

# ***Under Our Skin* Event Planning Toolkit**

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## **ABOUT UNDER OUR SKIN**

A gripping tale of microbes, medicine and money, *Under Our Skin* (produced and directed by Andy Abrahams Wilson) exposes the hidden story of Lyme disease, one of the most controversial and fastest growing epidemics of our time. Each year thousands go undiagnosed or misdiagnosed, often told that their symptoms are "all in their head." Following the stories of patients and physicians fighting for their lives or livelihoods, the film brings into focus a haunting picture of the healthcare system and a medical establishment all too willing to put profits ahead of patients.

## **ABOUT THE UNDER OUR SKIN AWARENESS TOUR**

The *Under Our Skin* Awareness Tour, which kicked off with the June 2009 theatrical release, is an effort to bring the film to cities across the country to educate audiences about Lyme disease, prevent the spread, and find solutions to this growing, yet hidden epidemic. We have already reached tens of thousands of people across the country, but we don't want the momentum to stop after the theatrical run. For this reason, Open Eye Pictures is inviting organizations and individuals across the country to get involved in our effort to bring this film and these issues to communities nationwide. Once the theatrical release ends, the film will be made widely available to groups who want to host their own screenings – both large and small – to continue the dialogue about how we can work together to uncover the epidemic. We know planning an event is not always easy, so this toolkit is designed to provide all the tools and tips you need to put together a successful event.

## **GETTING STARTED WITH YOUR EVENT IN FOUR STEPS**

To begin, individuals, community groups and libraries can purchase the educational DVD at the Community Group price, at \$95, which includes public performance rights, but not the right to charge admission. Order information can be found at [www.underourskin.com/store\\_home.html](http://www.underourskin.com/store_home.html).

If you or your organization is planning on charging admission to the screening, collecting donations, or using the film for a fundraiser, our standard screening fee is \$300, payable to Open Eye Pictures in advance. If over \$600 is received from ticket sales of fundraising, our policy is that Open Eye Pictures receives half of the total (minus the \$300 paid in advance). These proceeds are essential to support the continued educational outreach of the film.

### **1) Define Your Objectives**

Figuring out your objectives is the first step in planning a successful event. This is a great opportunity to think about how your event can support your longer-term objectives. Are you interested in sparking dialogue among healthcare providers in your community? Do you want to give voice to Lyme patients and family members? Do you want to heighten your organization's profile and build new partnerships? Having a sense of what

you'd like people to take away from their evening with *Under Our Skin* will help you plan and set the tone. Here are some possible objectives (these are not mutually exclusive):

- Educate community members about Lyme and other tick-borne diseases.
- Recruit and Inspire new advocates by offering ways to get involved – such as blogging, signing a petition, joining/starting a support group, or holding a screening of their own.
- Build coalitions with new allies who are “beyond the choir” and breathe new life into local Lyme advocacy.
- Recruit new policy stakeholders and spokespeople by engaging healthcare agents and policymakers, environmental advocates, and scholars.
- Spotlight the work of your organization and generate interest and press attention.
- Generate additional funding and support for Lyme disease research, education, and advocacy.

## **2) Identify Your Target Audience**

Once you define your objectives, you'll have a better sense of who your target audience is. Do you hope to engage people who are already motivated around the issues and ready to get more involved? Would you like to reach “beyond the choir,” and introduce the issues to new audiences? Are you interested in leadership development, medical education, or outdoor safety training? Even if your organization does not have direct connections to your target audiences, you can partner with organizations that do. See the next section for suggestions.

Get Connected With *Under Our Skin* Online! Network with the thousands of other *Under Our Skin* fans on Facebook at [www.Facebook.com/underourskin](http://www.Facebook.com/underourskin). Chat with other fans, post updates about your event, and stay updated and connected. You can also go to the *Under Our Skin* website to join our listserv and receive email updates. Visit [www.underourskin.com](http://www.underourskin.com).

## **3) Determine Venue Options**

Where you screen depends on your budget, the expected size of your audience, and the impression you want to give. For example, if you want to host an intimate dialogue, a church basement or large living room would suffice. If you want to engage college students and medical students, a university auditorium or classroom would work well. If you want to put on a more professional event that attracts VIPs and press, you may consider doing your screening in a private screening room (at a library, community center or museum, for example) or in a movie theatre. Theatres and screening rooms often have rental fees, which typically range between \$450 and \$1200. However, there may be organizations in your area that have screening rooms available for little or no

cost. Local universities, community centers and libraries might be a good place to start. You may also find out if there are any organizations that do a regular screening series, as they might be interested in partnering with you and including *Under Our Skin* in their lineup. (See next section on recruiting partner organizations.)

#### **4) Recruit Partner Organizations**

It's always good to invite other groups and organizations to partner with you on your event. Partner organizations not only help broaden your reach, but they can also lend credibility and contribute to your event planning. In some instances, event-based partnerships can even pave the way for longer-term relationships that will benefit your mutual efforts.

Partners can get involved in a range of ways, depending on their interest and capacity. At the very least, they can help get the word out about the event on their listservs or websites, but some partners might be able to get more actively involved and contribute ideas, time, resources, and/or panelists for the event. For *Under Our Skin*, you might consider the following groups as potential partners:

- Rotary clubs, Kiwanis, Lions clubs
- Local PTAs
- Healthcare advocacy organizations
- Local Garden Clubs
- Audubon Society chapters and other naturalist groups
- Medical schools
- Faith-based or interfaith organizations
- Libraries, museums, and media/film centers
- Community foundations

To really broaden your reach, try contacting an organization you've never worked with before that will share an interest in *Under Our Skin*. This will help you reach new potential supporters and bring your messages to audiences "beyond the choir."

Some tips for reaching out to groups you've never worked with before:

- *Offer background and context.* Send along a link to the *Under Our Skin* YouTube channel at [www.youtube.com/openeyepictures](http://www.youtube.com/openeyepictures). Also include a brief description of the film so they can see what it's all about. (You can use the description on page one).
- *Make it relevant to them.* Highlight elements of the film that are most relevant to their interests. For example, a group of naturalists might be interested in the fact that the film raises issues of outdoor safety, or a healthcare advocacy organization might be interested in the patient testimonials.
- *Let them know about partner benefits.* Getting involved in your event can be a good opportunity for other groups to spotlight their work, raise their visibility, and reach new audiences. If you are open to a more collaborative partnership, invite them to get more involved in event planning and design, such as suggesting panelists for the discussion, brainstorming target audiences, hosting a VIP reception, and more.

- Remember that groups have different capacities so involvement will vary. Some will simply just send your email blast to their listserv, others might get more involved in logistical planning, and some might even be able to contribute funds. Be mindful of what your partners are capable of and make sure you're not asking them for too much (or too little!) as you plan your event.

## GETTING THE WORD OUT

Getting the word out is one of the most important things you can do in your event planning. Even a well thought out event with prominent speakers can suffer low attendance if you don't cover your bases. We encourage you to spread the word by contacting your and your partner organizations' mailing lists, posting flyers in the community, and securing calendar listings. **Given that this film is part of a national effort, we have already been conducting outreach to major media outlets, so we ask you to NOT contact major media, and rather focus on local press. If major press or television contacts you directly, please put them in touch with Open Eye Pictures at [info@openeyepictures.com](mailto:info@openeyepictures.com).**

Below are some additional tips for getting the word out:

- **Check out our materials and downloadable artwork.** Your event is part of a nationwide campaign and we're here to help – so take advantage! Visit [www.underourskin.com/uos\\_press.html](http://www.underourskin.com/uos_press.html) to download customizable event flyers, production stills, email blasts, web banners, and other promo materials.
- **Nail down the details.** Confirm the exact time, location, venue, and ticketing/RSVP procedure before you send out notices to anyone. (If you're taking RSVPs, plan to accept 30% more RSVPs than you have room for and let late responders know you might be able to squeeze them in if people earlier on the list don't show.) And as a nod to your partner organizations, include a mention of them in all of your outreach.
- **Hit the inboxes.** The simplest thing you can do to promote your event is to create an email blast and send it out widely via listservs. We suggest you send out two email blasts: one at least two weeks before your event, and another as a reminder several days before. You can also create a Facebook event page and invite all your friends.
- **Get it on community calendars.** Try to get calendar listings in your city's weekly publication(s) and on the web. Newspaper websites and event sites like Flavorpill (which usually require 2 weeks' notice) can help you reach a broader audience. If you have a website of your own, make sure to post information about your event there, and ask any partner organizations to do the same.
- **Post flyers.** Use our *Under Our Skin* flyer templates to make your own flyers and post them in high traffic areas, such as college campuses, shopping malls, grocery stores, places of worship, and recreation centers. Make sure your flyers include information that might be a draw for your particular target audience, such as featured speakers, post-screening reception, appearance by one of the film's characters, etc.

- **Start the presses.** Ten days before your event, send a press release to local newspapers. (You can check out a full tutorial on news releases from the SPIN Project: <http://spinproject.org/article.php?id=115>) Again, since this is part of a large campaign, limit your press outreach to local newspapers only, and immediately notify [eve@openeyepictures.com](mailto:eve@openeyepictures.com) if any major press outlets contact you. Try to target reporters covering healthcare issues, and remember to customize your press release to highlight the film's relevance to local issues.

## FRAMING YOUR EVENT

- **Present a Speaker or Panel Discussion:** A speaker or panelists can help put the film in context, whether it's providing background information about Lyme disease or connecting the film's themes to what's happening in your community. It's always a good idea to have a range of perspectives represented – possible panelists might include a local Lyme patient, a doctor or nurse, an outdoor safety expert, or a science scholar. Partner organizations are great resources for potential panelists for the discussion, and they'll be even more eager to promote the event if they're being represented. See the next section for more detailed tips on how to run a successful panel discussion and audience Q&A.
- **Present Your Work:** Save some time after the screening for you and/or your co-sponsors to give a brief presentation about the work you do, and how audience members can support it. You and your partner organizations can also display literature outside of your screening venue so that audiences can learn more about your work. And there's nothing wrong with making a funding pitch at the event, especially if your audience includes potential big-time donors.
- **Distribute Materials and Resources:** Present audience members with fact sheets, flyers about upcoming events, and other relevant materials. Open Eye Pictures also has created a limited number of Take Action brochures and postcards for distribution at events. So contact us and we'll send you a batch, as long as supplies last. Open Eye Pictures also offers for wholesale purchase awareness bracelets and bumper stickers, which can be resold or distributed at your event.
- **Host a Reception:** A public post-screening meet-and-greet will allow opportunities for networking and continued discussion after the screening. Or, host a VIP reception with local leaders, policymakers, and funders. Whichever way you decide to go, refreshments are always a good idea!
- **Highlight Your Organization's Advocacy Efforts.** Consider what themes in the film can be linked to your existing advocacy efforts. Whether your organization is devoted to issues of patient advocacy, healthcare policy, or climate change, think of ways to use the film as a springboard to highlight those issues and provide concrete action steps for audience members.
- **Suggest Further Outlets for Action:** Offer audience members concrete ways they can get involved and support your and your partner organizations' work. These might include visiting your website to find out about upcoming events, volunteering,

becoming a member, making a donation, etc. See the Take Action brochure for additional ideas.

- **Stay In Touch!** Have a system for collecting email addresses at your event, and follow up with audience members and co-sponsor organizations in the days after. You've worked too hard to let those relationships disappear!

## TIPS FOR POST-SCREENING DISCUSSION

A film like *Under Our Skin* can raise a range of emotions, questions and/or concerns from the audience, and we recommend you address this with a post-screening panel discussion, Q&A, and/or facilitated dialogue. Below are some tips and ideas for having a productive conversation no matter what your format:

### Panel Discussion

- The themes of your panel discussion will vary depending on your event objectives, but it's always a good idea to have a range of perspectives represented on the panel. At the very least consider having one Lyme patient and one Lyme expert. A speaking engagement by the filmmaker can also be arranged; contact us at [info@openeyepictures.com](mailto:info@openeyepictures.com) to check on availability
- Make sure your panelists get a chance to see the film – or at the very least, clips from [www.underourskin.com](http://www.underourskin.com) – prior to your event.
- Give your panelists an idea of who will be in the audience, so they can tailor the discussion to the audience's needs. For example, if you anticipate a general audience, ask panelists to tone down any sector-specific jargon.
- If you can, have an experienced moderator present to keep time and prompt the speakers with questions.
- Even if you don't have a moderator, you can have a productive conversation by just prompting your speakers to reflect on the film, offer their own perspective, and supplement that with personal stories.
- A good length for a panel discussion is usually about 20-30 minutes, depending on how many panelists you have. After that, it's always a good idea to open it up to questions from the audience (because there will likely be many!).
- If you'll be in a large auditorium or theatre, make sure there are microphones.

### Q&A

- Leave as much time as possible for audience questions.
- You might even consider prompting the audience with a question first: "What jumped out at you in the film?"
- Given the subject matter of the film, some audience members may be compelled to give long accounts of their personal experiences. If their comments exceed a minute or two, respectfully thank them and ask them if they have a question for the panelists.
- If your group is large, you may consider either passing around a couple microphones for those who have questions, or simply setting up mics in the aisles and having people line up to ask questions.

- A good Q&A lasts around 30-45 minutes. If your audience seems like they still want to talk after the time is up, invite them into the lobby or a nearby restaurant or café to continue the conversation.

### **Facilitated Dialogue**

- If your group is small enough (under 20 people) it might be a good idea to do a facilitated dialogue, where all participants have an opportunity to share their feelings and experiences.
- Even with a large group, if your space permits, you may want to break into small groups for dialogue. (And if you have only one facilitator, s/he can float among the different groups.)
- Always start the dialogue by asking the group to share their immediate reactions to the film, i.e., what surprised them or particularly moved them.
- For additional discussion suggestions, please see the *Under Our Skin* Discussion Guide, which is available with purchase of the DVD.
- Be prepared for potential criticism. Although it is a very small possibility, you must be ready in case the film or speakers come under scrutiny. For example, there may be audience members who doubt or deny the science behind chronic Lyme disease. A neutral moderator can help make sure that the conversation remains productive and many perspectives are heard. In a case like this, guide any comments or concerns to a positive end that applauds the benefits of sharing information in an open forum. Encourage critical audience members to think about how the film might be a helpful way to address the tensions that they are feeling.

## **PLANNING CHECKLIST**

### **Preliminary planning – 6-8 weeks prior**

- Book the venue and date for your screening.
- Recruit local partner organizations to broaden your reach, and help identify roles for each one – such as publicity, panelist coordination, and reception planning
- Determine speakers, panelists, and moderator (if applicable).
- Forward the details of your event to [info@openeyepictures.com](mailto:info@openeyepictures.com) so we can help advertise your event on our website.

### **Communication with Open Eye Pictures – 4-6 weeks prior**

- Confirm the appropriate format for your screening and purchase the “Community Group” educational DVD at our online store: [www.underourskin.com/store\\_education.html](http://www.underourskin.com/store_education.html). This version includes public performance rights and a comprehensive discussion guide. (The movie is also available in 35mm and other formats. Contact [info@openeyepictures.com](mailto:info@openeyepictures.com) if you are interested in these other screening formats.)
- You may also want to purchase from the online store awareness bracelets and bumper stickers, which you can re-sell or hand out at your event.

- If you would like to sell DVDs at your event (there is always demand), ask Open Eye Pictures to provide them for you (one out of five audience members will usually purchase). Your group keeps 15% of sales and submits the rest, plus unsold DVDs, to Open Eye Pictures.
- The film's director, Andy Abrahams Wilson, is available for speaking engagements. If you are interested, inquire with us about relevant fees.

### **Logistical planning and initial outreach – 3-4 weeks prior**

- Create a flyer to publicize your screening (use template provided on [www.underourskin.com/gallery.html](http://www.underourskin.com/gallery.html))
- Secure food for reception (if applicable).
- Draft event agenda and vet with partner organizations.

### **More logistical planning – 2 weeks prior**

- Create an email blast to publicize your event electronically.
- Contact community calendars about your event.

### **Media outreach – 10 days prior**

- Send out press releases to local newspapers. *(Remember to notify [info@openeyepictures.com](mailto:info@openeyepictures.com) if any major media outlets contact you directly.)*

### **Final planning – several days prior**

- Important:** Test screen your format version of the film in advance of the event to make sure there aren't any glitches.
- Send second round of email blasts as a reminder.
- Follow up with press who expressed an interest in covering the story.
- Finalize event agenda.
- Make copies of handouts to distribute at the event (if applicable).

### **At the event itself**

- Take photos (and feel free to share them with us at Open Eye Pictures)!
- As people arrive, ask them to sign up to receive updates from your organization.
- Have a timekeeper so that panelists/speakers remain within their assigned speaking time.
- Announce a call to action or have materials available for attendees to follow up.
- Let audience members know that they can learn more about the film at [www.underourskin.com](http://www.underourskin.com), and that the DVD is available for purchase – either at your event or online. Also tell them to join the *Under Our Skin* Facebook page, which is becoming a wonderful resource to stay updated and connected: [www.facebook.com/underourskin](http://www.facebook.com/underourskin)

Thank you for your interest in *Under Our Skin*! If you have any additional questions, comments, or suggestions, please contact us at [info@openeyepictures.com](mailto:info@openeyepictures.com).