- Usually, the length must be very close to 28:30 or 58:30.
- No commercial content

Send the shows to your favorite dictators. Tell them they are being watched!