

2023 Fiscal Sponsorship Example Application

Project Logline

A West Philadelphia girls basketball team fights for a state title while contending with a dual pandemic; they look to love for survival.

Project Synopsis

LOVE WEST is a feature length, verite-driven documentary that follows the journey of a West Philly high school girls basketball coach, Beulah Osueke (o-sway-kay) who will stop at nothing to ensure her players actualize their fullest potential. They pursue a state championship during the dual crises of the global pandemic and the global uprisings to defend Black people against state violence. We highlight the life and legacy of Akyra Murray who was a star player taken as the youngest victim of the 2016 Pulse Tragedy. LOVE WEST teaches us that the time to love fully is now. This intimate documentary holds love and loss in the same breath while challenging all expectations of Black womanhood. On this journey we identify the essential parts of life for Black women- community, joy, and the divine. We navigate grief as we redefine survival in a genuinely hostile world. And survive we will... with patience, perseverance, play and prayers.

Topic Introduction / Background

In June 2022 it was announced that Philly is in the running for WNBA expansion team as early as 2024. Today, Brittany Griner remains caged as a prisoner of war because she had to play overseas. She makes 1/5th of the salary of most professional men's basketball players. What are we doing to reshape our systems so that the dreams of our youth don't send them into spaces of exploitation? How do we create communities that affirm us and resist state violence while making space in our lives for play and joy? Love West is a story with many layers that probe viewers to answer these questions for ourselves.

The last few years have brought increased awareness to how women are underestimated and undervalued in sports, from high school to the NCAA to the WNBA and beyond. From Sha'Carri Richardson to Naomi Osaka, Serena William and so many others, it is clear that sports is a critical location for discourse around race, gender, and class, especially for Black queer women. We must archive our own histories, celebrate ourselves, and leverage our storytelling to make space to fight for better for ourselves.

2021, the year that the team won the state championship, was also the deadliest year for gun violence in Philadelphia, especially for women and girls. LOVE WEST explores how gun violence has shaped the lives of our participants and reveals how gun violence is a manifestation of state violence. We seek to reveal the systems that we are forced to interact with through

sharing stories together. We are not postering a "healed" community, but rather a community grappling with all of these while holding on to love and joy.

Culture is a driving element in this film and to our issues, from images of local murals and Black Philly lyricists to intimate moments of laying baby hairs and rubbing down in shea butter before practice. As Philly continues down a path of intense gentrification, it's critical that creators actively preserve culture for future generations.

Instead of fighting to be seen by those whose success depends on rendering us invisible, Coach Beulah Osueke helps us center ourselves as individuals with multiple marginalized identities. She also identifies as neurodivergent and asexual/aromantic which are experiences rarely represented on screen with nuance and care. When we see ourselves and our power, we tap into true fulfillment in our everyday lives no matter what life sends our way.

Pivotal questions that "Love West" answers include how do we cope with this violence and imposition of identity that are consistently projected upon us? How do we move beyond fear and give our all to something knowing that the more we invest, the more we stand to lose? How do we turn deep loss into personal missions and successes? What does tough love look like? What is gained and sacrificed when we opt for a love rooted in "toughness"? What is the state's role in the violence Black women and girls in Philly experience? How to daily, seemingly mundane practices manifest into the lives we deserve? What do strong, empathic adult-youth relationships look like in urban communities?

Story Treatment / Artistic Approach

We propose to make a feature length film as this will afford us the time to complexly convey multiple story arcs to create a comprehensive portrait of the participants' lives and experiences. LOVE WEST is a vérité driven documentary. The cinematic aim is to balance the mundane and the magical. Lead cinematographer Jon Olshefski's cinematographic style of the shallow depth of field is used to create an elegant, immediate emotional connection between the viewer and the various participants. We filmed at the nation's only Black swim club for one of the player's graduation parties and we spent time filming kids flying off the diving board in slow motion. There are other intimate moments when we are focused on cultural expressions of hands and braiding of hair. All of the footage is filmed in 4k. For the first half of production we filmed using a Canon 5dMIV. Since June 2021, we have been filming with a Canon c500.

We will Incorporate audio of essays of black queer radical writers like Audre Lorde in her interview where she defines survival. We will also look to the archives to highlight stories of the Philly Tribune Girls who were a wildly popular basketball team in the 1930s and on whose shoulders the participants stand.

I want the theme to be understated cinematically and to glorify the mundane parts of the protagonists' lives right along with the high moments. Love West uses sound design to bridge the many worlds occupied by our protagonists. For example: we will go from an intense moment on the court where we hear people cheering and then the cheers turn into a crowd of protestors demanding justice for Walter Wallace Jr. who was murdered by police during a mental health crisis, then we see Patience walking home and we realize she lives on the same block where the protests took place.

This film will center creative anchors of repetition and juxtaposition on and off the court to drive home the coach's values of consistency. That looks like watching the girls count out their stretches from practice to practice in a sequence. Consistency also shows up in a scene we will build where we see Coach B in the same position in frame as she watches in support of the three main players as they compete in college and continue to apply the lessons she taught them.

We will include recorded Zoom calls of practice and interviews as well as film of the director Face-timing Coach B to debrief games and practices to visually signal to viewers that much of our film plays out during the global covid-19 pandemic.

We hope to bring on Duval Timothy for the original score. His Music Production/Composition Credits include Solange - Dreams and United in Grief by Kendrick Lamar. Timothy is gifted at establishing an instrumental narrative and incorporates his West African identity into his work and carving out his own sound. We've been using his music since our early work sample creation and have made a connection with him that we hope to deepen. See his song "Ball" to get a sense of his style that flows with the texture of the film.

We have original music being created by a queer West Philly artist, Emyne and hope to continue deepening connections with other queer artists to either incorporate established local music or have original music created. How are you going to tell this story? Describe your creative vision for the finished project - its visual look and feel. Explain your intended use of cinematic language or any particular artistic approach that informs the storytelling.

Access to Story / Characters

I am the best person to tell this story because I was given the vision. I live at the intersections of many identities and social conditions of the participants. I am aware of the benefits and challenges sharing compounding marginalized identities has and understand that my identities do not absolve me from accountability and in some cases, require increased support and reflection to tell the story fully. Making this film has supported me in looking at my own life.

I met Beulah in 2019 as part of a strategic communicators mentorship program called ReFrame. As we got to know each other, I realized that she applies the values and necessities of a better

world in her work as a basketball coach. We share similar values and neurodivergence which has allowed me to learn much about myself in the process of creating this film.

Like Beulah, I'm a first generation West African descendant. I am queer. I come from a deeply Christian upbringing. I grew up Black in the South. I am a communications specialist and under-resourced community organizer who has spent years working towards reproductive justice and ending state violence against Black people. I live with social anxiety and I am neurodivergent.

Like the players, I grew up in a predominately Black, religious-based school and community. I grew up housing insecure and deeply relied on my community for my survival. I was loved profoundly.

My intersecting identities and organizing background support my process in telling this story authentically. While so many aspects of this story are universal. I was really drawn to the story because of its specificity and cultural power. We intend to incorporate cultural moments of baby hairs being laid and the girls doing TikTok dances, highlighting their fly shoes, and incorporating music from rising Philly artists. We will also highlight local muralists in this documentary.

Like all of us surviving Western imperialism, my life has been shaped by colonization in ways that are visible and invisible. My Ghanaian father survived the 1980 Liberian conflict that happened on April 12 when President William Tolbert was overthrown and murdered in a violent coup. He was held at gunpoint by insurgent forces that night. While this story is centered in basketball, much of my work weaves in the particular role colonialism plays in the lives of African descendants and our power to resist and journey towards liberation wherever we find ourselves.

Project Director's Experience

Emerging

Director's Bio

Jasmine Leeward (they/them) is an activist, narrative strategist, and emerging filmmaker committed to the delicate work of culture shifting towards Black liberation, particularly in the US South. They are the owner of Impulse Media, an independent consulting company. They have worked as a Communications Specialist for Marijuana Justice, Women's March Inc., ReFrame, and New Virginia Majority, a group organizing for racial, environmental, and economic justice through strategic electoral work and grassroots campaigns. Jasmine is a 2020 Echoing Ida fellow. Their first short film "dusk" was selected for the 2020 Africana Film Festival. They are currently directing their first feature-length film "LOVE WEST".

Jasmine's primary goal as a filmmaker is to translate complex policy into accessible stories that inspire people to action. Their work is anchored in pan-africanism. They see their art as a reflection of Audre Lorde's definition of survival: learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. They are a 2021 Rockwood Leadership JustFilms fellow and a 2022 Broadway Advocacy Coalition Activism Fellow.

Other Key Creatives / Crew

Producer: Janae Thompson

Janae Thompson (she/her) is a theatrical performer and content creator from Hampton Roads, Virginia. She studied Musical Theatre at the American Musical and Dramatic Academy in New York City and is currently studying Digital Cinematography at Full Sail University.

She began emerging into film production in 2019, providing the opportunity to be a voice and a part of the community effort that comes with content creation. As a creative Janae focuses on the importance of the holistic wellbeing of black theatre and film.

Janae also serves on the Board of the historic Little Theatre of Norfolk as Marketing Chair. As a producer, she enjoys orchestrating collaborative experiences between creators and community. She has a passion for stories that bring awareness to social issues, women, and people of color. Together we can create new media and experiences that involves creativity, education, and our ancestral legacy of storytelling at the center.

Producer's Ethnicity

Black/African American

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Director of Photography: Jonathan Olshefski (he/him)

Jonathan Olshefski is an artist and documentary filmmaker. His debut feature documentary, QUEST was nominated for two News and Documentary Emmys in 2019. The film premiered in competition at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival and went on to screen at over 75 festivals nationally and internationally. In 2017 he was named as one of 25 New Faces in Independent Film by Filmmaker Magazine and mentioned in the New York Times as one of "The 9 New Directors You Need to Watch." In 2018 he received the "Truer Than Fiction Award" at the Independent Spirit Awards and was selected for a Pew Artist Fellowship.

Olshefski strives to tell intimate and nuanced stories that honor his subjects' complexity by employing a production process that emphasizes collaboration, dialogue, and relationship in order to amplify their voices and reflect their points of view in an artful way.

He has an MFA in Film and Media Arts from Temple University and is an Associate Professor at Rowan University where he teaches in the department of Radio, TV, and Film. He lives in Philadelphia with his two sons.

DOP's Ethnicity
Caucasian

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Editor: Kali Baker-Johnson (he/him)

Kali Baker-Johnson (he/him) is a Brooklyn-based, New Jersey-born filmmaker, college professor, and comic book writer. His feature film debut, *FEEL LIKE GHOSTS*, won the Best Director and Best Screenplay awards at the 2022 American Black Film Festival. He is an alumnus of Chapman University's graduate film directing program and during his time on the West Coast he collaborated with Oscar-winning producer Cathy Schulman as an O.L. Halsell Scholar, worked for Oscar-nominated producing duo Ron Yerxa and Albert Berger, and shadowed Emmy-winning director Millicent Shelton. His films have screened internationally, as well as in programs for domestic abuse education, centers for at-risk youth and New York's Time Square. He used to be able to dunk and, every once in a while, he still has a good day on the basketball court.

Editor's Ethnicity
Black/African American

Project Status and Completion Timeline

We are in month 18 of production. We've filmed 12 games, multiple practices, championships, graduation, graduation parties, and interviews. We are preparing our assembly and recently finished our work sample. Principal photography occurred between February 2021 and March 2022. We have 12 more shooting days planned and will be fully transitioned into post-production March of 2023. We will continue to follow participants throughout post production. We seek to have our world premiere at Blackstar Film Festival, August 2023 and distribution August 2024.

Fundraising Plan

Our funding strategy takes on a multi-pronged approach. In some ways it mimics campaign funding efforts since that I am greatly familiar with. Funds raised to date have been raised through intimate virtual gatherings where I pitch the project to my community.

We are launching our public crowdfunding campaign in August. We are also looking into angel funders and have started conversations with people who have access to wealth and are invested in the intersection of women and sports.

We are seeking funding from grants, crowdfunding, and large donors who have a vested interest in sports.

Grant Strategy details:

2021 Accepted

- JustFilms Fellowship (02/2021)
- IPMF Community Voices (06/2021) \$10,000

Not Accepted

- Ghetto Film School Netflix fellowship (04/2021)
- Good Pitch Philly (05/2021)
- Firelight (06/2021)
- Shifting Voices Film Fund (finalist) (\$30k) (11/2021)

2022 Accepted

- Southern Producer's Lab \$2,000 (04/2022)

Not Accepted

- Visual Arts Fellowship (studio space) submitted 02/02/2022
- Working Films - Impact Kickstart - (\$60,000) (03/2022)
- Cucalorus Works-in-Progress Lab (04/2022)

Applied

- Southern Documentary Fund Production Grant - \$10,000 - (applied 07/2022)
- AXS Film Fund, \$10k (applied 08/2022)

2023 Will Re-Apply

- Firelight Documentary Lab
- Shifting Voices Film Fund (2022 finalist) \$30,000 (11/2021)
- Working Films, Impact Kickstart - \$60,000 (finalist) (03/2022)
- Cucalorus Works-in-Progress Lab (04/2022)

Plan to Apply

- iTVS Open Call (up to \$350,000)
- Gotham Fellowship
- JustFilms Rolling Fund