



# MEDIA IMPACT FUNDERS

## 2017 Media Impact Festival Case Study: *Chasing Coral* [chasingcoral.com](http://chasingcoral.com)

### **Film synopsis:**

Coral reefs around the world are vanishing at an unprecedented rate. *Chasing Coral*, a documentary film from Exposure Labs, follows a team of divers, photographers and scientists set out on a thrilling ocean adventure to reveal the underwater mystery to the world. *Chasing Coral* was filmed over three years, with more than 500 hours underwater, and includes footage from more than 30 countries. It was made with the support from more than 500 people around the world.

### **Production Team:**

- Larissa Rhodes, Producer
- Samantha Wright, Impact Producer
- Jeff Orlowski, Director

### **Issues addressed in film:**

Over 93 percent of the excess heat in the atmosphere is absorbed by the ocean, so if you want to understand the impact of climate change, you need to look below the waves. Most people, however, never have the chance to dive below the water and see what's happening themselves.

*Chasing Coral* seeks to take viewers on an adventure to see these changes with their own eyes. Using time-lapse photography, the film captures visual evidence of coral bleaching like never seen before; and by capturing the scope and speed of this global phenomenon, the film shines a light on what lies ahead if we're not able to work together to reduce the warming of our ocean.

### **Target audience:**

The *Chasing Coral* team aims to reach the widest audience possible, with a special emphasis on outreach to people "beyond the environmental choir"—that is, people who are not currently engaged with environmental action.

### **Impact goals:**

To build the political will necessary to accelerate climate solutions, *Chasing Coral's* impact team is driven by this central mission: to inspire a new wave of climate champions in unexpected places. Specific goals include:

- Elevating the coral story as a symbol for climate action in media and public consciousness;
- Inspiring action that builds new power in clean energy movements, especially around tipping point moments from COP23 to state elections; and
- Educating leaders across business, politics and pop culture about what's happening to our ecosystems, and inspiring action in their realm of influence.

**Impact strategy:**

The impact strategy builds upon lessons learned from Exposure Lab's campaign for *Chasing Ice*, which went hyperlocal by focusing on shifting the public position of one climate-denying congressman, Rep. Pat Tiberi (R-Ohio). After several months on-the-ground mobilizing a diverse range of local communities from farmers to church congregations, the congressman issued a public statement acknowledging that climate change is real, and even joined the bipartisan Climate Solutions Caucus in 2017.

To build on this work, *Chasing Coral's* impact team combines a push-pull strategy that aims both to support global demand to host screenings, while also targeting local fieldwork and partnerships to more directly engage communities "beyond the environmental choir."

More specifically, the impact strategy includes efforts to:

- 1) **Wake up the world:** supporting film screenings around the world with a suite of tools that can help organizers amplify what's happening in their own communities, while also providing pathways to advance local clean energy movements. The team is also producing new storytelling and engaging media to further amplify the story of coral bleaching.
- 2) **Build bridges:** going deep in target communities, and working closely with trusted local messengers and partners, the impact team is working in some of the most conservative districts in the country, with a series of pilot campaigns designed to mobilize new, unlikely champions for climate solutions. In the wake of a failed nuclear plant in South Carolina and a subsequent energy shortfall, the focus is on using this as an opportunity to build support for new clean energy solutions going into a timely election year. In Atlanta, where Mayor Reed has already committed to reaching 100 percent clean energy by 2035, the focus is on creating and sustaining a groundswell of support so this commitment continues to be upheld.
- 3) **Inspire leadership:** sharing this story with decision makers and tastemakers in business, politics and pop culture, the team is revealing what the loss of coral reefs means within their communities of influence and using screenings to stimulate new leadership. From the U.S. Congress and the United Nations to city townhalls and major corporations, the film is creating an increased sense of urgency and importance for leaders to commit to climate action.

**Impact so far:**

The *Chasing Coral* impact team is just kicking off the first few months of outreach, with exciting momentum building both globally and in targeted outreach. Here are a few highlights:

Wake up the world:

- To date, there have been 750+ community screenings in more than 60 countries with more in the works.
- The team produced [new viral short content](#) for Upworthy highlighting the coral story.

- The film has elevated the story of coral bleaching with coverage in major publications such as NPR, *The New York Times*, CNN and Vice. *Chasing Coral* has been a favorite at film festivals around the world, screening festivals such as Sundance, Sheffield, SXSW, Hot Docs, and San Francisco International Film Festival.
- Anecdotally, the team has already found plenty of evidence of the impact the film is having on the public. Highlights include:
  - There has been a growing wave of people using various forms of media to help convey the problem of coral bleaching including [public art](#) and poems channeling the message corals are trying to send the world.
  - The film is helping to inspire a sense of leadership and moving people to action for the first time. For example, one mom threw a zero-waste birthday party for her child after seeing the film. While not directly related to coral reefs, she “knew she had to start somewhere.”
  - A group of about 30 volunteer “*Chasing Coral* ambassadors” around the world are rolling out new and creative ways to organize in their communities. One of them, a 14-year-old in Quebec City, developed a zine and distributed it in her community to raise awareness about coral bleaching. Another ambassador turned a screening into a clean energy fundraiser where she raised money by selling underwater photos of her own family in their pool.

#### Build bridges:

- As the campaign in the U.S. southeast kicks off, here are a few highlights from the field:
  - The City of Atlanta Mayor’s Office of Resilience opened the council chambers to screen *Chasing Coral* and seek community feedback on the city’s 100 percent Clean Energy Plan.
  - In Dunwoody, Georgia, *Chasing Coral* was screened in the local chapel as an opportunity to promote an upcoming community solar workshop. Since, almost 100 people have contracted to install about 85 kW of solar capacity in town.
  - In Charleston, South Carolina, a series of initial screenings at local high schools influenced an outpouring of students to join their environmental clubs, and inspired Charleston County School District to scale the film’s educational outreach to all county high schools next year.
  - The city of Oxford, Georgia, looks forward to using their March 2018 screening as a deadline for initiating sustainability initiatives in town.

#### Inspire leadership:

- The film has reached a diverse set of influencers through screenings at the United Nations, UNESCO, U.S. Congress, Aspen Ideas Festival and World Bank, and major corporations such as Google, Dropbox and Tiffany & Co.
- In celebration of World Oceans Day, the film screened to many ocean conservation groups at the United Nations. In July 2017, the film was screened for lawmakers on Capitol Hill and most recently the team hosted a bipartisan screening in Congress co-hosted by Sen. Murkowski (R-AK) and Sen. Whitehouse (D-RI).
- The impact team has been working with a coalition of advocacy allies to provide the film to environmental organizers around the world, most recently mobilizing students across

the United States as part of the #Stillin campaign to show U.S. support at the climate negotiations in Bonn, Germany.