Berkshire Film and Media Commission – Western, Massachusetts
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"Starting a Film Commission – The Art of Collaboration"

1) Start with an idea of what you want your Film Commission to look like – what are the goals; what are the challenges in your area. Create a mission statement that others can align with.

2) Find other people in the film profession in your area – through the Internet, business connections and friends.

3) Meet with others in the field. Enroll them in your project. Be clear about your vision. Take suggestions and always ask if they know others in the industry.

4) Find an initial core group or individuals to support the Commission. For BFMC, we began under the auspices of another non-profit, The Berkshire Creative Economy Council. They were able to give us administrative and fundraising support in our initial phase.
5) Design/Create your Business Plan or Plan of Action
    - Short term goals – First year – 18 months
    - Long term goals – 2+ years

6) Begin to build a Board of Directors and Advisors for your Commission – (those who can bring "wealth, work, wisdom"). Paramount is finding initial funding – for us, it came from individuals who shared our vision. There weren't any economic development funds from the state and we have no local, centralized government for Berkshire County.

7) Build a website – this is how people will find you! This is where we put our initial funding. We hired a graphic designer (for logo, branding work), and a web designer. We researched other Film Commission sites and decided what we liked and what worked. Once designed, we emailed everyone we knew in the industry to sign up and be part of our Production Guide (our database). We talked to real estate agents to sign up locations. We talked to local photographers who donated location stills in exchange for giving them photo credit on our site. It is still a work in progress.

8) Talk It Up!
    - Our website debuted at the Berkshire International Film Festival in 2009. Several months later, we had a launch party and invited people in the area from the industry. We also invited the press and got stories in several local papers.
    - Utilize press, radio and social media to get your message out.
    - Create relationships with Mass Office of Travel/Tourism (state film office), Mass Production Coalition and other film organizations in the State. Let them know you exist and want film production to happen in your area.

9) Finances – how will the organization operate?
- Decide who will run the operation on a daily basis – We are a one person operation with a lot of part time help - PR person (Facebook/Twitter), fundraiser, location scout, as well as some wonderful volunteers.
- Keep overhead low
- Fundraising – individuals, local companies, grants
  - ➢ After 1.5 years we had our 1st fundraising party. Gave us exposure, (even raised a bit of money) and established us in the community. We staged a live "shoot" to show the talents of the professionals in the Berkshires! Gathered potential guest names from the Berkshires Visitor's Bureau, friends in the industry, press, and from our Board of Directors/Advisors.
    Note: Email invite didn't work for us. People still like to receive a hard invitation for a fundraising event.
  - ➢ We are doing our first fundraising appeal letter this spring.
  - ➢ Grants: We are applying for grants now, but this is a slow process. We are starting with smaller grants for our educational programs as well as web site revisions.

Lessons learned to date:
- Talk to other people/similar organizations – it made us decide to be a non-profit even though we are an economic initiative.
- Join forces – collaborations are strong – especially for communication and marketing already in place with other, established organizations
- Be flexible – be willing to change course along the way
  BFMC is in the process of expanding to include the Pioneer Valley. This will allow us to market more unique locations, expand our local crew and talent offerings and increase our fundraising base.
- Interns - wish I had one from the start.