



Sky 539 : Virgin TV 233 : Freeview 87



Filmmakers FAQ

What is the Community Channel?

The Community Channel is a not-for-profit TV channel. It broadcasts for 24 hours every day, on Sky digital channel 539, Virgin TV 233. We also have a morning slot on Freeview 87 from 6am - 9am.

What do I get if I let you show my film?

We offer an opportunity for UK-wide television broadcast which would be impossible to negotiate with a mainstream broadcaster. You get an on-screen credit and recognition for your work.

What do you get out of it?

You offer an interesting film, with a voice from your community. We exist to encourage our viewers to do more with their lives - become volunteers or take an active role in their communities. Your film can inspire a desire to act, and our website and telephone line are ready to help viewers make contact with an organisation they want to help. Any promotional activity you do to tell people your film is on helps us build our profile and therefore gives you a bigger audience for your film. There are hundreds of channels fighting for viewers. We believe that any grassroots promotion you can generate could help us increase awareness of our channel.

What are your viewing figures?

The Community Channel is available in 13 million homes to 36 million people. BARB research (the TV industry Gold Standard) shows that approximately 1.3 million people tune in every month. As well as television viewers, every week there are 10,000 individual responses to the Channel through the website, telephone lines and email.

Can you give me money for my film?

No we can't - usually. We have very little money to run the Channel. In exceptional circumstances we can contribute towards production costs. We use our funding to pay for running the Channel for all charities and film-makers.

I'm making a film - what about Health and Safety?

No film is worth an injury. Making films can be exciting, but it is risky. You can get H&S training cheaply - take a look at the Skillset website (www.skillset.org). Please make sure you work safely. Don't take risks. Always get the right equipment. If permission to

film somewhere depends on you obeying H&S rules, do it. Hard hats look cool, and they'll stop you going to hospital.

I've made a film - can you show it?

Send a VHS tape/DVD of your film to **Acquisitions Department, 3-7 Euston Centre, Regents Place, London NW1 3JG**. Please mark your tape with your name and address. If you want your tape back, please send a stamped, self-addressed envelope as well. When you send in your film, please supply some basic information. You can download a Basic Information Form from the website. If your film meets our quality standards we will ask you for more information. We'll ask you to fill in a Programme Delivery Form. You can get a blank one of these, and a filled in example, from the website. There's no point filling this in unless we want to show your film, but it might help to take a look so you know what information you will need to supply.

When will my film go out?

Our scheduling and acquisitions people will agree a plan for the first few weeks of transmission. After that, it depends on the rights agreement you have made with us. The further in advance you deliver your film, the easier it is for us to schedule and let you know TX times.

What duration should my film be?

If you are making your film for us, it must fit into one of our slots. These are either 5, 15, 30, 45 or 60 minutes long. The actual film is of course shorter than the slot to allow for adverts. Here's how the slot lengths translate into running times:

SLOT	AD BREAK	PARTS	DURATION
15'	0	0	11'-13'
30'	1	2	23'-26'
30'	0	0	24'-28'
60'	3	4	48'-52'

If you have already made your film, you need to give us an accurate duration, and the right number of parts so we can put it into the right slot. This is extremely important. If you give us an inaccurate duration, we will calculate an inaccurate slot, and this means that we will drop your film if it overlaps someone else's slot.

Just so you're clear – if you make a promise that your programme will run to a certain duration, you **MUST** keep that promise. If your programme does not stick to the promised duration we will not transmit it.

What would you like me to put in my film?

We don't want to limit you. The story is the most important thing.

We like films to make sense. This means that they take viewers from one end to the other without confusing them. A good introduction to making television programmes is a book called "On Camera" by Harris Watts.

When you watch your film back, ask yourself if someone who had no idea about the subject would understand it. Some TV professionals show their rough edits to friends and family (with no explanation) to see if anything in the film isn't clear.

Documentaries must be true. We will need some kind of fact checking for every assertion. Interviewees generally tell their stories from their own points of view, but any facts in voice over must be backed up by evidence.

The look and sound of the film are also very important.

Try to make your film look nice. Use colours where you can. Try and get a bit of perspective in by using angles and lines.

Get a book about stills photography. They usually have more advice and ideas about nice pictures than the video books.

Please try and keep any text on screen as simple as possible - strange fonts and bright colours rarely look good on TV. Also try to avoid fancy transitions - page turns, clock wipes, and the like are fun to make but they can make your film look cheap. Stick to cuts and mixes like most TV professionals.

When you're making voice-over, get someone with a good voice. Be honest with yourself – if your voice sounds bad, use someone else. Ask your friends for some honest feedback.

Are there any rules about what I can put in my film?

Ofcom is the body which regulates the TV industry (apart from the BBC which is regulated by its Board of Governors). Ofcom is there to make sure that all broadcasters (except for the BBC which has a separate system) stick to the rules.

If you're serious about getting your films on any channel, you must get the Ofcom regulations and study them. You can download them from the Internet at www.ofcom.org.uk. You're looking for the Broadcasting Code and the associated Guidance.

It helps to bear two things in mind when you read the Ofcom rules. Firstly, they are trying to summarise the personal feelings of 54 million Britons about what should be on TV. You may not agree with it all, but TV is a mass medium.

The second thing is that the Ofcom rules try to ensure that when people watch TV they know what they're watching. On one level this means that there is a distinction between adverts and programming, for example. But on another level this means that if a broadcaster transmits a programme with strong language, it goes out in a way which give viewers a chance to watch something else.

There are some areas of the Ofcom rules which it's worth mentioning now:

Watershed

The watershed starts at 9pm, so before that time all programmes must be free from adult language, violence, sexual content and so on. After 9pm, programmes can be increasingly more adult, within the guidelines, until 5.30am the next day. If your programme is scheduled to start before 9pm, but it will continue after 9pm, the whole programme is considered to be pre-watershed.

Impartiality

When we show programmes about controversial matters, we are part of the national

debate on the issue. We have a duty to represent as much of this debate as we can, and not take sides.

What this means for you is that if you make a programme about current public policy, industrial relations or political controversy, you must make sure the film includes other points of view.

If your film only takes one side in a big national debate, we may need to show it in a slot or a series with other programmes and this may delay transmission.

Undue prominence

This is what is going on in programmes when every bottle or packet is turned away from the camera or has black tape over its name. Basically, make sure you don't over-feature any brand, and definitely don't take money or favours in return for featuring a brand in your film.

It is not acceptable to take payment from any person or organisation in return for featuring their product in your programme.

Sponsorship

This is when a company contributes towards the production costs of your film in return for appearing on television. Within the rules, this can be a useful way to raise production funds. However the rules are strict. If you are planning to raise money through sponsorship, you must read the Ofcom rules, and if you want us to show your film you must talk to us first.

The rules prohibit a sponsor from appearing in your film, and they limit the amount and placing of "sponsor credits" at the beginning and end of your film. There are also rules about what the credits can say, and on what kinds of organisation can sponsor programmes. It's not a straightforward area but we are here to help.

Will I still own my film if it's shown on the Channel?

We don't take ownership of any rights in your film. We will ask you to sign an agreement which gives us a licence to broadcast the film on the Community Channel, and to use it to promote its broadcast and promote the channel in general.

How can I raise money to make my film?

We realise that complying with our guidelines might make a film cost more than a one which is not going to be broadcast. We want to help, but our resources are limited.

Community Channel does not have a commissioning fund - we do not pay towards the production costs of films. We will cover the costs of getting a master tape copied and delivered to us, but if you're applying for funding for a future production we'd expect you to include this cost in your budget.

We should point out that a little pragmatism and planning will help. If you want to use commercial music in your film, approach the musician or publisher well in advance and get an agreement in writing. Make sure you approach other sources too - you only want one artist to say "yes it's free" and you've saved some money.

We hope that film-makers will realise that a guaranteed broadcast on Community Channel is a good way for them to raise extra funding either in cash or in kind.

Also, a film produced to the standard we require will have a value. If you make a film about a charity, you might find the people who run it will help you cover the cost of music copyright if you allow them to use the film themselves. They could even promote the broadcasts on Community Channel, and raise their charity's profile.

A letter of interest means we agree to broadcast the finished film. But we reserve the right not to broadcast it if it doesn't comply with Ofcom editorial and technical regulations, if it differs substantially from the original proposal or is not up to the required quality standards of the Channel.

Where else can I go for advice?

There are lots of organisations, and books, which will give you advice on making films. In fact there are far too many to list here. A good book about making TV programmes is "On Camera" by Harris Watts. A good website for links to all manner of film resources is the British Film Institute www.bfi.org.uk.

What's all this paperwork for?

We try to keep the paperwork to a minimum, but it's hard to run a TV channel without a few forms. Anyone who has delivered a programme to a terrestrial broadcaster will tell you what a bureaucratic process it can be. Look at our paperwork as good practice - and do ask us for help filling it in.

When we show your film we are responsible for its content, so we need some paperwork to help us make sure we comply with the rules and the Law.

We are also responsible for any so-called "third party rights" which might be in your film. This means any part of your film you have not made yourself, like music, poetry, stills, video and so on. It's up to you to get permission to use these, and we have to check this which is why we need paperwork.

We also need to make sure that anyone who appears in your film knows what they've agreed to. You need to get any contributors or actors to sign a Consent Form. You can find some standard text at the end of the Delivery Form.

Finally, we have so many films in our system that we need paperwork for each one to make sure we don't lose them and that we get each one on air correctly.

Will I get my tape back?

Yes you will, as long as you write your name, address and the title of your film on it. It's amazing how many tapes arrive without this information and it's very hard to keep track of unlabelled tapes. Of course, if we pay to have your master copied, or copy it ourselves, we will own the tape and keep it in our library.

Should I contact you before I start making a film?

Yes please. We can offer advice. We can look through your script or treatment. If you tell us when your film will be finished we can plan to get it on air that week.

Does it matter if I don't make the deadline?

Yes it does! If you miss your deadline we have to fill the hole with other material. Even though we're not paying, we still have to plan ahead, so please don't miss deadlines and if you have an emergency let us know plenty of time ahead.

Does it matter if my film is longer or shorter than I promised?

Yes it does, it really does. Please don't break the slot rules. This causes us more headaches than anything else. If you've promised a certain duration, then stick to it, even if you have to make a special edit just for us.

What should I do about the people that appear in my film?

If people agree to be filmed, they need to know what the film will be used for, and they need to give permission for it. Imagine if you gave an interview about a medical problem for an charity's video, you thought it was for the charity's own use, and a year later you saw it on the Community Channel...

Some good news: Not everyone who appears in your film needs to give their permission in writing. General shots of people going about their business in a public place do not require permission. You only need to get permission from people who were directed during the making of the film. If you ask someone to do something they wouldn't otherwise have done you need to get them to sign a form for their 'performance'.

You should avoid shots which identify people in a negative or demeaning way, and any identifiable shots of children when you don't have permission from a parent or guardian. Also, some people don't like the feeling of being filmed. Respect this.

The Programme Delivery Form includes some standard text which you can use when creating release forms for adults.

If you want to film with children under 16, you will need permission from their parents. In school time you will need permission from the Local Authority. This takes ages. Also, you'll need to provide someone to look after the kids if their parents can't be there and this person needs to be checked out. Unless you have the time - steer clear.

What technical requirements do you have?

When preparing your film for delivery, you must stick to a suitable technical specification. You can download a detailed broadcast technical spec from the websites of Channel 4 and the BBC. If you adhere to either of these you will be OK. What follows is a summary of those specifications

Master tape

This should be on a decent quality preferably digital format (we accept DVCAM, MiniDV

or Digibeta, for example). A rule of thumb - deliver your film to us on a digital format which uses proper, frame accurate timecode. We do not accept films on DVD or CD-ROM.

There should be one film per tape, ideally with line-up bars and tone, and a countdown clock, before the film. Timecode must be continuous throughout the tape.

Each part should start on a clean minute in the timecode and be preceded by a 30 second countdown clock which cuts to black and silence 3 seconds before the start of the part.

A typical programme master tape could run as follows, for a two part half hour programme . Please note all timecodes must be frame accurate.

Timecode	Item
09:57:45:00	Top of tape - black and silence
09:58:00:00	100% bars and 1khz tone at -18db
09:59:30:00	Countdown clock with slate giving programme name, part number (where appropriate), and duration to the nearest second
09:59:57:00	Cut to black and silence
10:00:00:00	Programme part one
10:mm:ss:00	End of part one
10:13:30:00	Countdown clock with slate for part 2
10:13:57:00	Cut to black and silence
10:14:00:00	Programme part two
10:mm:ss:00	End of part two
	Black continues for 2 minutes after the end of the programme

The master should be accompanied by a typewritten log, listing what it contains, and giving frame accurate timecode references as above, for every part.

If you're sending in a number of short films, you can put them all on one tape, but you must put a clock and a caption before each film giving its name. Again, each film must start on a clean minute in the timecode. If you don't label everything clearly it make mistakes much more likely.

Aspect ratio

We are a widescreen channel. If you are technically capable of originating and delivering in widescreen, this is our preferred format.

Tops and tails

It's important that you get the top and tail of each part right so that your programme fits in with the other material on air. The maximum durations given below for title sequences and so on are just that - maximums. We expect producers to bring their programmes in well within these limits wherever possible.

The start of each part must be preceded by a countdown clock which cuts to black 3 seconds before the first pictures.

The first part should begin with some kind of opening introductory sequence, and generally this should last no more than 15 seconds.

The second and subsequent parts should begin with a 3 second "start of part" sequence. Audio must not begin until at least 12 frames in. This sequence should contain a caption or text giving the name of the programme, but not a part number.

Every part except the last must end with a 3 second "end of part" sequence or picture freeze giving the name of the programme but not the part number. Audio must not extend beyond the 3 second limit or it will be clipped on air. Pictures must continue for at least 5 seconds beyond the 3 second limit, but this additional video material must not be included in your programme running time. Give the out timecode for the part at the end of the 3 second sequence.

The last part must end with a credit sequence followed by the copyright slides for the programme. The credit sequence can be over pictures or black. We impose limits on the duration of credit sequences. These are related to the slot duration of the programme. See elsewhere in this document to work out your slot duration.

Slot length	Max credit duration
Less than 15 minutes	15 seconds
15 minutes to 45 minutes	20 seconds
45 minutes and above	30 seconds

Copyright information

You are welcome to include a copyright end slide after the credit sequence has finished. This should contain the name of you or your organisation, your logo if desired, and the phrase "© copyright" plus the year of production in either a decimal number or roman numerals.

You may wish to thank outside organisations for their support for your project. The best way to do this is with a line of text in the "with thanks to" section of the credit sequence.

If you want to give some organisations more thanks, you can include up to two additional end slides, each of 3 seconds duration. These should feature the logo of the organisation(s) you wish to thank, their name in text plus the phrase "with thanks to:". You can thank up to four organisations on each end slide.

You are not permitted to thank any person or organisation appearing in the film, and contributing in cash or in kind towards to the production of the film. This is because if you make arrangements of this nature, we cannot broadcast your film with or without the thank you.

Each end slide must last no more than 3 seconds, but if you include more than one slide, the durations of all but the last one will be included in the total time for the credit sequence. So - if you use 3 end slides at 3 seconds each then your credit sequence must be 6 seconds shorter.

At the end of the final end slide, the picture must hold for a further 5 seconds. This 5 second hold is not included in your programme duration and you must not include it when giving us timecodes for the end of the part.

Video quality

Please shoot your film on a digital format, using a camera with 3 chips. Ensure that each shot is correctly exposed, well-lit and in focus, and avoid camera wobble. You are, of

course, at liberty to break these rules in context for effect.

Your finished master must be free from dropout, flash frames, and unintended picture disturbance of any kind. We will check that it is within the legal limits for luminance - you can check this as well using the waveform monitor on your editing computer.

The final edit of your film must take place on a computer system which stores digital video in at least DV PAL quality. Or, if you are using a tape based suite to make your final master, it must be a well maintained component suite with at least Beta SP record and play decks, and it must have a waveform monitor and vectorscope which the editor is able to use.

Sound quality

These are the minimum things you should have when making your film: a decent microphone close to the speaker's mouth, and a pair of headphones to make sure the sound's being recorded properly.

Make sure you get your sound right. Your camera records two types of sound - the stuff you want, and the stuff you don't. These are usually called 'signal' and 'noise'.

The key to getting sound right is to make sure you've got as much signal as you can, and reduce the amount of noise.

So - record your sound somewhere quiet, put your microphone close to the sound you're recording. And use headphones all the time to monitor what your microphones are picking up, and what the camera's getting.

There are two easy traps which often mess up sound. First, some domestic cameras have an automatic sound level device. This turns up the sound when things go quiet. This is OK for fun filming on the beach, but if you want to get good sound for your film, switch it off. If you don't, when someone stops talking, the background noise will get louder.

The other trap is to turn things up too loud, and overload your equipment. This causes distortion in the sound on the tape. If your camera has sound level meters, keep an eye on them and check the level of each new sound. Your camera's instruction book will tell you how to adjust the sound levels correctly. Generally, as long as the level meters go no higher than two-thirds of the way up, you'll probably be OK.

A good trick which the professionals use is to record 30 seconds or so of just the background sound of a location. This is particularly useful if you're editing an interview filmed in a noisy location, like by a road. This background sound is called 'buzztrack' and it helps you cover awkward edits or gaps, or even those moment when someone's talking over a great shot.

When you mix your sound in the edit, use headphones or decent speakers to make sure that voices can be heard above music and background sounds.

In order to do a decent sound mix you need to get hold of some external meters to measure your sound. Despite what everyone says - the VU meters on your mixer, or the digital meters in your edit software are NOT good enough to allow you to do a sound mix.

Your sound must not peak any higher than 6 PPM, and should generally be in the range

3-5 PPM for normal spoken interviews and similar sequences.

We look forward to receiving your film, good luck!!!

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