YMCA Guide to Making Impact Videos

February 2017

**Introduction:**

Our Recommendations Report introduced the idea – one that many YMCAs are already utilizing – of creating short videos focused on the impact of giving. Videos can provide compelling content across a number of platforms: websites, email messages, social media, on screens at events and on screens in YMCA facilities. As potentially useful as videos can be, however, they can also be time consuming and expensive to produce and easy to make poorly. This document will provide some guidance on creating simple but effective videos that can help your YMCA connect with its donors.

**Overview/Goals:**

There are almost as many ways to make a video about the impact of philanthropy as there are donors. Knowing the limitations in time, budget and technology that most YMCAs are working with – especially if the goal is to produce a number of videos to provide variety and a constantly refreshed resource – we are focused in this document on a specific type of video. That is a video that is easy to produce and can be completed without expensive equipment or specialized technical skills. The high-level goals of this kind of video are:

* It is short, likely less than two and a half minutes.
* It tells a story that reveals the impact of a YMCA program.
* It places the donors in the video by connecting the program or specific aspects of the program (growth, new features, etc.) to philanthropic contributions.
* It can stand alone – it doesn’t need explanation (such as a text introduction) to be understood. This will allow it to be employed in a variety of situations and media.

**Subject Selection:**

A great video interview begins with selecting the right focus and subject. This selection parallels the kind of selective process that usually goes into developing your cases for support. The characteristics of a good interview subject include:

* There is a good personal story.
* There is an actual change/outcome – for example, the story isn’t simply that someone participated in a program but that the person participated and that participation led to a positive and demonstrable change.
* There was donor money involved in making the program possible.

**Locations/Technical:**

* Select a location for the video shoot that is connected to the impact described in the story. Put something identifiable from that location in the background of the shot. If there is no specific location that connects to the program, or if the connected location is unsuitable or unavailable for some reason, pick a highly recognizable YMCA location. It’s fine to have some movement and activity in the background of the shot as long as it’s not excessive, it doesn’t affect the audio recording and the people in the background aren’t in focus and/or looking in the camera.
* Frame the interviewee slightly off-center and have the person’s eye line (where he or she is looking at the interviewer) go to the open side of the frame.
* Sit the interviewer fairly close to the camera so the interviewee’s eye line is not into the lens of the camera, but still affords a full view of his/her face.
* If possible, use a lapel microphone to record audio.
* In editing the video, consider doing a version with captioning/subtitles so the video can be played in locations where hearing the audio might not be feasible, for example, in the lobby of the YMCA.
* Pay attention to lighting and depth of focus in setting up the camera. Doing these two things well is the easiest way to make a video look professionally produced. Focus on the interviewee’s face and have the background slightly blurred. For lighting, try to avoid locations where there is only overhead light. An easy trick to create better lighting is to use table/desk lamps to provide equalizing light at the interview subject’s face height or below.
* Be sure to shoot “B roll.” This is video of the program in action, the interview subject in a non-interview setting, shots of the facility in question, video of signs or awards or banners related to the program, or anything that isn’t the interview subject speaking to the interviewer. Having this B roll gives you options in editing. You can cut to it, for example, to mask an edit in the middle of something the interviewee says or you can use it as background for an on-screen title, statistic or caption.

**Interviews:**

Interviewing people for a video is not like a normal conversation. Here are some tips to help interviewers get the most usable footage:

* Have the interviewee speak to you, not to the camera.
* Tell the interviewee that you are going to ask questions, but in the response they should assume that viewers will not hear those questions. Provide an example like, “So how did you first learn about the YMCA’s afterschool program?” The answer would be something like, “I learned about the afterschool program online. I did a lot of research to find the right program for my kids.”
* Tell the interviewee that you will probably ask questions that seem similar, but that’s because you want to get slightly different versions of the same information so you have options in editing. For example, you can ask the question, “How has being part of the program changed your life?” and then ask the question, “How do you think being part of the program is changing the way you’re planning your future?” Try two or three different approaches to your key questions if you don’t hear an answer that you like initially.
* In normal conversation, we make a lot of affirming vocalizations – things like “Right,” “Un huh” and “Sure.” Don’t do that. Remaining silent will feel unnatural. You’ll want to say something to encourage the person who’s talking. You won’t want to leave pauses in the flow of conversation. Instead, maintain eye contact, smile and nod as your way of offering support and encouragement. Anything you say while the interview subject is talking will make that clip unusable.
* In normal conversation, we are used to picking up immediately when people finish speaking. As an interviewer, you will need to wait a second or two longer than you think is necessary. This helps create space for editing, but also keeps you from speaking over something if the interviewee decides to continue.