



Report to funders, January 2021-April 2022

Summary

In 2021 Community Supported Film continued to deal with the limitations caused by COVID, developed new programming, and in August turned all our attention to helping Afghans.

Our COVID responsive public engagement programming continued, and we used the time made available by the canceling of in-person activities, to revise our communications tools.

It was our plan in 2021 to implement programming that would raise the voices of Afghans as the international community disengaged from Afghanistan. The framing of the program had to be radically changed as the year progressed and the situation in Afghanistan deteriorated. It was also our plan to produce an online asynchronous training program. This work was cut short by the crisis in Afghanistan.

The crisis in Afghanistan forced us to put everything aside, including our mission, to focus on efforts to evacuate or provide internal assistance to our colleagues in Afghanistan. This was a night and day effort in August and September and will continue to be a major responsibility for the foreseeable future.

Financial support during COVID allowed us to take on many activities despite the barriers caused by the pandemic. We hope that the information provided in this report encourages continued support for ongoing and new initiatives.

Details

A. Continuation of public engagement work and aligning the vision and mission of CSFilm through communication tools

1. Public engagement projects

New Immigrant and Refugee Visions

In December of 2020, CSFilm ended its proactive outreach for participation in the *New Immigrant and Refugee Visions (NIRV)* public engagement campaign. Since 2018 the campaign partnered with local, regional, and national organizations to promote and organize events that engaged the public in dialogue about US immigration.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we launched new online engagement strategies for individual, community and institutional use of the films and educational resources. Our mission was to engage people both welcoming and resistant to new immigrants and refugees and from a diversity of social, economic, and political perspectives. During the campaign, CSFilm organized 58 *Screen&Discuss* events in 15 states plus three national events, including:

- [El Paso Film Festival Interviews NIRV Filmmakers](#), Texas, 10/23/20
- [This film “increased my empathy for the political difficulties of immigrants”](#) Indiana, 09/15/20
- [Peace Corps Refugee Film Fest: “I had to learn how to be a Black man in the US”](#), National, 06/20/20

Five events were recorded and can be viewed online:

- [NIRV films at Viterbo University: “a much needed wake-up call”](#), Wisconsin, 11/17/20

- [NIRV Films Spark Rich Conversation in Michigan](#), 11/11/20
- [SURJ brunch brings organizers together around films](#), Massachusetts, 10-04 20
- [Screen&Discuss: “you can see yourself in someone else’s story”](#), Alabama, 07-14-20
- [Storytelling Workshop for Immigrant Educators](#), Massachusetts, 07-08-20

In 2021, while CSFilm was no longer committing time to outreach, four more *NIRV* events were held with participation of CSFilm staff and *NIRV* filmmakers and subjects. Some of the comments and feedback we received included:

I really enjoyed this, and it was very emotional. I was crying as it went on when they told how they have been treated. I know, unfortunately, this goes on, but hard to hear them talk about it. More people should hear it, because it is just getting worse, and needs to stop.

I feel more hopeful. Honestly after the last few weeks I was feeling discouraged and the energy from this event helped.

I respect the overall objective – to develop media activists – and the rigorous process on all fronts that resulted in these compelling stories.

I will work harder to foster acceptance of immigrants. Especially inspired by the poignant emotional presentation on behalf of the Asian population.

Afghan Perspectives in Film

In response to CSFilm’s work to help evacuate and resettle Afghans effected by the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban in August of 2021, further detailed below, three events were organized to raise funds and awareness:

- [Doc Yard & the Brattle Theatre](#)
- [JP Movie Night](#)
- [Community Church of Boston](#)

These events highlighted that [The Fruit of Our Labor films](#), despite being 10 years old, provide useful insights about Afghan culture and daily life for Americans who are trying to understand the situation in Afghanistan or who are helping resettle Afghan refugees in the US.

2. Organizational development

The success of the *NIRV* public engagement campaign was facilitated by the creation of [standalone event organizing materials and issue-based knowledge resources](#). These materials were used by many organizations and educational institutions across the country.

In conjunction with the redesign of CSFilm’s website at the beginning of 2021, CSFilm took the lessons learned from the development and usage of the *NIRV* materials and replicated them for the Haitian and Afghan films and resources:

- [Owning Our Future – Haitian Perspectives in Film](#)

- [The Fruit of Our Labor – Afghan Perspectives in Film](#)
- [Crosscutting Topics](#)

Event hosts can now more easily organize *Screen&Discuss* events that integrate films and issues from all three projects. We have been complimented on the comprehensive nature of these event organizing guides and the framing of topics for discussions:

Your event materials are so comprehensive. Thank you. They really made it so much easier to put our event together and to inform our audience. Lynda Wilson, Alabama Interfaith Refugee Partnership

In March 2021, CSFilm launched our new website, designed and implemented by Zayde Buti, the former coordinator of the *NIRV* project. Our previous website was not fully functional on phones and other devices and needed a conceptual remapping to focus the viewer’s engagement. To this end we streamlined the navigation tools around our two primary activities - training and public engagement. (Our public engagement work is now called “Screen&Discuss” across the website and our materials.)

In coordination with the website redesign, we reviewed all the communications documents used by CSFilm including our vision, mission, and strategy statements. This process forced a conversation about lessons learned from the organization’s first three projects, evaluation of the work of like-minded organizations, and a realignment of directions. The two primary outcomes of this review were:

- i. Focus new training and filmmaking projects on collaborations. Instead of CSFilm initiating the projects, CSFilm should respond to individuals and organizations seeking to improve their community’s documentary filmmaking and public engagement capacity. CSFilm needs to reengineer its approach to project development and focus on networking with potential collaborative partners in communities, regions, and countries of interest. The website and our communications materials have [new messaging regarding collaboration](#).
- ii. Make CSFilm’s model of documentary filmmaking training available online. Communities or organizations will be able to methodically work through the learning modules, periodically receiving input and feedback from CSFilm, toward the completion of short social-issue documentary films. For information about the development of this initiative, see below [“Reinvention of Afghanistan–LookListenLocal and development of Asynchronous Online Training.”](#)

B. Launching new projects

1. Development and implementation of *Afghanistan-LookListenLocal* and collaboration on live films by refugees

Afghanistan-LookListenLocal

In April 2021 CSFilm began exploring how to develop a new project with Afghans that would raise their voices and visions as the international community disengaged. The narrative about Afghanistan’s struggles, current condition and future have predominantly been defined by foreign reporters talking with those who were leaving the country. CSFilm wanted to offer an avenue for Afghans to provide their own perspectives and experiences through documentary film.

CSFilm hired Basir Bitra to coordinate the project in Afghanistan. We reached out to Afghan artists and filmmakers to get their input on the project. The consensus was that something immediate and responsive was needed. The uncertain future and fragile economic and social conditions did not provide mental or physical space for extended online or in-person training and production. Very short form impressionistic communications, that most anyone with a phone could produce - from most anywhere in the country, seemed like the best way to communicate the Afghan experience.

To this end, in June 2021 we launched [*Afghanistan-LookListenLocal*](#). The project sought to include the following three elements:

- A Single Shot Video Contest: Afghans across the country were solicited to use their phones to shoot a single unedited shot that captured the essence of their lived reality.
- A few short documentary videos that would be mentored through production. In addition to the single shot videos these short documentaries would become new tools to stimulate discussion online and through *Screen&Discuss* events.
- Blog posts written about Afghans that participated in CSFilm's first training and filmmaking project, [*The Fruit of Our Labor-Afghan Perspectives in Film*](#). After 10 years many were refugees again, others had developed careers in filmmaking in Afghanistan, some were living or working in regions once again controlled by the Taliban. All were fearful that Afghanistan would return to civil war.

Basir reached out nationally to solicit submissions of single shot videos and concepts for short documentaries. Facebook was the primary tool for dissemination of information about the project. In July and August [*our outreach*](#) reached close to 400,000 people, mostly Afghans. During the first days of August, [*Street Kids*](#), the first single-shot-video was released via CSFilm's website and social media. The one-minute video received close to 40,000 views on Facebook and 6,600 on Twitter.

[*Jamal Aram*](#), former CSFilm coordinator now an author living in Canada, was hired to write the stories of Afghans that participated in CSFilm's 2010-12 programs. In July and August the first two stories were released, about [*Majid \(My Cousin is fighting for the Taliban. I am not\)*](#) and [*Aqeela \(Soon you are married to a member of the Taliban\)*](#).

AF-LLL came to a sudden stop in August, with the collapse of Afghanistan to the Taliban, and would not be returned to until eight months later.

Live film by and about refugees – *Those Left Waiting*

In February 2021, CSFilm was contacted by Australian filmmaker Michael Beets about collaborating on the development of [*Those Left Waiting*](#). Michael specializes in the production of live films. With producer Christian Pazzaglia, Michael planned to create a live film of simultaneous stories from refugee camps around the world. CSFilm assisted with the identification of refugees and asylum seekers in the Americas.

For three screenings at the prestigious Copenhagen International Documentary Festival, in April and May 2021, refugees filmed their lived realities from camps in Greece, Kenya, Uganda, Jordan and as asylum seekers in Indonesia and Mexico. Asylum Access in Mexico helped CSFilm identify a Nicaraguan asylum seeker who participated from Mexico. Each filmmaker filmed with their phone and sent their footage in real time to Michael Beets and his live editing system.

2. Reinvention of *Afghanistan–LookListenLocal* and development of Asynchronous Online Training

With the Taliban’s restrictions on filmmaking and the economic crisis overwhelming Afghanistan, we did not believe it was possible to restart the *AF-LLL* project. But in March 22, an Afghan living in Herat contacted us and asked about the possibility to continue the program and to add an online documentary filmmaking training. Through the conversations we developed a one-year program for which CSFilm is working to raise \$28,000.

Seventeen artists, filmmakers and journalists have signed on to the project which will produce short documentary stories that stimulate discussion and are easily sharable online and at events. In the process Afghan participants will be mentored and Afghan documentary filmmaking capacity will be strengthened.

The training and mentoring process will be implemented online. To this end CSFilm is continuing its project to develop comprehensive online asynchronous training materials. Each module will include a video, transcription, topic resources and exercises. Funding is needed to produce these training materials which will be used beyond Afghanistan.

The Afghan program is divided into three phases of learning, plus distribution:

- i. Single Shot Cinema – two months
Participants will capture the challenges facing Afghans through single shots without editing.
- ii. Scenes of Afghanistan – three months
From shooting shots, the participants will consider how a series of shots and sounds can tell a scene-based story with a beginning, middle and end. Scenes will be sought that capture the lived-realities of Afghans. Scene submissions will be used to critique and encourage the maker’s progress as the eyes and ears of their fellow Afghans.
- iii. Short Stories – four months
The participants will now work to construct complete short stories driven by visual and sound experience and expanded on with interviews. Before filming, the stories will be researched, written, and pitched to fellow Afghan filmmakers. Selected stories will be shot and edited with ongoing mentoring.

Distribution

The distribution of the shots, scenes and stories will first be reviewed in terms of whether public usage will cause risk to filmmakers and subjects. If the risk is low and all participants agree, then a committee of Afghans and Americans will review the material to determine its capacity to inform and engage an

audience outside of Afghanistan about the Afghan experience. Entries will not be distributed in Afghanistan for security reasons. The US public engagement campaign will include online and in-person discussions. When possible, the Afghan filmmakers will be included in these events.

C. Emergency response

1. Evacuation and resettling of Afghan filmmakers and their families since the US pull out from Afghanistan in August 2021

In the first week of August 2021 CSFilm shifted its full attention to helping Afghans with internal assistance, evacuation and resettling. This included:

1. Submitting to the US State Department “Priority 2” referrals for the evacuation and resettling in the US of 24 Afghans, and their families, who had worked with CSFilm.
2. Assisting with the [logistics of evacuations](#).
3. Participating in [advocacy efforts](#) to hold the US government and international community accountable to the promises made.
4. Launching the [Fund for Afghan Evacuation & Resettlement](#). The fund was established to help families, both in and out of Afghanistan, survive without work and income. The fund raised \$37,000 to help CSFilm support 24 families, 121 individuals, with logistical, legal, and financial needs.
5. Participating in a [coalition of 180 organizations](#) working to help at-risk-Afghans. CSFilm serves on the Advocacy and Third Country Alternatives working groups.
6. Solicited nine pro bono lawyers to file [Humanitarian Parole](#) applications for nine families and assisted with coordinating documentation for all family members, securing US sponsors for each family and the payment of application fees.
7. Researching options for asylum in third countries such as Brazil and Mexico.

Of the 24 families we initially set out to assist:

- 9 families are still in Afghanistan, some in hiding.
- 2 are in Iran, one of which had a baby a month ago and both have been treated brutally by the Iranian government and people. They currently have no path out of the country.
- 4 were in Pakistan, two are still there. One family, who also had a baby recently, could not afford to stay in Pakistan and returned to Afghanistan. Another was expelled by Pakistan.
- 8 families got on the planes that flew out of the chaos of the Kabul airport in August. Those families are in Europe or Canada waiting for asylum in their host country or the US.
- Since August, only one family has escaped overland with help from Germans.

For a more detailed narrative of our assistance to Afghans since August 2021 please see this [update](#).

Conclusion

In 2021 CSFilm has been in a responsive mode regarding the impact of COVID and the crisis in Afghanistan. We have come out of the challenges stronger and with new opportunities to expand our programs with more flexibility. Flexibility was at the core of the feedback we received during our mission and strategy review at the beginning of the year. We look forward to raising the funds to implement the organization’s revised goals and new initiatives.