

BIANNUAL REPORT

2026

WHO LET THE DOCS OUT



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Founders' Reflections



We are so proud of this first chapter for Who Let The Docs Out. Running a young organization has its challenges, and of course, we've learned a lot since the beginning of the year.

But the more time passes, the more certain we are that this organization has the potential to have an enormous impact, not just for filmmakers, but for society as a whole, as these films become sharper and better equipped to connect with people, shape perspectives and help make the world a kinder, gentler place.

And what a journey it's been to get here. From struggling to convince people of the need for an ecosystem of support for documentary filmmakers, making sandwiches for 40 people and using a karaoke microphone and speaker for our first mini-summit, to seeing our name appear alongside Netflix and Universal, it's certainly been a rollercoaster so far!

Project by project, we've made progress in ways we hadn't anticipated. Partnering with Hollywood Climate Summit in June, attending Berlinale, co-hosting with Climate Film Festival in New York in September, and collaborating and connecting with organizations like Doc Society and BFI have given Docs Out a visibility in the film industry that has brought in talent beyond anything we could have imagined.

We've not only connected with creatives whose names we so often see in the credits of films we love, but brought them onto the Docs Out team to build our grants programs and support our filmmakers in ways we could only have hoped for.

We've built an infrastructure of support and resources that removes unnecessary complexities for filmmakers, helping them build better, more powerful films from the get-go. We've given them the space to explore the power of their stories without obligation, and supported talent in telling stories they might never have explored otherwise.

We're incredibly grateful for the amazing filmmakers in our network, the inspiring films being created, and the supremely supportive partners, funders and advisors we've been lucky enough to work with along the way. Without them, none of this would exist.

There are so many stories out there that deserve to be told. But more than that, it's never been more important than it is today that those stories are actually received and truly heard. And we couldn't think of a better way to spend our lives than building the bridge that gets those stories where they need to be.

Truthfully, this organization has become more than a big part of our lives as filmmakers and social entrepreneurs. It's become a big part of our marriage, too! We genuinely believe that having each other in this, sharing the same vision and being able to build it together every day, has been a huge part of what has made Docs Out what it is today. We've never wanted children because we're so focused on our work, but it seems Docs Out has become our child, and we're so excited to help it grow.

– Joanna & Max Hellier



SUPPORTERS AND PARTNERSHIPS

ADP

CLIMATE FILM FESTIVAL

HOLLYWOOD CLIMATE SUMMIT

K4G KICKSTARTING FOR GOOD

Stanford MEDICINE School of Medicine

WARREN UNDERGROUND

docsociety

CLIMATE SPRING

Coefficient Giving

craigslist CHARITABLE FUND

VIOLET STUDIOS

PEPR public benefit corporation

WE ANIMALS

That Documentary Girl

DOCUMENTARY+



THE TEAM

THE TEAM

Leadership



Joanna Hellier

Executive Director

Joanna Hellier is co-founder and Executive Director of Who Let The Docs Out.

She is an award-winning director & producer, with expertise in crafting compelling narratives with depth and purpose, turning complex issues into powerful, thought-provoking films. Her work has been featured on HBO Max and Asian Food Network.

At Who Let The Docs Out, Joanna leads strategy and partnerships, she designs the R&D and mentorship programs, oversees fundraising and grants, curates the advisory network and community growth.



Max Hellier

Managing Director

Max Hellier is co-founder, Managing Director and Impact Strategist at Who Let The Docs Out.

He is an award-winning director and DOP with 15+ years of experience creating bold and cinematic stories. His work has been featured on HBO Max, SBS, National Geographic, Discovery, BBC & ITV.

At Who Let The Docs Out, Max leads the R&D labs and grants programs, heads funding proposal review and technical due diligence, builds and evolves the strategic impact evaluation framework, and oversees resources, and mentorship matching.

THE TEAM

Core Team



Florrie Priest

Grants Manager

Award-winning documentary producer. She produced Teenage Wasteland (now streaming on Netflix) and co-produced the Oscar-nominated All That Breathes. Florrie is dedicated to elevating documentary cinema and advocating for filmmakers taking bold artistic risks.



Zoe Sale

Program Manager

Film professional, academic, and Lead for the Student and Emerging Filmmaker Program at Who Let The Docs Out. A Senior Lecturer at Ravensbourne University London, her producing credits include the Emmy-nominated No Fire Zone and Channel 4's BAFTA-nominated Sri Lanka's Killing Fields. Zoe is dedicated to mentoring early-career storytellers and advancing impact-driven documentary cinema.



Kylie Stott

Development Exec

Emmy-nominated documentary director, producer, and former SVP at AMPLE Nature. Her credits include Netflix's Kangaroo Valley, David Attenborough's Great Barrier Reef, and Stephen Hawking's Brave New World. As Development Executive at Who Let The Docs Out, she brings extensive experience in developing and shaping premium non-fiction stories for global audiences.



Jenny Lin

Comms

Photographer, social media strategist, and Durham University graduate. Serving as the Communications Lead for Who Let The Docs Out, she brings a dynamic approach to visual storytelling and audience engagement. Jenny is dedicated to amplifying impact-driven film projects and connecting storytellers with global audiences.

THE TEAM

Advisors



Jim Amos

Former President, Sony Pictures / Co-Founder, Scout 22



Ellen Windemuth

Founder & CEO, WaterBear Network & EP



Rebecca Loviconi

Director & Producer (Slay, Let Us Be Heroes)



Dr. Melanie Joy

Author. Director



Rebecca Aguilar

Impact Director, Oceanic Preservation Society (OPS)



Sebastian Joy

Serial Social Entrepreneur, CEO K4G



Joanna Zelman

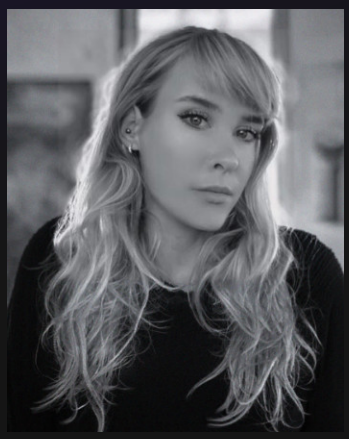
Former Executive Producer, The Dodo & Huffpost Editor

THE TEAM

Review Committee



Oli Harbottle
Chief Content Officer, Dogwoof



Val Dowd
Former Film Sales Manager, Submarine Entertainment



Luke Moody
Head of BFI Doc Society



Emre Izat
Former Netflix Creative Executive / Founder, Bluegrey Films



Ash Hoyle
Features Programmer at Sundance



Susan Vitka
Film Producer & Strategist



Rachel Coldicutt OBE
Founder, Careful Industries



Rachel Pronger
Curator, Writer & Program Advisor



FUNDING

Total funding raised to date:

$810,000

Since launching, Who Let The Docs Out has secured $810,000 USD.

This includes $254,000 USD already awarded across 27 filmmaker grants, alongside $400,000 USD allocated to our upcoming Career Transition Program to incentivize talented emerging filmmakers and film school graduates into impact storytelling.

The remaining funds support general operations, our global alliance infrastructure, mentorship programs, and filmmaker portal resources.



GRANTS PROGRAM

GRANTS PROGRAM

Grants Program:

$254,000

Total amount of grants disbursed in USD

4

Grant rounds completed

Pilot Grant
Research

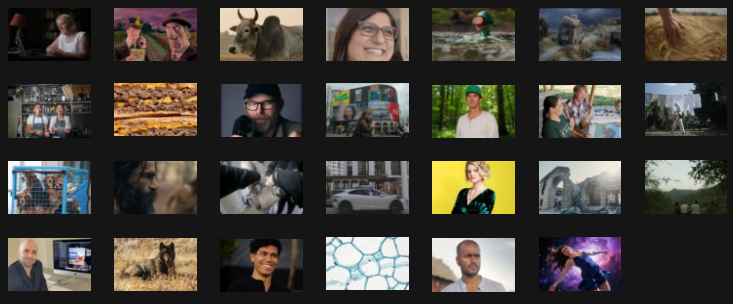
Coexistence Fund
Research & Development

Automation & Humanity
Research

Chew On This
Research, Development, Production, Post-Production

27

Grants awarded



GRANTS PROGRAM

Grants Awarded

RESEARCH



What's Eating Britain



Bombing Beavers



Ahimsa



Radical Muslims



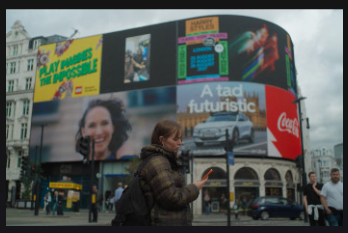
I'm Not Your Shifu



UltraProcessed



Feed The Beast



Consumption



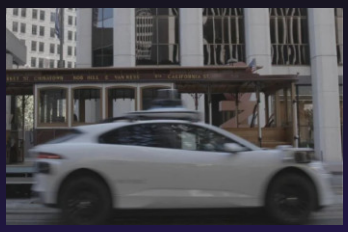
Born On Death Row



The Green Edifice



Trauma



The Last Humans



Strongman



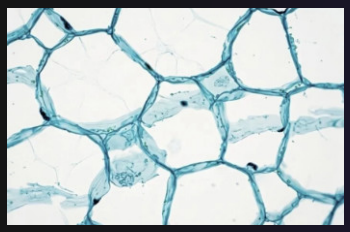
Coexistence



Longevity on a Budget



The AI Handover



Cultured Wars



The Translation Problem

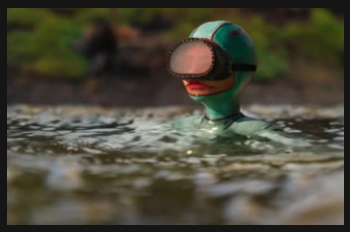


Show Hole

GRANTS PROGRAM

Grants Awarded

DEVELOPMENT



Wild Kind



Bombing Beavers



Cleansed



The Architecture of Empathy



What's Eating Britain

PRODUCTION



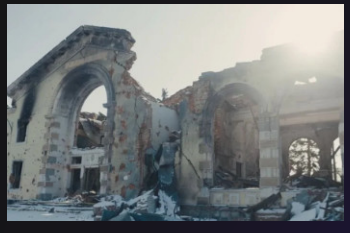
What's Eating Britain

POST-PRODUCTION



The Light Between Mountains

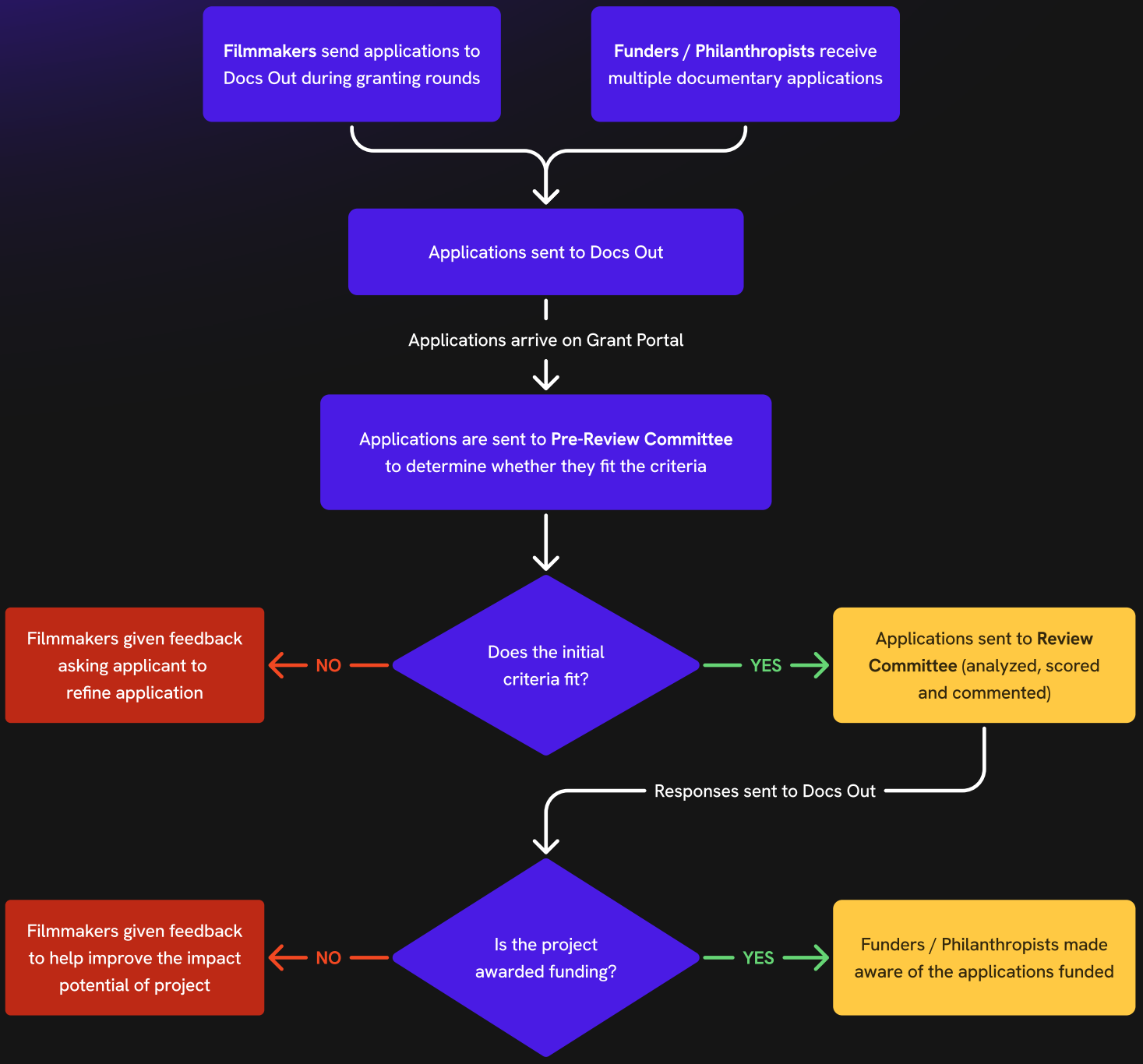
DISTRIBUTION



Rescue

GRANTS PROGRAM

Application Review Software





COMMUNITY

COMMUNITY



112

Filmmakers



12

Countries

COMMUNITY

Anecdotal Wins

The following feedback from our bi-annual member survey (n=27%) illustrates how our community provides filmmakers with vital funding, peer-to-peer mentorship, and a dedicated home for impact storytellers.

48%
have directly collaborated with another member on a project

59%
have learned a new skill through the community

85%
have attended a Docs Out event, online or in person

22%
of members have **taken part as mentor or mentee**

11%
received direct funding from, or **referred by**, another member



COMMUNITY

Anecdotal Wins

(via biannual survey)

"Support in terms of setting up a community and also with real, tangible funding"

– **Alex Lockwood**
BAFTA Winner

"Felt like the first space in the animal movement that is curated for filmmakers."

– **Adam Peditto**

"A direct source of support! Helping us filmmakers feel a little less lonely."

– **Damian Sciberras**

"Funding! And community."

– **Kylie Stott**
Emmy-nominated

"Finally a space for filmmakers with a shared ethos and goal, it feels like a very important community."

– **Jessie Ayles**
Webby Award Winner

"I'm an activist, not an experienced filmmaker... You gave me the how. You are the wind beneath my wings."

– **Zehra Abbas**

COMMUNITY

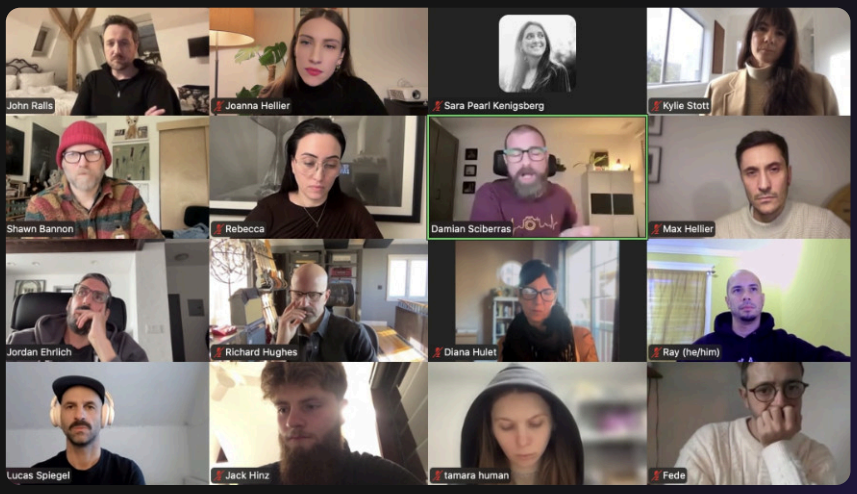
Sessions, Meetings & Workshops

Since we started in October 2025, we've held monthly community calls to tackle industry bottlenecks, show screeners and sample scenes, and collaborate and troubleshoot through community problem solving.

The alliance meetings, our expert sessions and workshops bring industry insight to our members; covering pitch deck design, streamer acquisition, storytelling strategies, alternative distribution angles, and character interview techniques, alongside Q&As with established filmmakers sharing their success stories.

16
Alliance Meetings

12
Speaker Sessions & Workshops









RESOURCES

RESOURCES

Filmmaker Portal

The Who Let The Docs Out Filmmaker Portal is a comprehensive digital workspace designed to **eliminate the isolation, funding bottlenecks, and distribution barriers** that impact-filmmakers face in the animal protection movement.

Built to support filmmakers across every phase of production, the platform provides direct community networking, structured mentorship matching, an interactive screening room, daily updated database of global documentary grants and more.

Ultimately, the portal exists as a centralized, data engine that equips independent filmmakers with the tools, funding, community, and strategy required to transform concepts into mainstream projects.

FILMMAKER DIRECTORY SESSIONS GRANTS

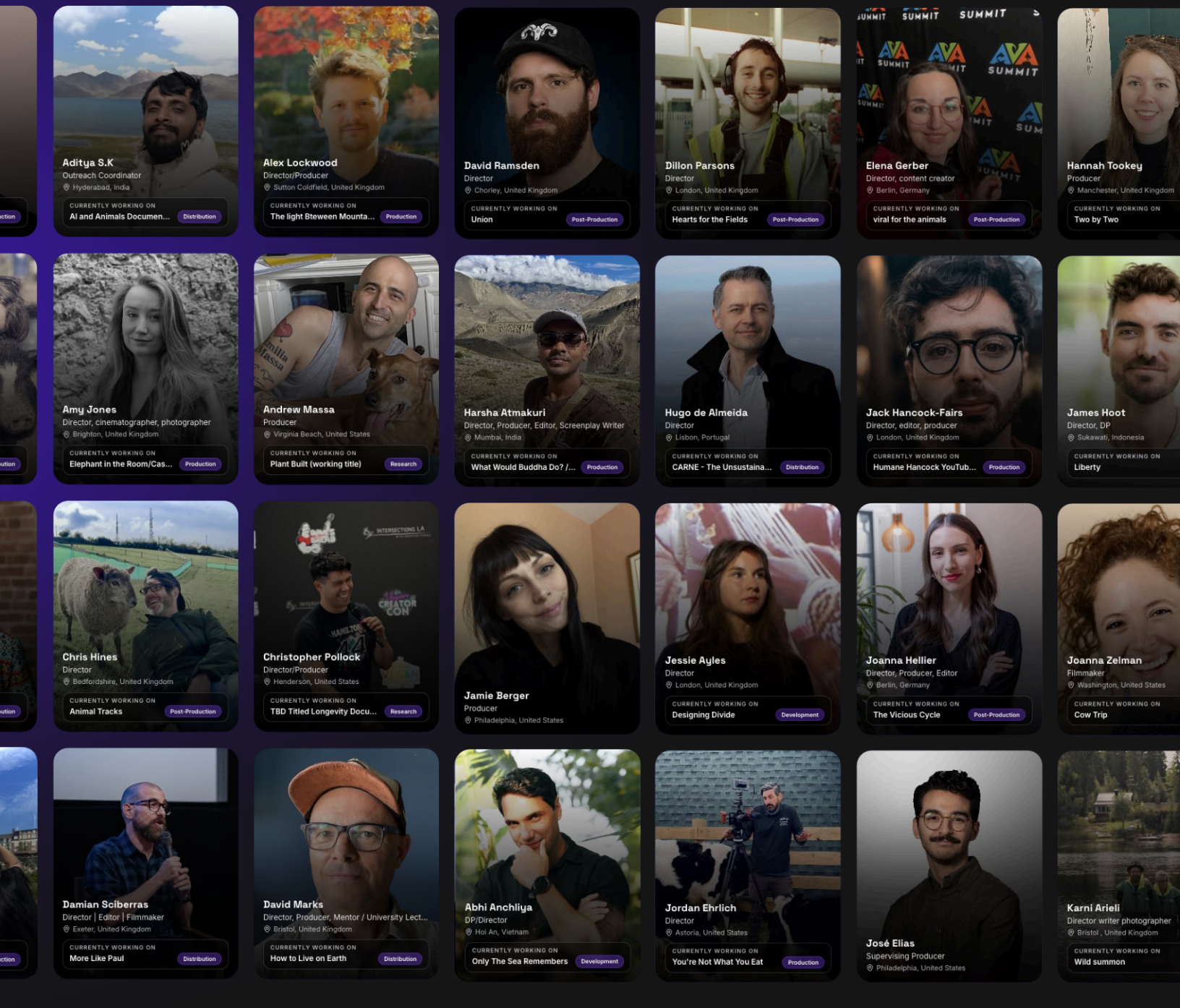
IMPACT EVALUATION MENTORSHIP MATCHING

PLATFORM MATCH EXECUTIVE PRODUCER MATCHING

RESOURCES

Filmmaker Directory

Filmmakers can browse their peers via a directory - learn about the docs they're working on, and where they're currently at with them.

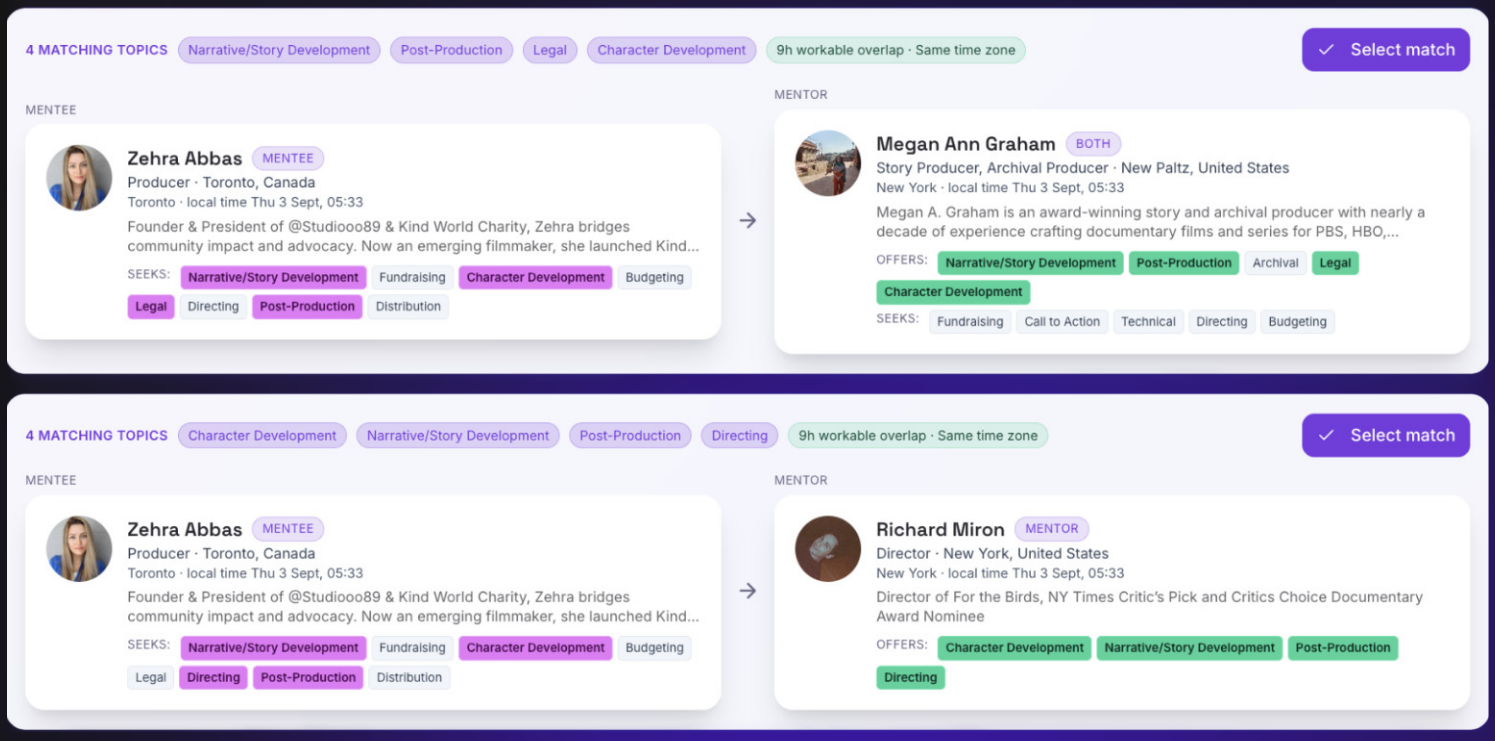


RESOURCES

Mentorship Matching

We made **7 strategic mentorship matches** through our Mentorship Matching Program, pairing filmmakers with experienced industry leaders.

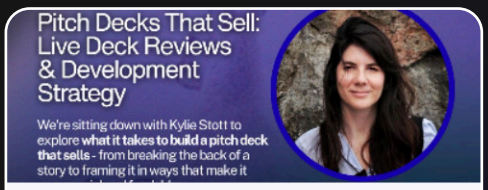
Designed to support projects across their entire lifecycle, these 1-on-1 pairings deliver targeted guidance in Narrative & Story Development, Character Development, Post-Production, Impact Campaign Strategy, Directing, Archival Research, and Legal Clearances—ensuring filmmakers have the direct support needed to navigate complex production challenges.



RESOURCES

Sessions

An evolving comprehensive library of previous speaker sessions, panels, and workshops featuring key insights from industry experts.

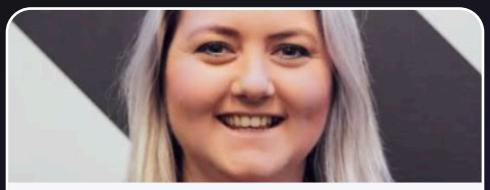


WORKSHOP · 2 Sept 2026

Pitch Decks That Sell: Live Deck Reviews & Development Strategy

We're sitting down with Kylie Stott to explore what it takes to build a pitch deck that sells - from breaking the back of a story to framing it in ways that make it...

Kylie Stott · MEMBER
Emmy nominated Director, Founder of P22 Films

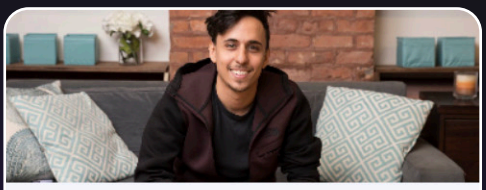


MASTERCLASS · EXTERNAL · 23 Jun 2026

Selling Your Doc Worldwide: How International Streaming & TV Really Works

Selling your film beyond your home territory can feel confusing and intimidating - but it can be a missed opportunity for filmmakers.

Sarah Mosses
Founder & CEO of Together Films

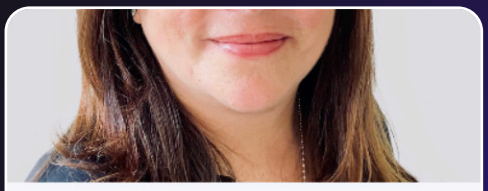


SPEAKER SESSION · 17 Apr 2026

Branded, Bold, and Impact-Driven: Inside The Price of Milk

We're sitting down with Nicholas Bruckman to explore how his Oatly supported docuseries 'The Price of Milk' came together, its impact, and the...

Nicholas Bruckman
Director of The Price Of Milk



SPEAKER SESSION · 6 Mar 2026

The Importance of Documentary Research For Story Success

We're sitting down with Megan Gelstein to explore why strong research is the foundation of powerful documentary storytelling - and how it shapes...

Megan Gelstein
Co-Director of Catapult Film Fund

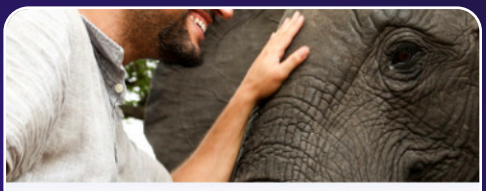


SPEAKER SESSION · 4 Mar 2026

The Art of Empathy in Animal Cinema

We're sitting down with legendary director Liz Marshall to explore how filmmakers can tell powerful animal stories that truly connect with audiences....

Liz Marshall
Director of The Ghosts In Our Machine & Meat The ...

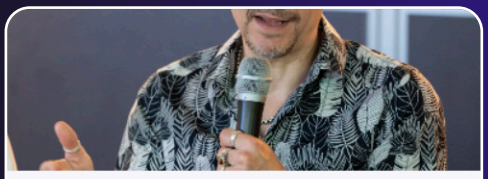


WORKSHOP · 26 Feb 2026

Documentary Story, Structure & Strategy

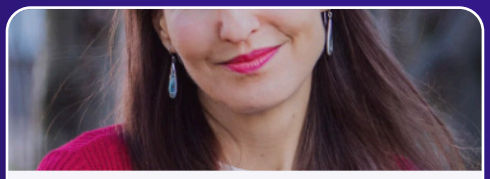
The session aims to bridge the gap between initial concept and production-ready narrative. By focusing on story fundamentals, participants will learn to...

Emre Izat
Documentary Filmmaker



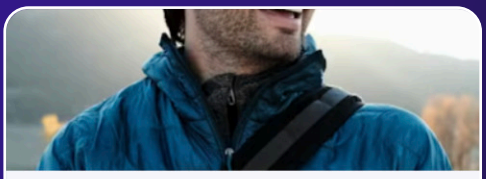
SPEAKER SESSION · 25 Feb 2026

Animal Docs & Independent Distribution



MASTERCLASS · 10 Feb 2026

Psychological Toolbox For Storytelling



SPEAKER SESSION · 9 Feb 2026

Finding and Working with Strong

RESOURCES

Grants

A curated, daily-updated list of documentary grants for every production stage, from development to impact.



GENERAL / MULTI-STAGE · INTERNATIONAL

DOK Leipzig Co-Pro Market and Previews

Access to co-production finance, marketplace matchmaking

Opens: 16 Jun 2026
Deadline: 3 Sept 2026

A premier European financing and marketplace platform looking for feature-length creative documentaries with international theatrical and festival potential.

Apply now

Learn more



GENERAL / MULTI-STAGE · INTERNATIONAL · PRODUCTION

Eurimages Co-production Support

Up to 70% of total budget (subsidy or soft loan)

Opens: 5 May 2026
Deadline: 8 Sept 2026

A European co-production grant for fiction, documentary, and animation feature films of at least 70 minutes. It supports producers working across member countries.

Apply now

Learn more



INTERNATIONAL · POST-PRODUCTION · PRODUCTION

Hubert Bals Fund (HBF) — Post-Production Support

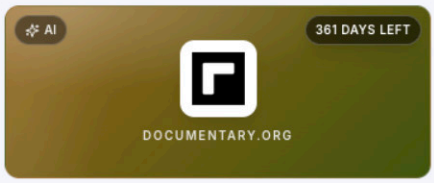
Various funding tiers up to €60,000

Opens: 10 Jun 2026
Deadline: 16 Nov 2026

Production, post-production, and distribution funding for feature films and creative documentaries from eligible regions across Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, Asia, and beyond.

Apply now

Learn more



OTHER

IDA Field-Building Fund

Opens: 30 Aug 2026
Deadline: 30 Aug 2027

Rolling deadline — applications accepted year-round. Source deadline wording: "Rolling nomination process". Rolling deadline — applications accepted year-round. Started in 2020, the Field Building Fund is organized and administered ...

Apply now

Learn more



GENERAL / MULTI-STAGE

Doc Society Fund, Expression of Interest

Opens: 30 Aug 2026
Deadline: 30 Aug 2027

Rolling deadline — applications accepted year-round. Open Globally for Feature Documentaries - Step 1 for the Doc Society Fund.

Apply now

Learn more



PRODUCTION

BFI Doc Society Production Fund Expression of Interest

Opens: 30 Aug 2026
Deadline: 1 Sept 2028

For feature length documentary films.

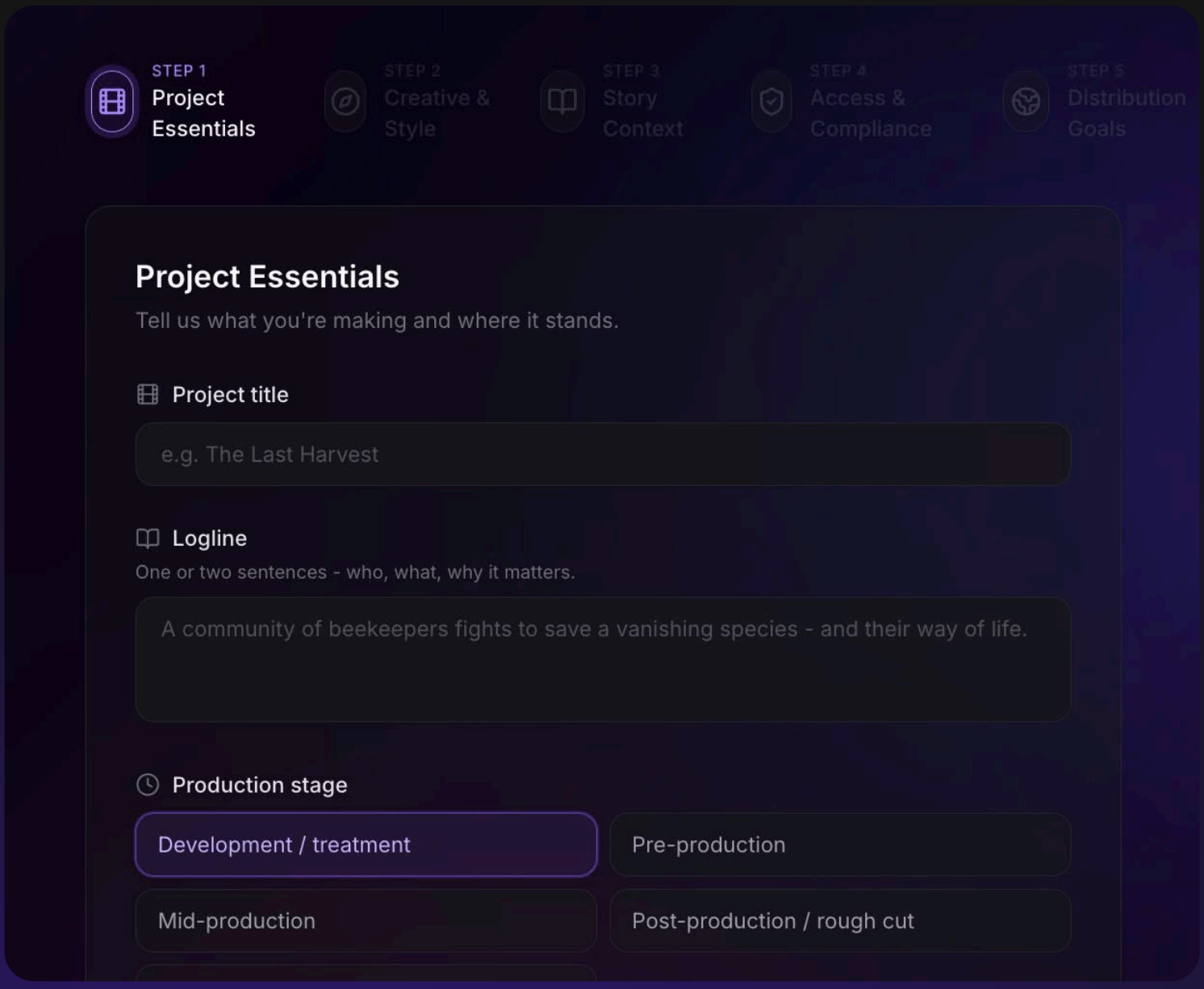
Apply now

Learn more

RESOURCES

Platform Match

A project-matching tool that pairs documentaries with the right streamers and broadcasters, delivering match scores, alignment analysis, actionable submission routes, and guidance on how to make the pitch more impactful.

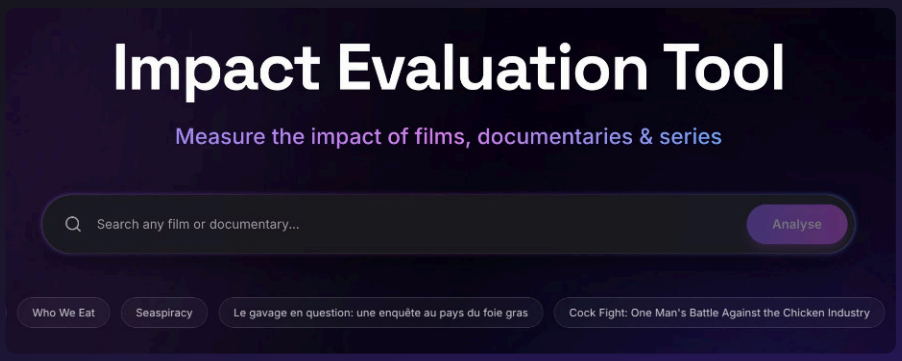


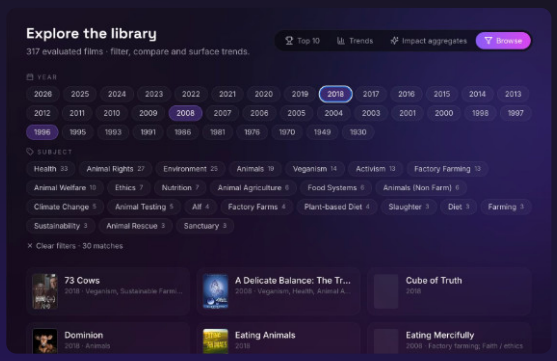
RESOURCES

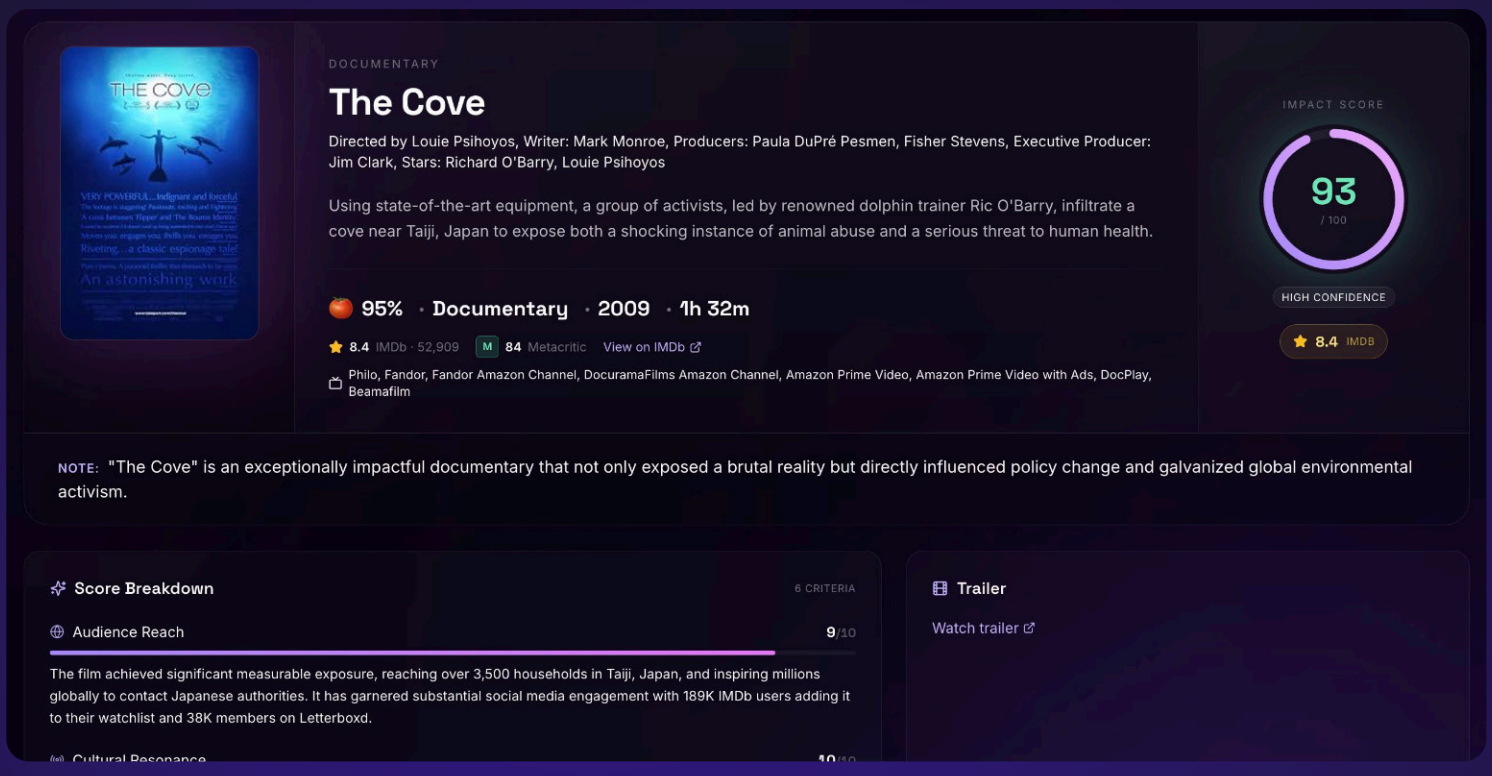
Impact Evaluation (WIP)

An evaluation tool that rates a documentary's real-world success, generating an Impact Score out of 100.

It calculates scores using our internal library, alongside public metrics like reach distribution, star-power, press coverage, social engagement, and policy influence.







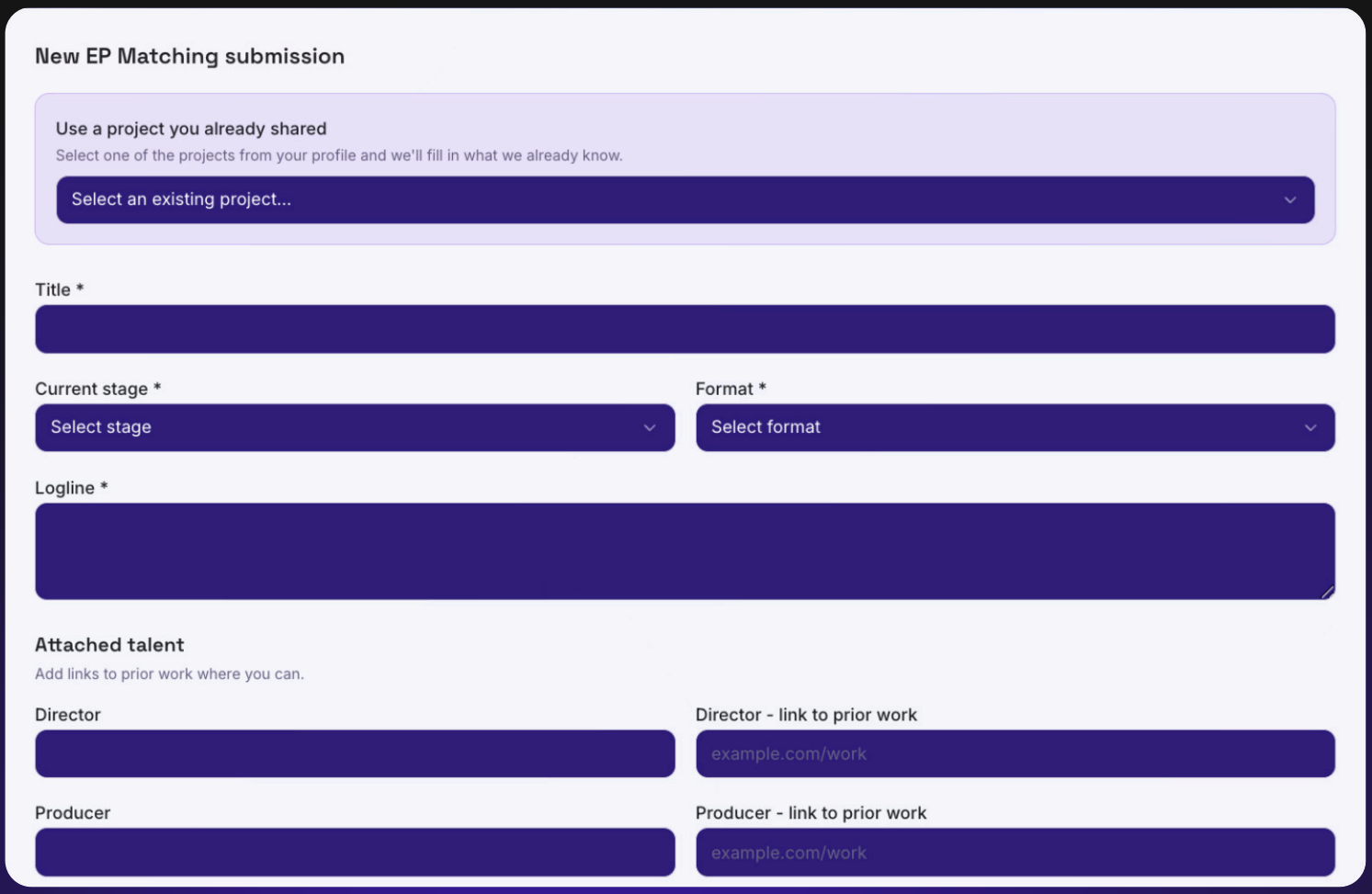
RESOURCES

Executive Producer Matching

A matchmaking feature that showcases documentary projects, including the stage, format, logline, and attached talent; to connect filmmakers with financial, creative, or impact Executive Producers.

By matching project goals with the right producer's expertise upfront, filmmakers save time, avoid early misalignments, and build strong partnerships that carries the film through to release.






FARMING A WILDER FUTURE
CHEW ON THIS
LIVE DOCUMENTARY PITCH
Preview
Program
Camera 1
Camera 2
HOW FOOD TELLS OUR STORIES
LIVE CHEF CAM
Camera 4
HOLLYWOOD CLIMATE SUMMIT
Media Player 1
Black
ISO REC
03:32:49
08:49
00:00

EVENTS

EVENTS

London Mini-Summit

In April, Who Let The Docs Out hosted its inaugural in-person mini-summit in London, bringing together UK-based impact-filmmakers focused on animal protection, for an intensive day of networking, sessions and strategy.

Designed to bridge industry expertise with grassroots peer support, the summit featured strategic sessions on funding and distribution trends and roundtables connecting filmmakers directly with mentors.

The event showcased leading industry figures, including a fireside chat on story-first filmmaking with BAFTA-winning director Alex Lockwood (73 Cows) and a session on animation for animal advocacy with BAFTA- and Cannes-nominated directing duo Karni & Saul (Wild Summon).







EVENTS

AVA Summit



In May, Who Let The Docs Out held a mini-summit at AVA in Toronto, bringing together emerging and established documentary storytellers and funders to strengthen creative pipelines in the animal advocacy space.

Designed to foster collaboration, the event combined project presentations, work-in-progress screenings and panel discussions focused on funding, distribution, and narrative impact.

The summit featured a dynamic group of impact filmmakers navigating investigative reporting, open rescue, and behavioral change narratives, including Tamara Human (RESCUE), Rebecca Loviconi (Slay, Crime or Rescue), Joanna Zelman (Cow Trip), and James Hoot (The Last Steppe, Cultured Wars).

By creating a space for peer-to-peer industry insights from filmmakers working within the movement, the Toronto gathering provided crucial networking infrastructure to empower filmmakers.



EVENTS

Hollywood Climate Summit

Who Let The Docs Out was an event partner alongside Netflix, Warner Bros, NBCUniversal, CAA, Doris Duke Foundation, UTA and Climate Spring.

We curated and hosted a panel discussion on **the importance of impact storytelling**, with panelists Stephanie Soechtig, James Wilks, Kip Andersen and Maggie Baird. We also led a LIVE pitching event, **awarding a total of $50,000 USD** to five impact filmmakers.

Two participating projects also received additional funding directly from The Redford Center and high-net-worth audience members.

This partnership established Docs Out as a key player in impact film, expanding our network and connecting us directly with award-winning documentary filmmakers.







$50,000 USD Awarded

EVENTS

Climate Film Festival





Who Let The Docs Out partnered with **Warren Underground** to co-sponsor a panel discussion at the **Climate Film Festival** Narrative Change Summit in New York City.

We curated and hosted the panel **'Activist Or Filmmaker? Choosing The Right Lens For Impact'**, exploring the tension between campaign messaging and nuanced, cinematic storytelling.

Moderated by Who Let The Docs Out Executive Director Joanna Hellier, the session featured acclaimed documentary filmmakers **Gabriela Cowperthwaite** (Blackfish, The Grab), **Louie Psihoyos** (The Cove, The Game Changers, Racing Extinction), **Richard Ladkani** (Yanuni, Sea of Shadows), and **Michelle Cho** (The Smell of Money; ED of Warren Underground).

Key topics explored included using genre storytelling to reach non-activist audiences and whether explicit calls-to-action belong in mainstream documentaries. This session further cemented Docs Out as a leading voice in impact storytelling and strengthened our ties with non-fiction directors and the broader climate media community.





DISTRIBUTION PARTNERSHIPS

MARKETING & DISTRIBUTION PARTNERSHIPS

That Doc Girl

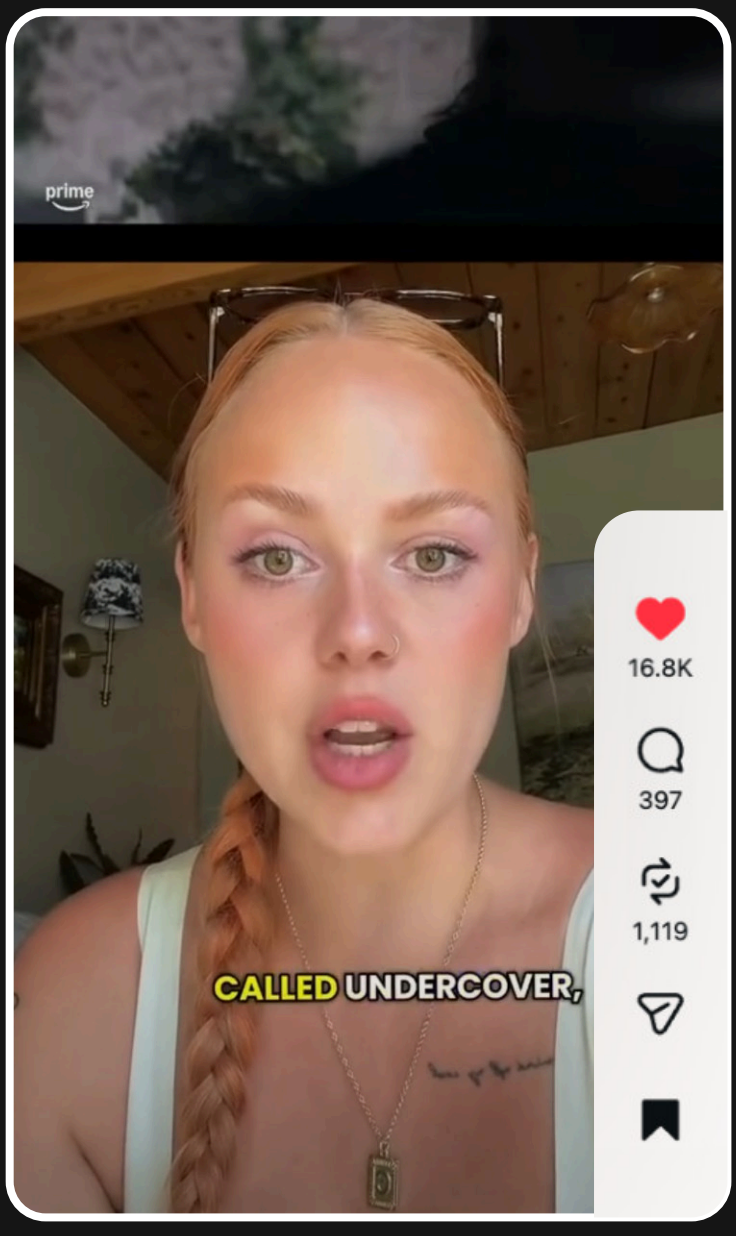
To evaluate independent distribution pipelines and test conversion models for documentary films, Who Let The Docs Out sponsored a strategic marketing campaign in collaboration with macro-influencer That Doc Girl (@thatdocumentarygirl).

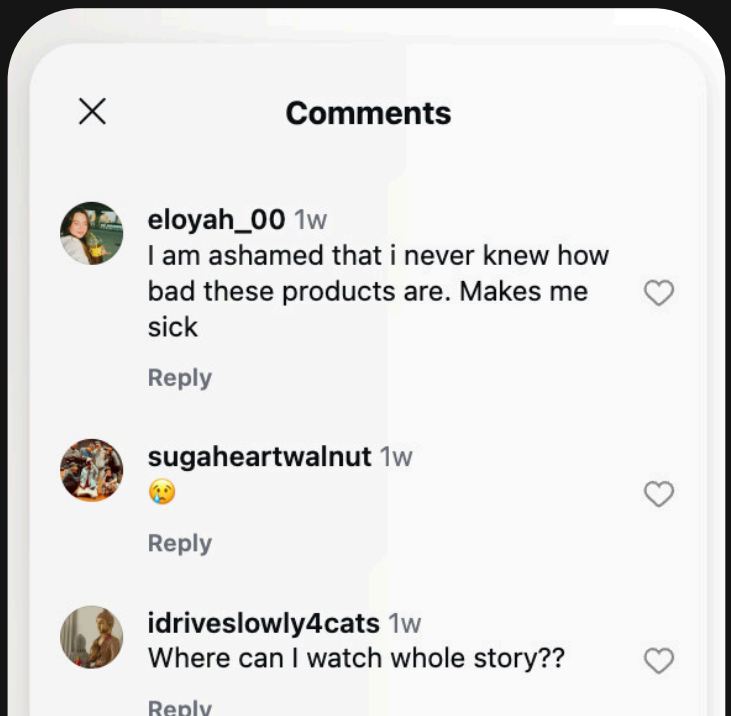
Designed as a market research exercise, the campaign analyzed how specialized niche social media influencers can drive traffic from social platforms to mainstream streaming (SVOD) services.

The sponsored post promoted the Prime Video investigative documentary **Undercover: Inside the Bunker**, generated high-level audience engagement. Performance analytics demonstrated exceptional traction within the target demographic.

This collaboration offers critical proof-of-concept data on how targeted influencer partnerships can bypass traditional marketing bottlenecks to funnel social audiences directly to documentary streaming releases.





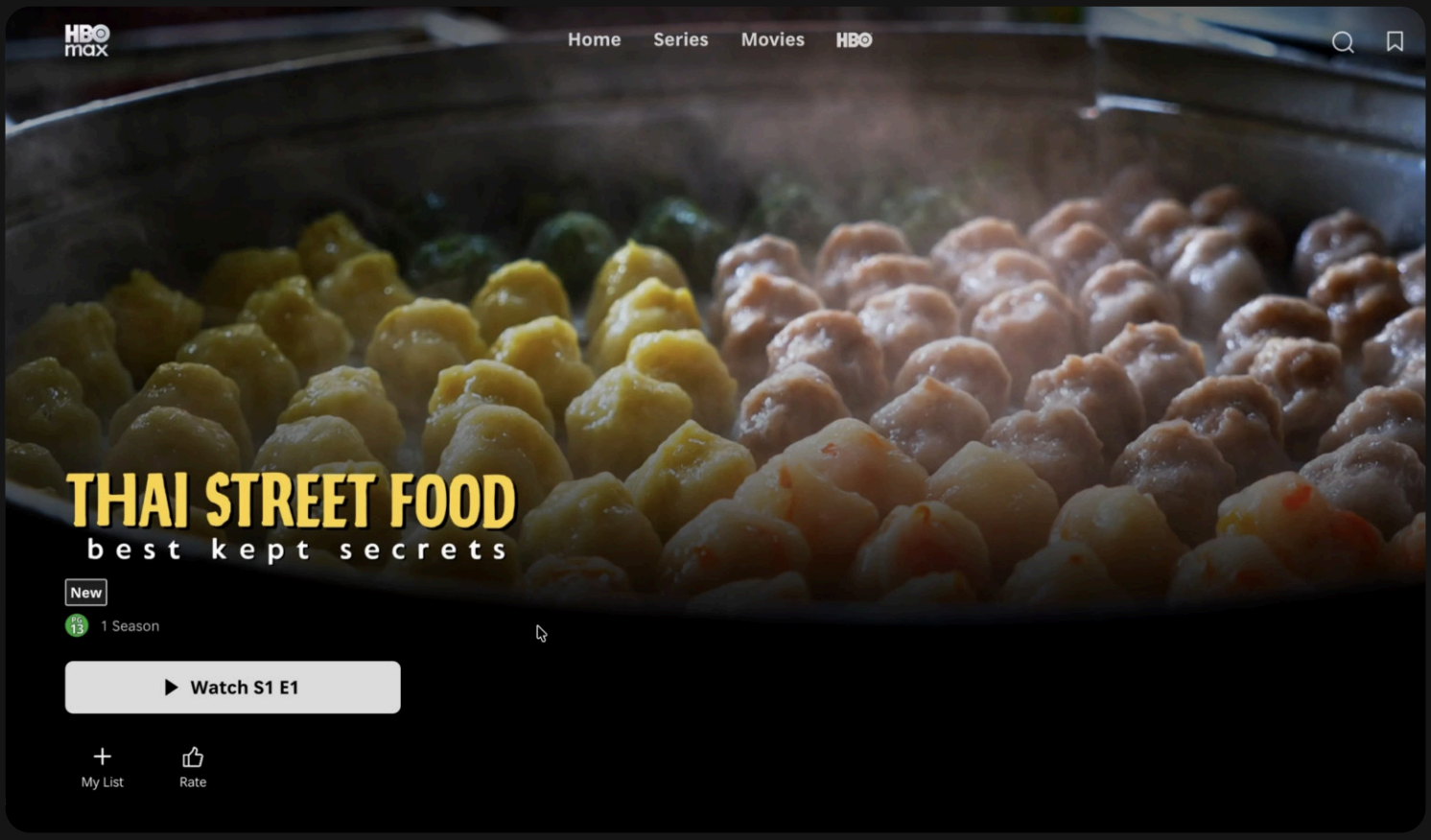


MARKETING & DISTRIBUTION PARTNERSHIPS

BomanBridge

Through our ongoing distribution partnership with Asia-based distributor BomanBridge Media, Who Let The Docs Out are helping to unlock distribution access across the Global South.

Building on our relationship with BomanBridge Media, we provide our community direct access to market intelligence and distributor wish-lists, which details the exact topics and genres actively being acquired across the Global South.





RESEARCH STUDY

RESEARCH STUDY

Stanford University

In partnership with researchers at Stanford University, Who Let The Docs Out embarked on an empirical study designed to **measure the impact of documentary films on dietary choices** and meat consumption across entire communities.

While impact media is widely recognized for raising awareness, rigorous population-level data on concrete dietary change conversion remains rare.

This joint study investigates whether targeted, community-wide promotion of a plant-based documentary, drives a statistically significant decrease in animal meat consumption alongside an increase in plant-based food purchases, compared to a randomized control community.

Focusing on semi-isolated, mid-sized cities, the study combines grassroots community engagement (such as cinema screenings, network outreach, local press, and geofenced audio ads), with robust longitudinal data collection. To quantify impact, Stanford is analyzing point-of-sale retail datasets via **Nielsen data.**

This study aims to produce peer-reviewed data, demonstrating whether impact documentaries measurably shift dietary choices and supply chain demand.



POST PRODUCTION PARTNERSHIP

POST PRODUCTION PARTNERSHIP

Sticks & Glass

To lower post-production costs and ensure independent impact films achieve broadcast-grade color and sound, Who Let The Docs Out signed an MOU with Leeds-based post-production studio Sticks & Glass.

Through this strategic agreement, Docs Out has established an in-kind sponsorship package covering comprehensive color grading and sound design for batches of 3 to 4 documentary projects.

By securing deeply discounted nonprofit rates, this partnership directly reduces finishing costs for independent impact filmmakers, while providing them with industry-standard, professional-grade technical finishing required for tier 1 festival releases and global broadcast licensing.





WHAT'S NEXT?

WHAT'S NEXT?

Career Transition Program

An initiative designed to support **film school graduates, emerging talent,** and incentivize **established filmmakers** to focus on animal protection and food systems.

By providing seed grants and production grants, and transition funding (backed by expert reviewers and 1:1 mentorship), the program equips talented filmmakers with the strategy and support needed to **build lasting careers in impact documentary filmmaking.**

We are currently partnering with leading educational institutions, including the London Film School, the University of Colorado Boulder, and UWE Bristol, to co-sponsor emerging writers and filmmakers while integrating impact narratives directly into higher education screenwriting and documentary curriculums.



WHAT'S NEXT?

Climate Spring Partnership

To reach mainstream audiences at scale, Who Let The Docs Out is partnering with Climate Spring to launch a strategic co-development initiative expanding into scripted film and TV.

Focused on shifting the global food narrative, this partnership sources and funds commercial screenplays that explore the transition away from industrial animal agriculture through behavioral change.

Moving past apocalyptic narratives, this partnership produces projects that highlight positive visions of the future, framing agricultural transformation, food justice, and evolving human-animal relationships **through compelling drama and comedy**.

From optioning IP and funding treatment drafts to providing expert sustainability consulting, this initiative bridges impact strategy with commercial entertainment to shape mainstream storytelling.





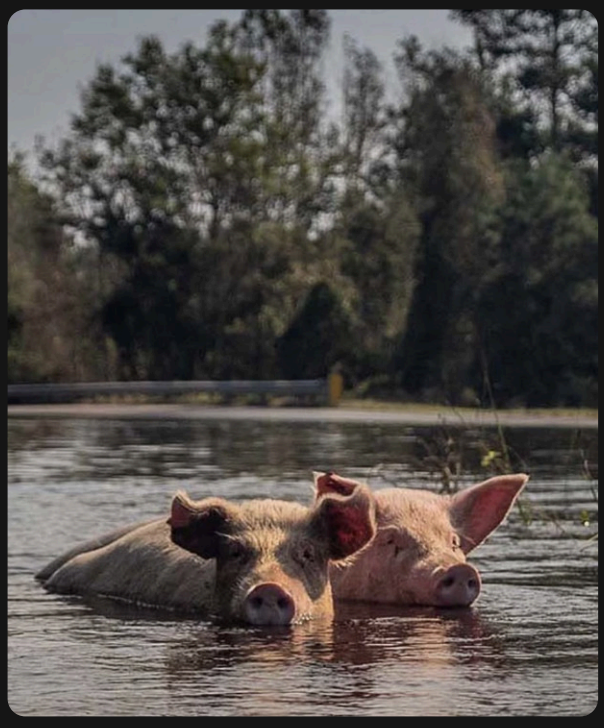
WHAT'S NEXT?

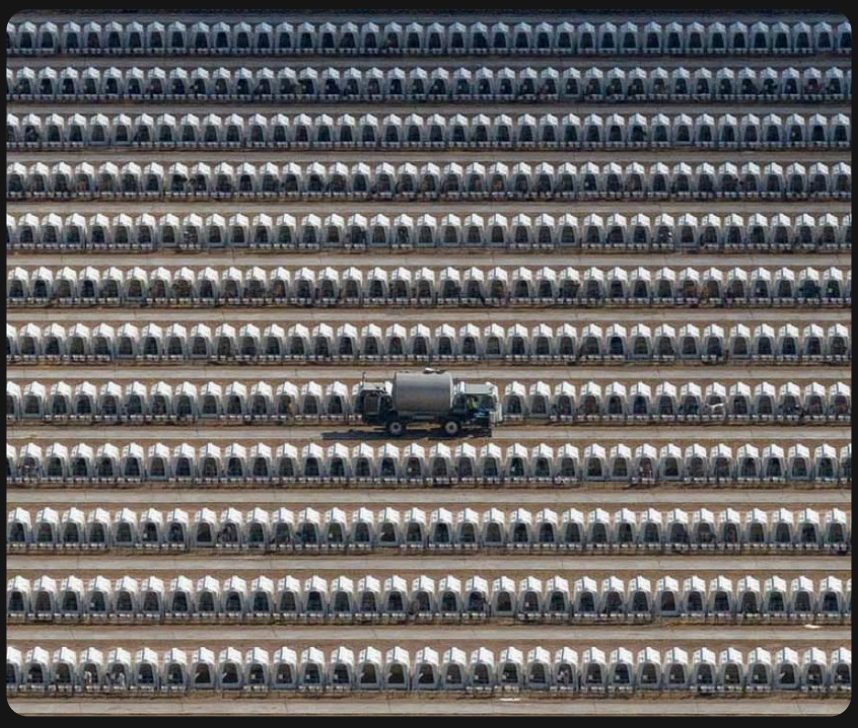
We Animals Commission

In December 2026, Who Let The Docs Out and We Animals Media will co-launch an international short film commissioning call.

The initiative invites proposals for short documentaries that investigate the use of animals within global food systems, prioritizing filmmakers from Latin America, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. The program provides $15,000 CAD in funding to elevate under-reported stories in animal agriculture for mainstream, non-advocacy audiences.

One film will be commissioned by We Animals. Who Let The Docs Out will manage applications, shortlisting, and 1:1 filmmaker mentorship; pairing the selected director with an industry expert for guidance across development, production, edit, and distribution. Through this collaboration, the program bridges early-stage funding gaps for regional directors whilst delivering compelling journalism to global audiences.





Thank you for your support!

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WHO LET THE DOCS OUT