



Unrest: Best Practices for Hosting a Community Screening

This guide will provide you with ideas for hosting your own impactful screening of *Unrest* that will be well-attended, well-publicized and garner support from important institutions in your community for Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME).

Community screenings of *Unrest* have taken place all over the globe. While all successful events can look differently, below is an example of what we consider best practices for a large-scale community event.

As an example of a highly successful *Unrest* screening, we'll look to the Boston event organized at the historic Regent Theatre on Nov. 12, 2017. The event was packed with 358 people attending. A panel discussion followed the film, moderated by a local National Public Radio (NPR) station senior correspondent and host. The organizers solicited the support of stakeholders in the community, resulting in 19 co-sponsors from government, healthcare, disability, arts, academic, religious and women's organizations. For most of these organizations, this was the first time they worked on an ME advocacy effort, and the first time they publicly declared their support for people with ME.

For this event, the Boston advocates were also able to secure a statement from the entire 11 member Massachusetts Congressional Delegation vowing support for ME patients, which was made public for the first time, and read aloud, during the *Unrest* screening event.

Watch the opening introduction and panel discussion from the Boston Regent screening of *Unrest* [here](#). See photos [here](#).

The [Massachusetts CFIDS/ME & FM Association](#) organized the Boston Regent *Unrest* screening, with #MEAction member and MassCFIDS volunteer Rivka Solomon spearheading the effort with her co-organizer Leah Williams. (Follow Rivka on Twitter: @RivkaTweets)



Table of Contents

1. [Build your Team](#)
2. [Find a Venue](#)
3. [Identify Community Allies](#)
4. [Invite Healthcare Professionals](#)
5. [Create the Program](#)
6. [Get the Word Out](#)
7. [Leverage the Film for Political Gain](#)

Resources

- Sample pitch to ask your local cinema to host the screening [here](#).
- Sample outreach email for your community screening [here](#).
- Boston's email [pitch](#) inviting groups to co-sponsor the screening.
- Boston's email [pitch](#) inviting healthcare professionals to the screening.

- Boston's email [pitch](#) to media and press release.
- Boston's email [pitch](#) to local community media stations.
- Boston's email [pitch](#) inviting members of congress to support the screening.

1. Build your Team

Work with a local organization to support your effort. Identify other people with ME, advocates and caregivers in your community to help you organize the community screening.

For the Boston Regent screening, Rivka Solomon already had some contacts in the larger (non-ME) community through her previous advocacy work with local women's organizations. Consider finding someone who can provide those contacts in your community.

The Boston organizers had two donors who provided 100 tickets for healthcare professionals to attend the film free of charge -- a wonderful incentive to attract the medical community to see the film. Announcing these free tickets also helps your PR efforts as you reach out to healthcare institutions, such as hospitals, asking them to publicize your event in their newsletters.

- Find a local advocacy organization for ME [here](#) or [here](#).
 - Our #MEAction Community Organizer, Ben Hsuborger, can help put you in touch with other advocates for ME in your area. Email ben@meaction.net. He is also available to discuss strategy via phone. Set up an appointment with him [here](#).
 - Contact the Unrest [team](#) for questions about hosting a screening.
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Notes from the Boston Regent screening

Event co-organizer Rivka Solomon talks about how they were able to find philanthropists to sponsor 100 tickets that they then gave away to healthcare professionals.

Like most ME patients, I do not have a lot of spare money, and I don't know anyone who does -- or so I thought. But then I suddenly thought of two women connected to ME who just might have a bit of money, at least enough that they'd want to donate to educate the Boston healthcare community about ME. And so I just called them up to ask, and lo and behold they did want to help. I made the pitch enticing and exciting, making it sound like an exciting opportunity (which it was!). One sponsor - a patient - gave \$600 and the other, a loving family member of a patient, gave \$500 to help underwrite the tickets for 100+ healthcare professionals. I actually knew both these women from discussing treatments and doctors with them. So I had a relationship with them. I explained that if we could educate Boston healthcare professionals, it would have an impact not only in our Boston area but also around the country because Boston has so many teaching hospitals. Boston is a mecca for the medical world.

I also asked all the co-sponsoring organizations to donate, if they could. It was on our menu of options for how they could help the event. However, only one did, and it was for \$100. Separately, a personal friend gave \$300. So we got a total of \$1,500 donated. That essentially covered the cost of the theater rental.

Of course, having Massachusetts CFIDS/ME & FM as the organizer and host was key to the success of this event. They knew this *Unrest* screening was a huge opportunity to raise awareness about ME. So they were ready to lose money on the event, if necessary. This freed us up to take some risks, such as renting the large theater.

2. Find a Venue

Consider where you will host your screening of *Unrest*. Is there a historic site, landmark theater or other community-oriented venue in your area that would be open to showing such an important film? For the Boston event, showing the film at the historic Regent Theatre provided validation of the significance of the film, as well as a festive, memorable atmosphere for attendees.

Send out feelers *now* to all possible venues. (Find contact information on the venue's website.) Dream big and get creative. *Unrest* has played at significant venues across the

world, including at the House of Commons in London, the historic Hotel del Coronado in California, the Picturehouse Central in London, the University of Kent, the Square Chapel Arts Centre - the list goes on. You may want to mention the fact that Unrest has played at such impressive venues in your own pitch for a location. But don't forget that a fancy venue is not necessary: You can also have a highly successful *Unrest* event at a local library, hospital, high school or community center.

If your local cinema needs to be convinced about the significance of the film, there are countless news [articles](#) about the film that you can share. Also:

- [The New York Times](#)
- [LA Times](#)
- [Cosmopolitan](#)
- [The Guardian](#)
- [The Telegraph](#)

See "Sample Pitch for Local Cinemas" [here](#).



Unrest playing at the historic Vogue theater in San Francisco in Oct., 2017.

3. Identify Community Allies

Inviting members of the community to a screening of *Unrest* is an ideal way to introduce ME to people in a way that is social, interactive, non-confrontational and fun. The event brings together leaders in the community for whom it is important to be seen at philanthropic or social justice functions. And the event serves as a positive and memorable association to people with ME.

Reach out to your local government, healthcare, disability, arts, academic, religious and women's organizations. The Boston organizers were able to secure 19 such co-sponsors - many of whom then advertised the *Unrest* screening to their network through their social media channels, newsletters and emails.

Getting a local government institution to co-sponsor the event will really help in your PR efforts. It legitimizes your event. In Boston, the event co-organizers got the Massachusetts Department of Public Health to co-sponsor in part because the Massachusetts CFIDS/ME & FM Association had already held a prior meeting with the department half-a-year earlier, so a relationship had already been established.

“It has been especially helpful to have the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the Division of Women’s Health at Brigham and Women’s Hospital as co-sponsors,” explained Boston event co-organizer, Rivka Solomon. “Mentioning their names gave Boston hospitals a reason to help us get the word out about our free tickets for healthcare professionals.”

Thanks to their co-sponsorship and to the free tickets being offered to healthcare professionals, Massachusetts General Hospital, a well-respected healthcare institution in Boston, announced the film in their “Perks” newsletter which goes to 30,000 employees. Brigham and Women’s Hospital did the same and thus advertised the film screening to its 14,000 employees. The Spaulding Rehab hospital told their 4,000 staffers.

As always, it is ideal if you already have contacts to people in the community. If you don’t have these connections yourself, think about friends, family members, colleagues, neighbors who might be able to make that introduction for you.

See “Sample Outreach Email for your Community Screening” [here](#). Here is a [two-pager](#) that provides information about Unrest. Here is the [email](#) Boston used to invite groups to co-sponsor their event.



UNREST

The Massachusetts CFIDS/ME & FM Association welcomes you to a screening of UNREST, followed by a panel discussion

We are grateful to our event co-sponsors and panel moderator

■ **Co-sponsors** include these government, healthcare, disability, ME/CFS, religious, arts, academic and women's organizations:

- MA Dept. of Public Health
- Division of Women's Health at Brigham and Women's Hospital
- Disability Law Center
- Cambridge Women's Commission
- Arlington Disability Commission
- Disability Policy Consortium
- Our Bodies Ourselves
- American ME and CFS Society
- Cambridge Women's Center
- MEAction
- Hadassah Northeast
- ReelAbilities Film Festival Boston
- Old Schwamb Mill Museum
- Boston Univ. Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies Program
- Opening Doors to the Arts
- Boston Women's Fund
- Mass NOW
- Boston Int'l Film Festival
- Arlington Int'l Film Festival

■ **Panel moderator**

- Deborah Becker, Senior Correspondent and Host at WBUR

Notes from the Boston Regent screening

Rivka Solomon talks about how Boston got 19 organizations to co-sponsor the event, and why that was important.

I had a few connections to organizations, but much of the solicitation for support was done via cold calls and cold emails.

I used to organize women's empowerment events and plays, and twice I produced my women's empowerment play in Boston. It was from those experiences that I learned how to use co-sponsors. At that time, I knew that if I had co-sponsors for my play I'd reach a lot more people than if I tried to do the outreach all on my own. Especially if I got each co-sponsor to let their email list know about our play. At that time, I got something like 15 women's and girls' organizations to co-sponsor the production of my play, and it was a huge success. They all emailed their members and gave away free tickets to our play (we gave them the tickets). A number of nights we had sold-out crowds.

This time around, for our ME event, when I pitched organizations to get co-sponsors, I knew I wanted to reach out to disability and women's organizations, as they are our natural allies. Some of the women's organizations I already knew from my past work. But since it

was 10 years ago that I did my women's play in Boston, many of the people I knew were no longer there. But that did not concern me. I am not afraid to use cold calls and emails. What I often lack is energy to make these calls, not the chutzpah required to make them.

Also, just recently I have been using the fact that 75 percent of people with this disease are women to secure support from women's groups, such as Ms. magazine (I had an article published on [Ms magazine.com](https://www.msmagazine.com)), and NOW, the National Organization for Women. (A few of us had worked with NOW previously to write a letter to Congress and to raise awareness about this disease [through their NOW membership](#)). So it made sense to invite Boston women's organizations. And I could use the fact that they had worked with me in the past to secure their interest now in our ME event.

Also, I used the fact that ME is a disability issue. Women's organizations are trying hard to be diverse and inclusive, and so framing ME as a disability issue helped cement their interest.

Reaching out to Jewish groups was a no brainer, because I'm Jewish and there are two Jewish women's organizations in Boston that once honored me. So I leveraged that award from 15 years ago to ask them if they wanted to co-sponsor this event. One of those organizations couldn't act as a co-sponsor because they were promoting their own events at that time. But they still wanted to help, so they offered me a [blog post](#), which I used both to appeal to Jewish women and promote the event. In fact a lot of organizations were in this same position and were not able to co-sponsor. So in the end, many organizations that did not officially co-sponsor still sent their members information about our event, or put it in their newsletters and on social media.

For the past year, I had already been wanting to reach out to Hadassah, the largest Jewish women's organization in the country and one of the organizations that had honored me 15 years earlier, to let them know about ME. So I took the opportunity now, and I called them and emailed them cold. When they did get on board with co-sponsoring the screening, they added our event to their newsletter, which went to 5,000 women in New England.

Some of our co-sponsors did things like this, and were a great help. Other co-sponsors were helpful only in adding their name to our list of co-sponsors, but they did nothing else. Still, simply having their name as a co-sponsor added legitimacy to our cause.

It helped that we also offered each co-sponsor 10 free tickets to the event. However, in the end most did not take us up on this offer, which is too bad.

How you craft the initial email pitch asking a group to co-sponsor is key. You have to tailor the email to each group a bit differently, so that your message and your "ask" fits their mission.

For my cold calls, I simply used the same info that you see in my cold emails. But you should not robotically read from a script when you cold pitch. Or, if you do, find a way to still make it sound warm, genuine and inviting.

The thing is, Unrest is so easy to pitch. It is like you say one great thing after another about this movie and there is no way the group you are pitching to will not be interested. I always mentioned the Sundance and Boston Globe (GlobeDocs) film festival awards; the list of amazing press attention the film got; and the local Boston celebrity (Henry Louis Gates, Jr.) who introduced the film at the Massachusetts premier of Unrest a few months earlier. All these exciting things capture the interest of those you are pitching to. It is also key that you share the names of the co-sponsors you already have. Just stating the names of other organizations proves that your event is legitimate. Much of pitching ME is about establishing our legitimacy. Establishing the film and ME's legitimacy is, in fact, the key to pitching.

The co-sponsors for the Boston Regent screening of Unrest included:

- Massachusetts Department of Public Health
- Division of Women's Health at Brigham & Women's Hospital
- Disability Law Center
- Cambridge Women's Commission
- Arlington Disability Commission
- Disability Policy Consortium
- Our Bodies Ourselves
- American ME and CFS Society
- Cambridge Women's Center
- #MEAction
- Hadassah Northeast
- ReelAbilities Film Festival Boston
- Old Schwamb Mill Museum
- Boston Univ. Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies Program
- Opening Doors to the Arts
- Boston Women's Fund
- Mass NOW
- Boston Int'l Film Festival

- Arlington Int'l Film Festival

4. Invite Healthcare Professionals

Notes from the Boston Regent screening

Event co-organizer Rivka Solomon talks about reaching out to the medical community to invite them to the screening of Unrest.

We were lucky to have a few part-time, yet steadfast, volunteers help with outreach to the medical community and healthcare professionals. First, we made a spreadsheet of all the area hospitals and healthcare institutions we wanted to reach out to, and even listed which specific departments we wanted to target, such as Neurology, Immunology and Infectious Disease. Then we called and emailed all the gatekeepers of those departments (the administrative assistants). Sometimes we hit a jackpot, and a secretary would agree to forward our information to all the people in their office or department.

But when contacting the gatekeeper did not yield results, we did not hesitate to look up individual doctors on the department websites. For example, we sent our email invite to the event to all the doctors in the Neurology Department of a key teaching hospital in Boston. We asked everyone to please forward our announcement for free tickets to their department colleagues and listservs. When we discovered that hospital Public Affairs or Communications Departments could help get our event listed in an institution-wide newsletter, we made a concerted effort to reach out to the heads of those departments. That was a real success. Our free ticket offer easily fit in with the so-called Perks newsletters of major hospitals, thereby giving us great free publicity.

See Boston's [pitch](#) to invite healthcare professionals to the screening.

5. Create the Program

- Find the Panelists & Moderator

Build the program around your film screening to turn it into an event. For example, can you get a community leader or elected official -- someone who is an audience draw -- to introduce the film? Are you able to create a panel to foster discussion following the film?

The film is emotionally intense and full of important issues that need unpacking. Are there medical experts, researchers, advocates, patients and caregivers who can speak to the issues surrounding ME? How about the head of an ME advocacy organization in your community? Another idea is to go outside the ME community and get a non-ME person to MC the event, someone who has a good stage presence and would be an audience draw.

Be sure to leave time for a Q&A (at least 30 minutes is best), to give people in the audience the opportunity to share their experiences and ask questions. At the Boston Regent screening, a senior correspondent and host from the local NPR station moderated the panel, lending even more credibility to the afternoon event.

- Get in touch with the #MEAction community to see if there is a researcher, advocate or medical professional who would be right to speak on your panel. Contact ben@meaction.net for assistance.
- A representative from the [Open Medicine Foundation](#) or the [Solve ME/CFS Initiative](#) may be willing to travel to your community for the screening.

- Prepare for the Event

Read the Unrest film discussion [guide](#) to prepare for the panel discussion.

- Film the Event

Videotape the introduction and panel discussion. Upload your video to #MEAction's Youtube page. (Email editor@meaction.net) Send your video to the local cable TV stations. (*See Boston's pitch to local community media stations [here.](#)*)

- Collect Email Addresses

Pass around a sign-up sheet for people who are interested in learning more about *Unrest* and even hosting their own screening of the film. Sign people up for the #MEAction newsletter. See if folks are interested in starting a local advocacy group using the conference call and communication tools provided by #MEAction. (Email info@meaction.net for more information).



The panel discussion during the Boston Regent screening

6. Get the Word Out

Invite local journalists. This is an ideal opportunity to educate your newspapers and bloggers about the compelling story of this disease. When you contact these journalists now about your ME event, you are actually building a relationship with them that you will be able to use in the future. Also, once a relationship is established, these journalists may contact you when future issues arise about ME. This is how people with ME will begin to control the narrative around ME. (See Boston's press release [here](#).)

1. **Contact Local Journalists.** Once you have a journalist's attention, direct them to the media [resources](#) the Unrest team has already prepared, such as the *Unrest* [press kit](#) that goes into detail about the film.
2. **Promote on Social Media.** Use Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to advertise your film screening. Create an EventBrite or Facebook event, like the one below, so that people can RSVP and share the event with their own followers. Request for *Unrest* to be a co-host so it can be listed on the *Unrest* Facebook Events Page. (Don't forget to use the hashtag #timeforunrest with all of your social media posts.)


Find photos of the Unrest poster [here](#).



3. **Advertise your Screening on #MEAction.** Let us know about your event so that we can advertise it through our social media channels. We can also email #MEAction members from your community about the screening. Contact us at editor@meaction.net.
4. **Ask Others to Spread the Word.** Get the snowball rolling; ask people in your network to spread the word about your community screening. Ask folks to share your Facebook event. Don't forget to ask your co-sponsors to share it a few times.

Alternatively, the *Unrest* film team has already created social media “tiles” that are informative and colorful that folks can share directly from their Facebook or Twitter accounts. Below is an example of a social media tile.

Find *Unrest* social media “tiles” [here](#).



NOW PLAYING IN BELFAST
QUEENS FILM THEATRE
Saturday 11th November at 15:30
Sunday 12th November at 15:30

Unrest Queen's Film Theatre Belfast
Join us for the #Belfast premiere of UNREST on 11th & 12th November at Queen's Film Theatre! Get your tickets and see the film on the big screen: <https://queensfilmtheatre.com/Whats-On/Unrest>

f Post to timeline

5. **Prepare for the Press Interview.** Speaking to the press is anxiety-provoking. You may find yourself rambling or forgetting important facts. Assign a point person for the event who will deal with the press and manage interviews. That person should be well-versed in the facts on ME in order to gain credibility with the journalist.

Review our [guide](#) on “How to Talk to the Press.”

6. Leverage the Film for Political Gain

The Boston advocates were also able to secure a statement from the entire 11 member Massachusetts Congressional Delegation declaring support for ME patients, which was read at the start of the *Unrest* screening.



Event co-organizer Rivka Solomon speaking at the Boston Regent screening of Unrest

Event co-organizer Rivka Solomon talks about the process:

This joint statement from the Massachusetts congressional delegation came about directly due to the film screening. First, we invited a number of Massachusetts elected officials to come to the event and give opening remarks. None were able to attend due to scheduling conflicts. (Lesson learned: Never hold your event on a three day weekend. Lots of people are out of town.)

After they said no, I tried the next best thing: I asked three of them, the ones I was already working with on Capitol Hill on ME issues (Sen. Warren, Sen. Markey and Congressman McGovern) to offer a statement of support for ME patients that we could read aloud at the event. This is not an uncommon "ask" of an elected official. So I asked. (Always ask. There is no harm in asking. And you may just get what you want.)

Well, a week later all three came back saying they had crafted a joint statement of support. I was floored -- and thrilled. And being the organizer that I am, I thought, "How can I leverage this to make it even bigger?" (Essentially, that is what I thought each time we got any new success.) Well, that was easy: I could try to expand it to the entire Massachusetts congressional delegation. I got permission from the staffers in Warren, Markey, and McGovern's offices to do just that, and then I crafted a good email (never underestimate the power of a good email that is both informative and full of successes -- a list of successes makes people want to join in). And then I sent that [email](#) to the rest of the Massachusetts congressional delegation. I stressed that Warren, Markey and McGovern were already supporting our efforts. That was key, as Warren and Markey are the leaders of the

Massachusetts delegation, and McGovern is very well respected, too, by the entire delegation.

I followed that email up with phone calls and messages with the elected officials' front desk staff and also voicemail pitches (I use voicemail pitches a lot). That began a week of many phone calls and emails to the whole 11 member Massachusetts congressional delegation asking them to sign on to this joint statement. One at a time, they did. With each one that signed on, I sent a new email to all of them updating them to the fact that another in the delegation had signed on. That created momentum.

It was a lot of work. And we did it with only 15 minutes to spare; 15 minutes before Congress went away on the long holiday weekend (the same weekend on which our event was held). At, literally, the final hour, we got the last of the 11 members to sign on to the joint statement of support for ME patients.

During this effort, I had a few first-time phone calls with some of these Capitol Hill staffers, but most of them just got my emails and voicemail pitches. It did not matter if I spoke with them or not, because in the end they all learned about ME from one route or another (via email, voicemail or a phone meeting).

The great thing about this action is that it sets up us Capitol Hill advocates to return to each of these congressional offices in the very near future and have a real meeting to fully introduce them to ME. And it sets us up for future actions that we hope the whole Massachusetts congressional delegation will support.

If you are planning to reach out to your representative, let them know how many people suffer with ME in their district using our prevalence [spreadsheet](#).

8. Celebrate!

When everything is done, including all the post-event tasks (such as contacting those on your sign up sheet and uploading the video of your panel to YouTube), take the time to feel proud of what you have accomplished. Being an ME advocate can be hard work, and you need to take time to celebrate the successes.

