

## PROPOSAL ORGANIZER

Working title \_\_\_\_\_ Format \_\_\_\_\_  
 Director \_\_\_\_\_ Camera \_\_\_\_\_  
 Sound \_\_\_\_\_ Editor \_\_\_\_\_  
 Others (Role) \_\_\_\_\_ (Role) \_\_\_\_\_

1. **WORKING HYPOTHESIS and INTERPRETATION.** What are *your* persuasions about the world you are going to show in your film, the “statement” you want to emerge out of the film’s dialectics? Write a hypothesis statement that incorporates the following wording:
  - A. In life I believe that (your philosophy regarding the particular life-principle that your film will exemplify) \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. My film will show this in action by exploring (situation) \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. My film’s main conflict is between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
  - D. My film’s point of view, or its POV character, will be \_\_\_\_\_
  - E. I expect my film’s structure to be determined by \_\_\_\_\_
  - F. The subject and point of view suggest a style that is \_\_\_\_\_
  - G. Ultimately I want the audience to feel \_\_\_\_\_
  - H. . . . and to understand that \_\_\_\_\_
2. **TOPIC and EXPOSITION.** Write a paragraph that includes
  - A. Your film’s *subject* (person, group, environment, social issue, and so on)
  - B. *Expository information* (factual or other background information) so that the reader can see the enclosed world into which you are going to take us
3. **ACTION SEQUENCES.** Write a brief paragraph about any sequence that will show characters, an event, or an activity. (A sequence is usually delineated by being in one location, one chunk of time, or an assembly of materials to show one topic.) For each, describe
  - A. The sequence’s expected action
  - B. What information or persuasion it contributes to the film
  - C. The agendas or conflicts you expect it to evidence
  - D. Any useful metaphors it will suggest
  - E. Any special, symbolic, or emblematic imagery it will contain
  - F. What structures the events (especially through time)
  - G. What the sequence will contribute to the film as a whole
4. **MAIN CHARACTERS.** Write briefly about each main character, including
  - A. The person’s identity—name, relationship to others in film—and his or her qualities
  - B. What he or she contributes to your film’s story
  - C. The metaphoric role you see this person occupying in relation to what else is in the film

- D. What this character wants to get or do in relation to the others or to the situation
  - E. Any direct speech quotation that freshly and directly conveys what this person is about
5. CONFLICT. What is being argued or worked out in this film? Define
- A. What conflict the characters know they are playing out
  - B. What conflict *you* see them playing out (of which they may be quite unaware)
  - C. What other principles (of opinion, view, vision, and so on) you see at issue
  - D. How, where, and when will one force confront the other in your film (the *confrontation*, which is very important)
  - E. Possible developments you see emerging from this or other confrontations
6. SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE. What will this film say about the lives it portrays, and what is the social significance of this? Why should people care to watch this film?
7. YOUR MOTIVATION FOR MAKING THE FILM. What, in your background and interests, impels you to make the film? This indicates whether you have the energy, passion, and commitment to stay the course and make an outstanding film.
8. AUDIENCE, ITS KNOWLEDGE AND PREJUDICES. A documentary should anticipate the expectations—both right ones and wrong—of its audience. Your film is in a dialogue with these prejudices and must extend, subvert, or endorse them. Complete the following:
- A. My intended audience is (don't write "Everyone!") \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. I can expect the audience to know \_\_\_\_\_ but not to know \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. I assume positive audience prejudices are \_\_\_\_\_ and negative ones are \_\_\_\_\_
  - D. Countervailing facts, ideas, and feelings that my audience needs to experience are \_\_\_\_\_
9. TO-CAMERA INTERVIEWS. Because "talking heads" have been overused they are now out of favor, but they do make good safety coverage. Also, a well-recorded track can be used as voice-over narration or interior monologue. For each intended interviewee, list
- A. Name, age, gender
  - B. Job, profession, or role
  - C. Metaphoric role in your film's dramatic structure
  - D. Main elements that your interview will seek to establish
10. STYLE. Shooting or editing style that might augment or counterpoint your film's content. Comment on
- A. Documentary genre you are using, and how this affects the film's style
  - B. Point of view and how this affects shooting and editing styles

- C. Narration (if there is to be any, and by whom)
  - D. Lighting moods
  - E. Visual and other rhythms
  - F. Any intercutting or parallel storytelling
  - G. Intended juxtaposition of like or unlike materials to create comparison, ironic tension, etc.
11. **TONE.** Describe the progression of moods of the film as you see them, and the film's prevailing tone.
  12. **STRUCTURE.** Write a brief paragraph on how you might structure your film. Consider
    - A. How you will handle the progression of time in the film
    - B. How and through whom the story will be told
    - C. What elements in the film (such as a process, journey, season, etc) that will probably structure the film
    - D. How important information will emerge
    - E. What will probably be the climactic sequence or "crisis" in your story, and where in the structure this might go
    - F. What other sequences will become the falling action after the "crisis"
  13. **RESOLUTION.** Your film's ending is your last word. It exerts a strong influence on the film's final impact. Write a brief paragraph about how you imagine your film ending and what meaning you foresee it establishing for the audience. If the events could go in more than one direction, it is entirely realistic to hypothesize different endings.

## THE PROPOSAL

The final proposal will probably be presented to a fund, foundation, or television channel—that's if they fund at the conceptual stage, which is rare today unless you have a stellar track record. You may be canvassing individual investors. Note that a good title for your film is an extremely important part of signaling your wares and attracting support.

Use the information you collected in the Proposal Organizer under the different headings, putting selected information in the order that will work best for the foundation, fund, or channel to which you are applying. Write compactly, informatively, and poetically so that the reader can "see" all the essentials of the film in the writing. This means summoning up the essence with maximum brevity. Expect to go through 10 to 20 drafts before you have something worthy of you.

Typically a proposal will include the following:

- Cover sheet (1 page)
- Program description (3 pages)
  - Synopsis of the project, maybe in 25 words or less
  - Treatment explaining background information, structure, theme, style, format (16mm film, DVCAM, Digital BetaCam, HDTV, etc.), voice, and point of view