SIX DEGREES
FROM SCIENCE

IF THEY SUCCEED...
IF THEY FAIL...
SIX DEGREES FROM SCIENCE

(working title) is a feature-length documentary immersing us in the lives of passionate biomedical scientists who work in environments where competition for resources is fierce, institutional barriers abound, and their focus is constantly directed away from science to survival.

The American “ivory tower” system is forcing promising researchers out of science and into other lines of work, damaging the pipeline of discovery and jeopardizing critical medical advances and future cures.

Will these tenacious “next generation” scientists be able to navigate all the obstacles en route to their fascinating and life-changing discoveries?

Or, should they fail, what is at stake for the rest of us?
THE LENGTH OF THE AVERAGE SCIENTIFIC CAREER HAS GONE FROM 35 YEARS IN THE 1960S, TO 5 YEARS IN 2018 IN A RANGE OF SCIENTIFIC DISCIPLINES.

- PNAS Journal "Changing Demographics of Scientific Careers: The Rise of the Temporary Workforce"
OUR BRIGHTEST MINDS - UNDER PRESSURE

Most of us take medical breakthroughs for granted. When we think about medical research – if we think about it at all – we might picture people in white coats, working in state-of-the-art laboratories, focused intently on their own ideas and research. They’re making methodical progress toward new discoveries and technologies. Isn’t that how science works?

In fact, most scientists will never have this luxury – or operate in this comfort. Though many enter the field to find life-saving treatments and cures, systemic barriers are everywhere. Younger researchers (often people of color) are up against the old guard (often male and white) for ever-diminishing funding.

They endure bigotry and bias, receive comically low pay, and work very long hours. Scientists belonging to certain racial and ethnic groups, including African Americans, Latinx/Hispanics, and Native Americans, are twice as likely to leave the STEM disciplines as whites and Asian Americans.
Today’s scientists are expected to “publish or perish.” This pressure leads to overworked scientists pursuing publication-generating experiments rather than following more exciting and innovative ideas that might not deliver quick results. It hinders creativity, and even the most devoted and mission-driven scientists face frustration and painful choices along the way.

Dwindling professional opportunities keep many stuck in a gridlocked career path with no upward mobility. The list of challenges goes on.

What will it mean for the future of medicine when so many different factors are pushing American scientists toward burnout? What groundbreaking discoveries will be lost along the way?
75% OF RESEARCHERS BELIEVE CREATIVITY IS CURRENTLY BEING STIFLED.
…AND WE ARE TELLING THEIR STORIES

SIX DEGREES FROM SCIENCE is a feature-length documentary telling the story of three brilliant researchers, each poised to make a significant impact on the world. We’ll follow these young scientists after many grueling years of graduate school and postdoctoral work, as they take the leap of faith to launch their own labs and pursue their own research.

Our past films make it clear: complex topics are best explored using a character-driven, creative approach. We will intertwine individual experiences and personal milestones recorded with the main characters – all scientists – to create the narrative arc of the film. Personal stories filled with curiosity and unexpected humor will make science accessible to viewers, and give them heroes to root for all along the way. SIX DEGREES FROM SCIENCE will expose the sacrifices researchers must make, and the rewards we all will reap if they find success along the way.
WE WILL FILM WITH OUR SCIENTISTS IN CINEMA VERITE, a fly-on-the-wall approach to filmmaking. Our small film crew will embed in the lives of each of these charismatic people to capture moving and entertaining moments with colleagues, family, and friends. The trust we’re building with the primary characters behind the scenes will result in access to pivotal – and sometimes sensitive – moments. We will be there when they are experiencing funding challenges, and we will be there for the breakthroughs in the lab.
WE’LL SHOOT WITH A SMALL AND NIMBLE CREW

of no more than 2-3 people, helping our characters forget the cameras are there, enabling them to reveal their true selves in these raw moments. At key times, we’ll pull in secondary characters with expertise to offer context and texture, and we’ll use animation and archival footage to illustrate concepts and clarify information.

While the issues the film will address are complicated, the joy of discovery and hope for breakthrough cures will remain a constant thread, woven through every chapter of the film. SIX DEGREES FROM SCIENCE will celebrate what’s possible when researchers have the freedom and resources to explore their most exciting ideas. This film will ask audiences to consider the stakes for human health if these bright minds are not supported.
GOING DEEPER WITH ON-SCREEN ELEMENTS

ANIMATION & ARCHIVAL MATERIAL

We’ll encourage each scientist to describe their research in easy-to-understand ways, and stylish and playful graphics will help viewers quickly grasp exactly what each scientist is studying, and why.

Additional animation and archival footage may illustrate examples from the history of lab-based discoveries and illustrate how seemingly “small” discoveries can pave the way to monumental revelations.

Through these animated “explainer” scenes, the audience will become emotionally invested not just in the characters, but in the science itself, bringing home the exhilarating potential of the work.

VIDEO DIARIES

Our scientist characters are already recording intimate video diaries detailing ongoing failures and victories, sharing frustration or elation, depending on the day. These entries will be filmed at work, at home, and while out on the road. These moments will serve as another access point to seeing how these scientists work through inherent obstacles in real time. By capturing raw emotions in private, they’re apt to open up in an even more sincere way than relating an experience after the fact with the film crew.

Suggested animation tone & style

Video diary – Dr Carla Nowosad
“In the course of scientific progress, things tend to pop up. Most of the celebrated achievements had their origins in moments of surprise in the laboratory, unplanned for, unanticipated, unpredicted. No committee convened to survey the future prospects for biomedical research could possibly have guessed at the things that lay ahead. No branch of government could have laid out detailed plans for the scientific needs of the future, beyond asserting that what the country needed was more fundamental knowledge about the human form and function, about the agents and influences responsible for disease, and, in a certain sense, about nature itself. Scientific research works, it is the only way to get at the underlying mechanisms of disease, and the only way to learn what to do about them.”

- LEWIS THOMAS, M.D.
THE SCIENTISTS

We’re now casting our primary characters, who will represent diversity in gender, race, and specialty, and will represent the many challenges that span the industry. Following are a few of the scientists we are currently strongly considering:
Dr. Carla Nowosad is a rising star in the field of immunology. She made a splash early in her career as a member of two different teams studying how B cells (a type of immune cell that makes antibodies) communicate and connect with other cells in the body. The revelations that came from both of those studies were met with great enthusiasm and offered up brand new questions about how human immunity works, even hinting at potential future advances for vaccines, treatments of cancer, and a host of other diseases.

Carla is now building on this early success to open The Nowosad Lab at NYU Grossman School of Medicine and striving to make, what we expect will be, major breakthroughs to revolutionize antibody-based medicines.

Carla must now raise the necessary funding for her own research, learn to establish effective leadership with her staff, and tackle countless daily interruptions and distractions while game-changing discoveries lie just below her fingertips.

“There are so, so, so many unknowns that... while it's nice to publish and while it's nice to obviously get the money to keep us going, what we really want to do is find stuff out, right? We want to know something that we didn't know before!”
Erich Jarvis, Ph.D.
Head of the Laboratory of Neurogenetics of Language & Professor, The Rockefeller University

Dr. Erich Jarvis, an authority on the neurology involved in vocal learning, wants to know: “What is in our genomes that builds this brain structure for speech?” Jarvis’ Lab has identified hundreds of potentially related genes that differ in the very few species that have vocal learning, such as humans, songbirds, and parrots. They’ve confirmed that animals like monkeys and pigs, who do not exhibit vocal learning, don’t have these genetic differences. By altering the same genes in mice, Jarvis is now looking to see if there will be changes in their vocal patterns.

Sadye Paez, Ph.D.
Senior Research Associate, Laboratory of Neurogenetics of Language, The Rockefeller University

Dr. Sadye Paez holds a Ph.D. in Human Movement Science and studies the genetic origin and evolutionary purpose of dance across different species. Paez’s plans to sequence the genomes of highly specialized dancers to learn if they have specific genetic differences, compared to non-dancers. If so, will those similarities overlap with genetic locations involved in speech learning?

Drs. Jarvis and Paez are both dancers themselves and believe our brain pathways for speech evolved out of the ancient pathways that are involved in body movement. Their upcoming collaborative experiments may lead to better treatments for people with neurological movement and spoken language disorders. The Jarvis Labs’ broad ranging work also includes leading a global effort to sequence the complete genome of every known vertebrate species on earth, as well as using that information to support the conservation of critically endangered species.

Dr. Jarvis is committed to supporting efforts to achieve racial and ethnic diversity in the scientific community, giving frequent talks and writing about the historic and ongoing underrepresentation of blacks and other racially subordinated minorities in the sciences.

“Changing the demography of the scientific community may...allow us to transform the enterprise of science. Specifically, there is a crucial need to address how racial/racist ideology persists within our research programs.”

– Erich Jarvis (An Open Letter: Scientists and Racial Justice)
Tanea Reed, PH.D.
Professor and Chair of the Department of Chemistry.
Eastern Kentucky University

Dr. Reed studies traumatic brain injury (TBI), defined as a sudden trauma followed by secondary damage. TBI has impacted approximately 10 million people worldwide. Dr. Reed studies the use of Gamma glutamylcysteine ethyl ester (GCEE), which is a naturally occurring antioxidant that has been shown to improve outcomes in patients when given immediately following a moderate brain injury. Dr. Reed is currently looking at how long this window of opportunity for treatment lasts. Is it still beneficial to give GCEE to patients 30 minutes, 60 minutes, even two or three hours after an injury? This is crucial information, especially in rural areas, where medical facilities are few and far between and reaching a hospital may take hours. Her dream is to develop a transdermal GCEE patch, to be widely distributed so people might have them on hand when an injury occurs. This type of patch could even be used as a preventative measure, for example. young football players could put a patch on their arm at the beginning of a game, to protect them in case of concussion.

In the Appalachian region of Eastern Kentucky, where Dr. Reed teaches Biochemistry and Neurochemistry, 30% of the students are first generation college students and 40% are classified as low income. In addition to her own work, Dr. Reed has received funding from the NIH to enrich research opportunities for underrepresented minorities like the students at her institution. Many of them have never left home before, so she tries to offer opportunities for them to present at national conferences.

“The beauty is that research unlocks a door to the world they never knew existed”, she says. Occasionally the students’ families resist her efforts. “Building community trust is a big part of my story.”
“We’re creating bionic arms and legs that allow people to think of these devices as a part of themselves, and not necessarily just a tool to help them, and we’re already making rapid progress.”

JACOB GEORGE, PH.D.
Principal Investigator, The Utah Neurorobotics Lab
The University of Utah

Named one of Forbes’ “30 Under 30” in the Science category for 2022, Dr. George’s remarkable work spans three fields of study: Rehabilitation Robotics, Brain Computer Interfaces (BCI), and Artificial Intelligence. Originally inspired by the fictional prosthetic hand that Luke Skywalker received in *The Empire Strikes Back*, Jacob created his own version and has already successfully attached experimental robotic hands into the arms of nine volunteer patients who have been living as amputees.

He implants are temporarily “wired” directly to their muscles and nerves using neuromyoelectric connections, to send and receive signals to and from the brain. The goal is for users to experience dextrous and intuitive movement, and even the sensation of touch. Initial results have been so promising that the FDA recently approved Jacob to go further and implant a new “investigational device” into three new volunteers, who will be able to use them at home, unsupervised, over the course of several months.

Even with this FDA approval in place, Dr. George has only raised enough money for the first half of the first patient’s timeline. Will he be able to secure the needed money to complete these groundbreaking trials, or will he be forced to have the device surgically removed from the patient before the first experiment has even been completed?
Dr. Niroshana Anandasabapathy holds both an M.D. and Ph.D. and runs her own lab, which she launched when she was three weeks pregnant with her first child after working three jobs to put herself through school. As a young woman, she only took a scientific research course to have a backup plan for her art history degree, but found “that class lit up my world. Young women aren’t usually rewarded for being relentlessly curious, but this is a place I could be.” Today, as a dermatologist, she treats melanoma patients in her doctor’s office, and as an immunologist, she studies the immune cells around malignant moles to better understand how they function, among many other subjects. “The body is like a Russian nesting doll with many layers. I study how immune cells move through these different layers.” Balancing a medical practice and a research lab while also being a parent of two young children is not for the faint of heart and requires great stamina, especially now that Niroshana is coming up for tenure.

She encourages colleagues who are also women of color to protect their time against gender double-standards and racial bias, asking “what work have you been asked to do lately that is not your job?” Unlike their white counterparts, scientists from minority ethnic groups are often targeted to serve on diversity, equity, and inclusivity committees and act as mentors to junior colleagues, which takes precious time away from their research.

Citizenship fatigue is real. If you’re lucky you get to spend 10% of your week doing what you’re supposed to do... so don’t let anyone step on your superman cape!”
As our young scientists pursue their work, secondary characters will provide context for the system our main characters must navigate.

Several established scientists have already agreed to go on camera, including:

- **Dr. James Allison** (MD Anderson Cancer Center), whose early research went largely unnoticed until it was harnessed for new cancer therapies, leading to a Nobel Prize in 2018
- **Dr. Charlie Rice** (Rockefeller University, Nobel Prize 2020)
- **Dr. Akiko Iwasaki** (National Academies of Medicine, Yale University)
- **Dr. Lorenz Studer** (MacArthur Fellow, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center)

These scientists offer the chance to provide interstitial “breathers” whether they are engaged in conversation with the younger scientists to discuss the “big picture” challenges for researchers just starting out, or helping us to understand scientific discoveries and changes through the years.

The National Science Foundation, Howard Hughes Medical Institute, Science Philanthropy Alliance, and Damon Runyon Cancer Research Foundation have also agreed to share perspective, if needed.

These entrenched, systemic issues may seem insurmountable, but SIX DEGREES FROM SCIENCE will also feature the passionate efforts of activists to challenge the system and clear the way for new treatments and medicines will energize viewers and leave them feeling hopeful.

- Dr. Akiko Iwasaki
“A broad-ranging dialogue between science and society is not only necessary for laying the foundation for future financial support. It is crucial for attracting young minds to join the research effort.”

- ROBERT DIJKGRAAF, IN THE WORLD OF TOMORROW
**FILM TEAM**

**CONSEQUENTIAL** creates meaningful films, content, and campaigns that uncover and share in-depth issues and educate and activate audiences. Founded by entertainment and social impact experts from Paul G. Allen’s Vulcan Productions, the company works with storytellers, philanthropists, production companies, investors, and brands throughout the life of films and programming on the most important issues of our day, including climate change, science literacy, public health, conservation, and human rights.

**PRODUCER: TED RICHANE** works closely with filmmakers, production companies, brands, funders and distributors from development through distribution to assure storytelling makes measurable impact. He is an industry leader at building and managing story-driven impact campaigns, with a proven record of building audiences, changing public policy and shifting the trajectories of some of society’s most pressing challenges. With deep experiences in climate change, conservation, public health and human rights, Ted is an expert on deploying film, television and other media properties for social change. He speaks frequently before academic and film festival audiences and has acted as an advisor at the Sundance Institute’s Producers Lab and other industry events. For six years, Ted oversaw publicity, audience engagement and impact strategy for Paul G. Allen’s Vulcan Productions, where he was responsible for maximizing reach and social change for projects spanning ocean health, conservation, climate change and beyond. At Vulcan, Ted also advised the company’s philanthropic and government affairs departments, and for two years acted as deputy to the general manager. Prior to moving to Los Angeles, Ted spent eight years in Washington working in public relations and public affairs, where he served clients ranging from non-profit organizations and filmmakers to Fortune 500 companies and foreign and local governments. He’s also worked on numerous political campaigns, both for national candidates and major political organizations. Ted has a Master of Public Diplomacy from the University of Southern California and an undergraduate degree from Syracuse University. He is a talented writer and speaker, and a seasoned strategist using deep research to drive multiplatform campaigns.

**PRODUCER: RUTH JOHNSTON** is an award-winning executive producer of films including Oscar® winner SUMMER OF SOUL and Oscar® nominees HUNGER WARD and LEAD ME HOME. Other credits include festival favorites REASON I JUMP and MASTER OF LIGHT, along with hundreds of hours of award-winning film, television series, and interactive digital media projects. As an executive, she was COO of Lion TV in New York and most recently General Manager of Paul G. Allen’s Vulcan Productions, where she grew and managed a team that became an industry leader in impact storytelling. At Vulcan, she was also a member of the company’s philanthropy and overall executive leadership team. Ruth is currently leading production at Consequential on two feature-length documentary films, executive producing a short documentary, and developing several projects ranging across the spectrum of the world’s most pressing issues. Other client work includes advising philanthropists, storytellers and platforms on how to optimize strategies for development, production, distribution, and audience acquisition and activation.

Some film and campaign highlights from Ruth and Ted’s careers: Summer of Soul, Hunger Ward, Lead Me Home, School of Hope, Youth v Gov, The Reason I Jump, Oliver Sacks: His Own Life, Reef Rescue, The Cold Blue, Philharmonia Fantastique, Ghost Fleet, Chasing the Thunder, Ocean Warriors, Mind of a Giant, STEP, The Ivory Game, Midsummer in Newtown, USS Indianapolis Live: From the Deep, USS Indianapolis: The Final Chapter, Body Team 12, Ballet Now, Going to War, Naledi: A Baby Elephant’s Tale, Unseen Enemy, Racing Extinction, We the Voters, We the Economy, XRAY Fashion (VR), Drop in the Ocean (VR), Critical Distance (VR), Guardians of the Kingdom (VR), Mothers of Invention (podcast), Fiat Lux: Illuminating Our Common Home, This Emotional Life, History Detectives, Rebuilding the World Trade Center, Ca$h Cab, America Revealed, Reigning in Hell, Girl Rising.
DIRECTOR: MARILYN NESS is a two-time Emmy, Peabody, and DuPont Award-winning filmmaker and works as a director and producer. Most recently, she produced ANONYMOUS SISTER (dir. Jamie Boyle) about one family’s fall into opioid addiction that premiered at DOC NYC 2021. Before that, she produced the Netflix Original documentaries BECOMING (dir. Nadia Hallgren), about former First Lady Michelle Obama, which was nominated for four Primetime Emmy Awards as well as DICK JOHNSON IS DEAD (dir. Kirsten Johnson), which premiered at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival and won the Special Jury Award for Innovation in Non-fiction Storytelling, was nominated for a PGA Award, an Independent Spirit Award, and later earned 3 Primetime Emmy® nominations winning one. Marilyn directed the Emmy®-nominated documentary CHARM CITY which premiered at the 2018 Tribeca Film Festival and was shortlisted for the 2019 Academy Award®- Best Documentary Feature. The film was broadcast on PBS’ Independent Lens in April 2019 and is now part of a Department of Justice collaboration to bring documentary film into police training classrooms. Before that, she produced CAMERAPERSON (dir. Kirsten Johnson), which premiered at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival, was released by the Criterion Collection and was shortlisted for the 2017 Academy Awards® - Best Documentary Feature. TRAPPED (dir. Dawn Porter), about the struggle to maintain access to abortion in the South, premiered at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival, received the Jury Prize for Social Impact Filmmaking, broadcast on PBS’ Independent Lens, and was awarded a Peabody. She also produced Katy Chevigny and Ross Kauffman’s feature documentary E-TEAM, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2014 and was bought by Netflix Original, and later earned two Emmy nominations. She directed the documentary feature film BAD BLOOD: A CAUTIONARY TALE that broadcast nationally on PBS in 2011. She is currently at work on a multi-disciplinary theater and documentary project entitled POSTMORTEM. Ness is a partner in Big Mouth Productions, a women-owned, women-led award-winning documentary film and theater production company. Marilyn is a member of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, the Television Academy, the Producers’ Guild of America, and the International Documentary Association. She lives in New York City with her husband and two sons.

PRODUCER: ELIZABETH WESTRATE is a filmmaker with over twenty-five years of production experience, leading complex international projects for a broad range of clients. Her work has been broadcast widely on PBS, HBO, Netflix, Amazon, NBC, Sundance Channel, Public Radio International, and at major film festivals and museums around the world. Westrate is currently in pre-production as Series Producer for a ten-part documentary series for children featuring musical artist, Ben Folds, for Fred Rogers Productions. She recently acted as Producer on Jamie Boyle’s feature documentary, ANONYMOUS SISTER, along with Marilyn Ness of Big Mouth Productions. Westrate was the Director and Producer of the critically acclaimed documentary A FAMILY UNDERTAKING (PBS/POV), as well as THE JAMES WOLFENSOHN TRIBUTE PROJECT, PASSING ON THE GIFT and many other films. She is was Series Producer of I CONTAIN MULTITUDES, a twelve part science series for PBS Digital and HHMI, and also thirty episodes of the innovative ecological PBS series, E2: E2 DESIGN, E2 ENERGY, and E2 TRANSPORT. She has acted as Line Producer for high-profile documentary projects such as Dror Moreh’s THE HUMAN FACTOR (Telluride 2019), Roger Ross Williams’ AMERICAN JAIL (CNN Films 2018), and multiple projects for BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN and Thrill Hill with director Thom Zimny.
PARTNERS

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE: SCIENCE & SOCIETY PROGRAM: “The world is more polarized than ever. Science—especially when applied to questions about the environment, medical interventions, and new technologies—has become a splinter between people and between communities. To overcome these divides, the Aspen Institute launched the Science & Society Program in 2019. Housed within the Aspen Institute Health, Medicine and Society Program, Science & Society serves as a laboratory to test ideas and approaches that help explain, connect, and maximize the benefits of science for public good. The primary audiences for our work are community leaders, science communicators, current and future scientists, and the general public. We leverage the established assets, networks, and platforms of the Aspen Institute to convene and mobilize these groups to build bridges between them.”

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: AARON MERTZ, PH.D. Internationally recognized for his laboratory research and advocacy for underrepresented groups in science, Aaron F. Mertz, Ph.D., joined the Aspen Institute in 2019 as Director of the Science & Society Program, which seeks to democratize science as a guiding force for public good. The program convenes experts in solutions-oriented strategy sessions, mobilizes a diverse constituency of science advocates, and implements public outreach efforts and initiatives. In his role, Dr. Mertz executive produced the documentary series INFODEMIX: GLOBAL CONVERSATIONS ON SCIENCE AND MISINFORMATION that appeared on PBS and Link TV, chaired the Aspen Global Congress on Scientific Thinking & Action, published the digital magazines The Future of Science in America and The Pandemic Issue, and launched the youth initiative “Our Future Is Science.” He has hosted public events on COVID vaccines, the quantum future, personalized genetics, climate change, and science storytelling. Before joining the Aspen Institute, Dr. Mertz was an Arnold O. Beckman Postdoctoral Fellow and National Science Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow in cell and developmental biology at Rockefeller University. His publications span biology, physics, engineering, and science policy and have appeared in Nature, Science, Cell, and Physical Review Letters. He earned a bachelor’s degree in physics from Washington University in St. Louis as a Barry M. Goldwater Scholar and Arthur Holly Compton Fellow; a master’s degree in the history of science, medicine, and technology from the University of Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar; and a doctorate in physics from Yale University as a D. Allan Bromley Fellow and NSF Graduate Research Fellow. He has chaired and organized interdisciplinary scientific meetings and symposia, including the Gordon Research Seminar on Epithelial Differentiation & Keratinization in Tuscany, Italy; the New York City Skin Club; and Yale University’s Physics–Engineering–Biology Discussion Group.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: SHRUTI NAIK, PH.D. Dr. Shruti Naik is a world-renowned skin biologist and immunologist. Dr. Naik is an Assistant Professor at New York University School of Medicine. She received her Ph.D. in Immunology from the University of Pennsylvania and performed her postdoctoral training at the Rockefeller University. She has discovered that normal bacteria living on our skin, known as the commensal microbiota, educate the immune system and help protect us from harmful pathogens. Dr. Naik’s research has been published in top-tier scientific journals including Science, Nature, and Cell. Her lab studies the crosstalk between immune cells, epithelial stem cells, and microbes with a focus on 3 major areas of research: Tissue regeneration and cancer, host-microbe interactions, and early in life immunity. Naik is a strong advocate for increasing diversity in science and promoting the advancement of underrepresented and marginalized groups. She has been recognized for her research and advocacy through numerous awards including the Regeneron Award for Creative Innovation, the L’Oréal For Women in Science Award, the Damon Runyon Dale F. Frey Award for Breakthrough Scientist, the Blavatnik Award for Young Scientists, the International Takeda Innovators in Science Award, Pew-Stewart Scholar, NIH Directors Innovator Award DP2, Packard Fellow, and a NYSCF Robertson Investigator.
DISTRIBUTION

We will produce SIX DEGREES FROM SCIENCE for wide distribution, reaching as large an audience as possible, with a specific focus on those demographics with the agency to effect change related to increases in support for basic research. Ideally, this will begin with a high-profile festival premiere followed by a festival run. Our previous films have premiered at prestigious festivals including Sundance Film Festival, Tribeca Film Festival, Telluride Film Festival, and SXSW in Austin, among many others around the world. Following the festival run, we will coordinate a national release with a broadcast or streaming premiere. Past films have premiered on Netflix, Hulu, HBO, and PBS, to name a few.

Our strategy for distribution is to
• reach as many people as possible;
• generate a return on investment (so funds can go to audience engagement and impact work); and
• retain the flexibility necessary to do the outreach required for our film.

We will begin speaking with potential distributors during production and will consider the timing of distribution decisions based on what’s best for the project. We will likely work with a sales agent who can maximize the reach and impact of our distribution through broadcast, streaming, and VOD platforms.

Simultaneously, we’ll make sure the film is available for non-theatrical community screenings and educational use. Because the intended audience for this film ranges from individuals who are well-versed on the issue, like scientists and science funders, to average citizens and students, the film team will go to extensive efforts not only to highlight facts, but do so in a way that is both captivating and relatable.
OUTREACH, AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT, AND IMPACT

Public support for research funding is essential if policymakers and institutions are to increase support for the work of scientists like those we feature in our documentary. The film itself will be a great tool for building awareness, but even the best documentary films won’t achieve their objectives without strategic plans for building audiences and empowering those audiences to act. It won’t be enough to make and distribute the film; we’ll take it a number of steps further.

Consequential has a strong track record for building and activating audiences and sustaining activity around films in pursuit of changing hearts and minds on core societal issues.

SPECIALIZED OUTREACH AND MARKETING

To build audiences, we will augment our distributor’s marketing activity with dedicated outreach on social media and with earned media outreach with film publicists. While our past projects have been reviewed in The New York Times, LA Times, Washington Post and have been profiled on John Oliver’s Last Week Tonight and on NPR, among many others, this outreach will go beyond traditional film press and include science writers, health writers, and other media that can extend the reach of our message to priority audiences. We’ll also use ancillary video content on social media to go deeper into specific issues (beyond what we can include in the film).
LEVERAGING THE FILM FOR MEASURABLE IMPACT

As we produce the documentary, we’ll be simultaneously designing an audience outreach and engagement campaign to extend its reach and impact. Consequential’s Ted Richane, who for years ran impact for Paul G. Allen’s Vulcan Productions, will spearhead this effort.

We’ll begin this process by developing a clear theory of change, which identifies what specific impact we want to achieve with our film and campaign, and accordingly, which audiences we’ll need to prioritize. From there, we’ll create a multiplatform campaign that will:

• Grow public awareness about the importance of basic research
• Provide tools and material to empower researchers to advocate for the importance of their work
• Support efforts to increase public funding and support for research
• Prioritize policy solutions

We’ll design partnerships, a social media strategy, a community screening campaign, educational outreach, and more. This campaign will begin as the film’s premiere approaches, maximizing the size of our potential audience, and continue well afterward. We’ll run it in close collaboration with leading foundations and NGOs working around this issue area, and with the counsel of scientific/expert advisors, we’ll also create a plan for evaluation and measurement. This way, we’ll be able to monitor progress in real time and prioritize resources as needed.
Scientific discoveries happen in unpredictable manner, and you never know where the next cure will come from. Funding to support basic science research is more important than ever before, whether it comes from government, foundations or private donors.

- Akiko Iwasaki, Ph.D.
Sterling Professor of Immunobiology and Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology at Yale University, and an Investigator of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT, PLEASE CONTACT:
Executive Producer, Aaron Mertz: Aaron.Mertz@aspeninstitute.org
Producer, Ruth Johnston: us@consequential.us
Producer, Ted Richane: us@consequential.us