

# Documentary Proposal

Documentary Filmmaking 101 (MOOC)  
Week 2



# Purpose of Proposal

- Present in conjunction with a pitch, to funders and anyone you wish to interest in the project



- Is a way to plan your documentary in great detail and in writing



# Elements of Proposal

- Synopsis
- Subject Bios
- Crew Bios
- Background Research
- Director's/Visual Treatment
- Budget
- Financial Plan
- Marketing Plan
- Two-Column Script



# Synopsis

- A written summary/outline of the film's content



A person in a light blue hoodie is seen from behind, holding a basketball. They are on an outdoor basketball court with a hoop and backboard visible in the background. The scene is slightly blurred, suggesting motion or a shallow depth of field.

# Example

## Synopsis: Hardwood

**Hardwood is a personal journey by director Hubert Davis, the son of former Harlem Globetrotter Mel Davis, who explores how his father's decisions affected his life and those of his extended family. Elegantly structured into three chapters entitled "love," "recollection" and "redemption," Davis uses personal interviews, archival footage and home movies to delve into his father's past in the hope of finding a new direction for his own. At its core, Hardwood is about the power of archival footage and home movies to delve into his father's past in the hope of finding a new direction for his own. At its core, Hardwood is about the power of redemption and the healing of the bonds between fathers and sons.**

**Source: <http://www.nfb.ca/playlists/nfb-oscar-nominations/viewing/hardwood>**



# Subject Bios

- It is essential to provide a list of your intended subjects and a biography for each.
- This will require you to pre-interview your subjects, ideally over the phone. \* \*



# Crew Bios

- Provide bios for your key crew members, including yourself (director/writer), camera person/cinematographer/camera operator, sound recordist, editor, producer, composer.
- If you plan to do all positions yourself, you can preface this and then include your bio.



# Example Filmmaker Bio

**Nettie Wild** is a Canadian documentary film filmmaker. Wild has **directed and produced four full length documentary films**: Wild was awarded the audience **award** for best documentary film at the 1998 AFI Fest for *A Place Called Chiapas*. She was given Genie Awards for both *A Place Called Chiapas* and *Fix*, and won two awards at the Berlin International Film Festival for *A Rustling of Leaves*.

Source: <http://www.whoislog.info/profile/nettie-wild.html>



# Background Research

- **All documentaries require research, even if they are highly personal.**
- **The nature of the research will depend on the nature of the content of the film.**



# Research Example 1



- **If your documentary is about a certain period of your own family history, your research will entail conducting many interviews with different family members and perhaps also researching the time and place, through newspapers, letters, pictures or other artifacts.**



# Research Example 2

- If you are planning to make a documentary about "The History of the Berlin Wall," you will be required to conduct a great deal of research, likely in the form of newspapers, journals, books, news footage, other films that have been made on the subject, archives and much more.



# Director's/ Visual Treatment

- To provide the vision of the director, in categories including: “the look of the film, documentary genre, the structure, bios/interview style, the theme and pace/editing”
- <http://elruisenorylanocheng.wordpress.com/visual-treatment/>



# Budget

- **A film budget is the total cost of the production.**
- **Budgets are organized in a spreadsheet in excel or using other software, such as Movie Magic Budgeting.**
- **Documentary budgets are different from a fiction film budget, as they do not require payment of talent. Other costs that are usually low or exempt are art department, wardrobe, locations and more.**
- **Budget level depends on the nature of your documentary, but most often the subjects wear their own clothes and you would film them in their space, which is usually free of charge.**
- **Documentaries can have high post-production and archival footage costs.**



**Program:** SAMPLE BUDGET  
**Format:** DV 24P

Producer/Director: Great filmmaker  
 Locations: Los Angeles, New York

Budget date: 8/1/2005

Research: 8 weeks  
 Prep: 6 weeks  
 Shoot: 35 days (over 12 wks)  
 Wrap: 2 weeks  
 Post: 24 weeks  
 TOTAL: 52 weeks

	<b>ABOVE THE LINE</b>	<b>TOTAL BUDGET</b>
1000	Pre-Production and Development	1,000
2000	Producing Staff	51,250
3000	Rights, Music & Talent	21,340
	<b>TOTAL ABOVE THE LINE (A)</b>	<b>73,590</b>

	<b>BELOW THE LINE</b>	<b>TOTAL BUDGET</b>
4000	Crew & Personnel	126,116
5000	Production Expenses	22,715
6000	Travel and related expenses	4,450
7000	Post-production	38,883
8000	Insurance	17,400
9000	Office & Administration costs	31,745
10000	Other Required Items	3,650

	<b>SUB TOTAL</b>	<b>244,959</b>
	<b>TOTAL BELOW THE LINE (B)</b>	<b>244,959</b>
	<b>TOTAL (A+B+FL)</b>	<b>318,549</b>
	FINANCING	0.0%
	FISCAL SPONSOR FEE	5.0%
	<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>367,924</b>

- **A comprehensive resource with a sample budget can be found here:**
- **<http://www.documentary.org/magazine/dont-fudge-your-budget-toeing-line-items>**



# Financial Plan

- A financial plan is a list of where the production is obtaining its funding.
- For example, if you are paying for all costs yourself, your financial plan would state "Director Contribution - 100% (the total dollar amount, which is the EXACT amount of the budget)."
- If you have money coming in from other sources, you would break down your financial plan to represent the different sources.

- Director Contribution - 100%

OR

- Director Contribution - 50%
- Investor - 30%
- In-Kind Services 20%
- Total 100%



# Marketing Plan

- For now, the only thing you should keep in mind at this stage is, **who is your target audience?**
- Eg. My primary target market are audiences who watch short documentaries, and a more niche market is environmental festival audiences and other activist audiences.
- More on marketing in Week 11.



# Two-Column Script

FAMILY LAND, MASS & RUINED  
HOMES—duration: 5:00

DC EXPLAINS HISTORY OF FAMILY LAND TO  
LEYTE

DC EXPLAINS FAMILY LAND TO LEYTE  
(WHITNEY)  
LEYTE DRAWS TREES

FULL MAP OF FIRST FAMILY LAND  
SECOND FULL MAP OF FAMILY LAND  
FCM: NON-DROP FRAME

CU BOUNDARY OF TIA'S AND DC'S LAND  
CU COOKING HUT AND PATH  
CU COOKING HUT NUMBER TWO  
CU PATH  
CU HUT WITH BLUE DOOR

EXPLORATION OF FAMILY LAND

PHOTO: DONA DEMETRIA

WALK AROUND FOUR SIDES OF OLD  
FAMILY LAND

DC GATHERS HERBS

PTVO: Don Chabo dictates the  
history of the family land.

**He speaks little Spanish, and his  
granddaughter speaks little Mayan.**

**80 years ago his granddaughter's  
great-great grandmother lived in a  
forest.**

**60 years ago she sold some of it.**

**50 years ago her daughter sold  
more.**

**40 years ago her daughter--DC's  
mother--sold more.**

**30 years ago DC sold the rest,  
sliver by sliver, because what he  
earned as a shaman was too meager  
to live on.**

**20 years ago, DC's second wife,  
Doña Demetria, left him for a  
better life selling fruit on the  
streets of Manila.  
It was then that DC began to eat  
scraps.**

**To make his medicines, DC enters  
the town and his students to  
gather leaves from trees he planted  
years ago on land that once was  
his.**

- Documentary scripts are written in a two column format (audio/video).
- Please download format template under resources for this week.



# Homework

- Prepare your documentary proposal containing:
- Synopsis
- Subject Bios
- Crew Bios
- Background Research
- Director's/Visual Treatment
- Budget
- Financial Plan
- Target Market