

A Community Action Tool-Kit for Screening and Organizing

a **film** by
Nancy Kelly



how **art** can
change the
spirit
of a **place**

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About “Downside Up”

What happens when an impoverished, working-class town decides that its only hope for survival lies within the world of contemporary art? Can these disparate worlds benefit each other? And why would they try?

“Downside UP” captures the beginnings of America's largest museum of contemporary art, MASS MoCA (Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art) and the rebirth of its host-city, North Adams. Through the eyes of filmmaker Nancy Kelly and her family, many of whom worked in the factory before it closed, the film renders the subtle changes in the spirit of a region, from the intimate view of a kitchen table.

“Downside UP” is about the tentative, dangerous notion of hope in a town widely viewed as hopeless. Film can be a powerful communications tool, and bringing the story of MASS MoCA to your town can create a positive focal point for your organizing and information-sharing.

It is our hope that this guide can encourage you in bringing new resources to your community in support of community development and the arts. As you proceed, please let us know if we can be of any assistance in identifying resources, partners, or tools, and if you need any technical assistance to get your work off the ground.

• Videotape copies of “Downside UP” are available through New Day Films
22-D Hollywood Ave., #T2
Hohokus, NJ 07423,
(888)367-9154 (toll free),
tel: (201)652-6590,
fax: (201)652-1973, orders@newday.com
or on the web at www.newday.com.

• Visit our web site at www.downsideupthemovie.org. There you will find the most recent material available, including information about how others have used the film, press and print resources, materials for learning, and interactive links to other organizations in the field, and chat rooms with others doing this work.

• Call or email us to get support, or assistance with your plans. Give us feedback and help us to better support your efforts.

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121 Greenbrae Boardwalk
Greenbrae, CA 94904
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How Can A Film Develop Community?

“Downside UP” is an investigation into the factors and forces at work at the intersections of art, culture, public space, and community development. It also explores the potential to articulate a collaborative strategy to revitalization that can be embraced by other communities.

Utilizing “Downside UP” in communities in the midst of an arts-based community development strategy can provide fuel to the fire: It is a true success story which is still evolving, and shows how tenacity and collaboration can bring about real progress.

A screening of “Downside UP”, or promotion of the upcoming broadcast, can also gather community members to begin an exploration about how art and culture have or are anticipated to have on community improvement, including more active public spaces.

The collaboration of multiple fields is key. In any event, screening and discussion activities could include practitioners engaged in art, culture and economic development, foundations, artists, and arts groups. The project can help cultivate a community’s sense of artistic and cultural pride as a communal asset.

Like Soho, Glasgow (Scotland), and London’s New Tate Museum, North Adams and MASS MoCA provide an outstanding example of what a community can do when it thinks outside the box. “Downside UP” captures the way North Adams and MASS MoCA:

- Identified an element of its region’s economic strength: cultural tourism and then made a Sisyphean effort to link with that activity.
- Turned the city’s liabilities (abandoned 19th century mills) into assets (space to exhibit large works of contemporary art).
- Developed a revitalization plan that preserved its historic buildings and sense of place, both on the MASS MoCA site and in the downtown.
- Used the history and physical infrastructure of the surrounding area to create a destination for the cultural tourist.

Suggested Activities

A special screening of the film can be a fulcrum for community-based learning, planning, and brainstorming, or as the centerpiece for a community event. Some possibilities:

- Public screenings can be paired with a discussion panel to follow, involving architects, planners, artists, community development specialists, economists, or arts institutions. The point of the discussion is not to critique the film, but to quickly move from this single story to success to your OWN community. What is happening where you live or work? How can you nurture arts as an integral part of the development within your community?
- In community organizations, screenings of the film can be used for outreach, organizing, recruitment, or fundraising. Invite members of groups you are targeting: consider your current and prospective funders, arts organizations, civic leaders, members of the press, artists, planners, and community development professionals.
- Use “Downside UP” internally for staff, board, or member inspiration.
- Screen “Downside UP” at conferences. Bring together stake-holders in planning, the arts, arts institutions, and community development.

A short guide to hosting a screening follows on page 4: it can be as intimate or as public as you wish, and it not truly as daunting as it may seem. But it does require planning and logistical coordination: please call on us to assist you, provide posters and other materials, and for other technical support. Our contact information is on the last page of this guide.



Screening “Downside UP”

There are three primary parts to a successful community screening: planning, audience, and the event itself,

Planning

A well-planned event will enjoy a broad base of support from a variety of constituencies: engage representatives of your target audiences in the planning and outreach for the event itself.

Location and equipment are the primary logistical concerns. An auditorium or theater already set up for showing a video is best. Colleges and museums often good venues, with good audio and viewing capabilities and a sound system for the film and any followup presenters. They can often rent you equipment and projectionist, also. An adjacent area for tables and/or reception is important, too as is a set-up for any speakers or panelists to follow or precede the screening.

Audience

The key to garnering a high-quality, interested audience is outreach. Work with your collaborators and use this as an opportunity to build alliances. Co-sponsors might include civic organizations, community development organizations, arts institutions, artists, local community members, planners, and government leaders.

Personal invitations work best; fax, mail, email, hand out directly and follow up with phone calls. Your own networks and those of your co-sponsors are your best tools.

For broader public promotion, consider posting fliers (an insert which can be customized is included with this kit), posters, and adding your event to local calendars on radio, online, and in newspapers. If you can interest members of the press, media coverage can broaden your audience, but personal outreach is much more important.

The Event Itself

Do a trial run of the tape and sound system at least 20 minutes before audiences are expected. Have clear signage for parking, entrances, the restrooms, and the screening room, including handicapped access points. Engage the assistance of your co-sponsors to be greeters with you at the event. Start on time. In your brief welcoming remarks, note why you have organized this screening. Welcome everyone, introduce yourself and sponsoring organizations, and any speakers who will follow you. Let the audience know what you’ll be doing when the film ends.

When the film is over, the audience will want to talk. Don’t monopolize the stage, but skillfully guide the conversation along. Be sure to provide adequate time for your invited speakers to present their ideas, and try to balance audience response with panel or speaker presentations. A presentation should probably be limited to 30 minutes; a Q & A to 15-20. Then let people get up and mingle, talk to your people individually, and get to your reception, if there is one.

Plan ahead on future opportunities: you should give the audience a way to use the energy from the screening to sign up, get informational pamphlets, make contributions, come to a next meeting, etc.

Have at least one greeter staffing the lobby to connect with those early departers, to receive donations, give out information, or other items, and to answer questions.





Places to Post Fliers

- Art schools
- Art studios
- City Hall
- Public and university libraries
- Museums
- Partner bulletin boards
- Places where people wait
(bus stops, hair salons, busy restaurants, laundromats, groceries)
- As an insert into newsletters or local papers
- Movie stores
- Coffee shops
- University departments: architecture, planning, social work, urban studies, economics, art, etc.
- Student commons
- Public markets

We have other materials, too!

- Posters
- Jpegs for your web site
- Print-ready display ads
- Great photography
- Color versions of this document

Sample copy for short announcements

What happens when an impoverished, working-class town decides that its only hope for survival lies within the world of contemporary art? Can these disparate worlds benefit each other? And why would they try? Join us for a screening of "Downside UP", a new film by Nancy Kelly, on (DATE) at (TIME) at (LOCATION). The film captures the beginnings of America's largest museum of contemporary art, MASS MoCA (Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art) and the rebirth of its host-city, North Adams. Through the eyes of the filmmaker and her family, many of whom worked in the factory before it closed, the film renders the subtle changes in the spirit of a region, from the intimate view of a kitchen table. (Add "FOR MORE INFORMATION" info and any other details about the event.)

For these and other materials and information, visit our web site at www.downsideupthemovie.org, or contact us at:

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The Community Distribution Project is funded by the National Endowment for the Arts.

"Downside UP" was produced and directed by Nancy Kelly. Co-produced by WMHT, Schenectady and The Banff Centre for the Arts, Banff, Alberta, Canada.

Produced in association with ITVS, with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Additional funding was provided by a grant from the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities, a state program of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Produced in association with the Center for Independent Documentary.

