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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

INTERNATIONAL DIVISION

JUL 31 1972

Mr. Anthony Guarco
Acting Director, Screen Service
United States Information Agency

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Dear Mr. Guarco:

The General Accounting Office, as part of its continuing audit of the media activities of the United States Information Agency, has reviewed the procedures employed in planning, coordinating, and evaluating worldwide motion picture and television documentary films.

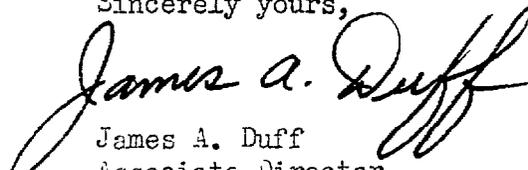
The enclosed report presents the results of our review together with a discussion of the types of data which we believe should be available to management for the planning and production of films.

We have concluded that, although a system has been established for evaluating films produced for worldwide distribution, improvements are needed to provide the Screen Service with data to more effectively plan future film products. In the enclosed report (page 13) we are recommending that:

- action be taken to ensure that all posts submit film evaluations as required,
- criteria be established for the utilization of all evaluation data,
- placement and local reaction reports be provided on a more consistent and uniform basis, and
- management data be maintained on a continuing basis for the comparative analysis of current and prior film evaluations.

We wish to acknowledge the cooperation given to our staff during this review and we would appreciate receiving your comments and advice as to any action taken or contemplated on our recommendations.

Sincerely yours,


James A. Duff
Associate Director

Enclosure

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IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED
IN THE EVALUATION
OF WORLDWIDE FILMS

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INTRODUCTION

The primary mission of the United States Information Agency (USIA) is to help achieve United States foreign policy objectives by influencing public attitudes in other nations and by advising the President, his representatives abroad, and the various departments and agencies on the implications of foreign opinion for present and contemplated U.S. policies. In furtherance of this mission, information programs are conducted in countries overseas through the overt use of the various techniques of communication, including libraries, radio broadcasting, press, motion pictures, and television.

Within USIA, the Screen Service is responsible for the production, contracting for, or other acquisition of motion picture films and television programs for use in the overseas information program. These films and television programs are intended for viewing on either a worldwide, regional, or country basis.

The fiscal year 1971 expenditures for the Screen Service amounted to \$10.7 million, of which production of documentary films and television programs for worldwide distribution totaled approximately \$2.9 million. During fiscal year 1971 a total of 82 original productions were released by the Screen Service, of which 28 documentary films were intended for worldwide audiences.

Test prints of worldwide documentaries are distributed by the Screen Service to the major overseas posts for previewing and evaluation prior to placement with foreign audiences. One of the purposes of this evaluation is to determine the best methods for effectively utilizing the film within each country program, and to provide evaluative data for the guidance of the Screen Service in the future planning and production of films. In addition, reaction and placement reports on actual film showings are supplied by the posts to the Screen Service on an intermittent basis.

Our review of the system for evaluating worldwide films included discussions with responsible officials in Washington, D.C. and the examination of pertinent records. The results of our review are presented below.

EVALUATION PROCEDURES AND PRACTICES

The United States Information Agency has a system for evaluating its worldwide documentaries and television films; however, improvements are needed in the procedures and practices followed in carrying out this process. Overseas information posts are not submitting evaluations as required. In addition, the Screen Service has not established guidelines and criteria for the utilization of evaluation data. As a result, much of the evaluation data submitted by the posts has not been summarized for management use.

In August 1970 the Screen Service initiated a formal evaluation program for those motion picture and television documentary films produced for worldwide distribution. Under this program all posts receiving film test prints are to submit evaluations of the films within a short period of time following receipt of the print. In this regard, the USIA Manual of Operations and Administration, Part XIII, Section 524, provides the following:

"The Agency sends to individual posts test prints of documentary films and TV pilot programs for evaluation of their potential value and use within the country program. The evaluation of each post is urgently needed by ISS to determine the size of the Agency's print order and the language versions required. The evaluations also provide a guide for future planning and production."

The evaluation is accomplished by means of completing a questionnaire designed by the Office of Research and Assessment and the Screen Service. The questionnaire contains specific questions relating to the following areas:

- degree to which the film supports worldwide Agency themes for which it was produced, as well as individual country objectives;
- the number of target audiences to which the post intends to show the film;
- the methods by which the post plans to show the film such as TV placement and loan distribution;
- interest in the subject on the part of prospective local audiences; and
- adequacy of the treatment of the subject as well as technical aspects.

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Overseas posts are also requested to describe any local political, social, cultural, psychological, or other considerations which either limit or increase the posts' ability to effectively utilize the film, and to provide any other written comments as needed. Test print evaluations, upon completion, are submitted to the Screen Service by the posts with informational copies to the appropriate geographic area offices and the Office of Research and Assessment.

Within the Screen Service, the Program Policy and Evaluation Staff has been assigned the responsibility for analyzing the effectiveness of the worldwide motion picture and television program. In this connection, the Manual of Operations and Administration outlines the functions of this staff as follows:

"...Prepares assessments and evaluations of films and television programs and coordinates survey and research programs of the medium with the Office of Research and Assessment (IOR)."

Analyses of test print evaluations prepared by the Program Policy and Evaluation Staff are distributed to interested elements within the Screen Service as well as to the Office of Research and Assessment.

The information provided by the posts is essential to the Screen Service for the planning of future productions. Equally important is the utilization of this data by the Screen Service in producing more effective films. We found, however, that a significant number of posts were not submitting the evaluation data as required and that the Screen Service was not analyzing available data in the most optimum manner.

Evaluation Of Films
By Overseas Posts

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During our review we determined that the overseas posts were not evaluating the worldwide films as required and, as a result, sufficient information was not always available to the Screen Service for a meaningful analysis. It is necessary, for the most effective planning and production of films, that management have sufficient information in a timely manner to enable them to produce films which will be responsive to USIA themes and country objectives.

Test print evaluations should be submitted by the posts in a timely manner so that the information may be analyzed and the results furnished to management, in order that the Screen Service can act upon suggestions for improvement. Since a film undergoes various stages in the production process, modifications can be made to films already in process. Thus, if posts were to report that the technical quality

of the film being evaluated needed improvement, corrective action could be taken, if warranted, for other films in process. The lack of timely responses could result in the release of additional films with the same technical deficiency.

From our analysis of Screen Service records, we learned that a significant number of evaluations were not timely and in many cases never submitted. The failure of posts to respond limits the usefulness of any analysis made of those evaluations which are received. For example, if both positive and negative comments regarding the use of a given technique, such as the use of multiple split screen were received, management would be unable to draw a meaningful conclusion from the responses if a significant number of posts did not reply.

Our analysis of available data for 22 films released during the period August 1970 through November 1971 showed that, on the average, only 41 percent of those posts receiving test prints had submitted evaluation data as shown in the following tabulation:

SUBMISSION OF EVALUATION DATA
BY OVERSEAS POSTS FOLLOWING
DISTRIBUTION OF TEST PRINTS

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	<u>Within</u> <u>6 Weeks</u>	<u>7-12</u> <u>Weeks</u>	<u>13-24</u> <u>Weeks</u>	<u>After</u> <u>24</u> <u>Weeks</u>	<u>Total</u> <u>Evaluations</u> <u>Received</u>	<u>Total</u> <u>Evaluations</u> <u>Not Received</u>
<u>Motion Picture Films</u>						
"One Man" Series	21.4%	8.6%	7.2%	1.3%	41.5%	58.5%
Other Documentaries	30.1	14.5	7.6	8.5	60.7	39.3
<u>Television Films</u>						
Total Films	<u>21.3%</u>	<u>9.7%</u>	<u>6.2%</u>	<u>3.9%</u>	<u>41.0%</u>	<u>59.0%</u>

In view of Agency regulations requiring that each film must be previewed by the post prior to programming, we see no valid reason why the evaluation could not be completed at that time. We believe that action can be taken by area offices in Washington to alleviate this problem. Since the geographic area offices not only receive copies of the test print evaluations but also follow-up requests for overdue evaluations, they should be aware of which posts, coming under their jurisdiction, are not responsive and take appropriate remedial action. The following tabulation shows, by geographic area, the percentage of posts which had submitted evaluations on 22 films included in our review:

Submission of Evaluation Data
By Geographic Area

<u>Geographic Area</u>	<u>Percentage of Submission</u>
South Asia	66.1%
East Asia & Pacific	49.1
Western Europe	46.2
Latin America	40.0
Africa	37.7
Near East & North Africa	34.5
Eastern Europe	<u>12.3</u>
Overall Average	<u>41.0%</u>

When a significant number of posts fail to respond or respond in an untimely manner to these evaluation requests, it places the Screen Service in a situation whereby it can not best serve the posts in meeting their country objectives. If the evaluations are to serve a beneficial purpose, the responses must be timely and in sufficient quantity so that the data contained therein can be associated and related into meaningful trends for review by the Screen Service and other concerned Agency elements.

Utilization Of
Evaluation Data

Although the overseas information posts are required to submit film evaluation data, no guidelines or criteria have been established by the Screen Service for the analysis and utilization of this information. Since the evaluation data submitted by the overseas posts is considered essential, it would logically follow that the Screen Service should summarize the material and utilize the information to the best advantage in planning future films.

As previously stated, the Program Policy and Evaluation Staff has the responsibility for preparing assessments and evaluations of films and television programs for management. In meeting this requirement, the Staff summarizes the written comments contained in the evaluation forms by positive and negative reactions, and usually assess the overall merits of the particular film. For example, in assessing the motion picture film "One Man: Walter Washington," their summary contained data on the distribution of test prints; overall costs; planned placement outlets; and evaluative comments relating to the general reaction of the posts to the film.

We found, however, that written assessments had not been made for all worldwide films. Of the 40 worldwide motion picture and television films released during the 17-month period ended November 1971, the Screen Service had summarized only the written comments received on eight films at the time of our review. In this connection, we were unable to identify any established criteria or guidelines for the selection of film evaluations to be summarized. We were informed by Screen Service personnel that factors such as cost, the nature of the film's message, expressed interest of top USIA management, or the number of evaluations received are considered in making this determination.

We also found the Screen Service did not tabulate posts' responses to the questionnaire portion of the evaluation form. Objective questions, such as the degree to which Agency themes and country objectives are met, are very important, and an analysis of this data for each film would provide the Screen Service with valuable insight into the film's effectiveness and, accordingly, would be of assistance in future planning.

The geographic area offices, which receive informational copies of test print evaluations from posts in their area, have indicated that the evaluations can serve a very useful purpose because they reflect the judgment of those people in the field who are in the best position to determine how well a film supports the country program and how appropriate a given film is likely to be for post priority audiences.

We noted that in early 1971 the Office of Research and Assessment undertook, at the request of the geographic area directors, a tabulation of the responses to the questionnaire portion of the test print evaluations for five films. The results of this study were provided to the Director, Screen Service, with informational copies to the Area Directors in August 1971. The results, however, consisted only of an arithmetical summary of posts' responses without any comparative analyses or suggestions for consideration in future planning. A responsible Screen Service official stated that this data was used for general informational purposes but we were unable to determine what action if any was initiated by the results of this study to improve the planning and production of any films.

We were advised by officials of the Office of Research and Assessment that, as a result of this study, questions were raised by the geographic area offices regarding the suitability of the film evaluation form as presently worded. Subsequently, the Office of Research and Assessment initiated a study of the test print evaluation form. At the time of our review, a revised draft form was being circulated to the Screen Service and the geographic area offices for comment. We noted, however, that although the format and wording of the evaluation form had been modified, the type of data to be provided by the posts will remain essentially the same.

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Placement And Local
Reaction Reports

Although the present evaluation system provides for the submission of data on films planned to be shown overseas, it is equally important that this system also specifically provide for information regarding the actual placement of films. This feedback information should deal with actual experiences relating to how well films met country objectives; the target audiences reached; the number of film showings; and the outlets used for distribution. To plan on a long range basis, it is important that overseas posts provide the Screen Service with sufficient data regarding the placement of films.

In this regard, Agency instructions state that test print evaluations, although important, are only the initial step in the anticipated chain of responses, and that posts should keep in mind the Agency's need for subsequent reports as aids in future programming. The structure of these reports is more flexible than the reporting requirements for the test print evaluations and would include data on:

- specific comments, favorable or unfavorable, from members of priority target audiences,
- public response to theatrical placement or TV showings including when applicable, the size of the audience and comments by theater or station managers, and
- reactions, favorable or unfavorable, by the local press, radio and TV critics.

Based on our review of available data, we noted that these placement and reaction reports consisted primarily of comments by the posts and, for the most part, related to the placement of a particular film and/or the post's reaction to a film. Relatively few posts were submitting these reports and, for those posts providing comments, they were sporadic and lacked uniformity. Some posts' comments were very inclusive in that they mentioned how and why a film was placed and the audiences reached, whereas others merely commented that a certain person saw the film or that a certain film was placed with a particular station without giving any specifics regarding the placement.

Consideration should be given to having posts report to the Screen Service data regarding actual placement of films on a more consistent and uniform basis. If this data were submitted regularly, it would provide the Screen Service with an additional means for improving the effectiveness of its films.

ANALYSES OF EVALUATION DATA

Management should maintain data on a continuing basis to provide for the comparative analyses of current and prior film evaluations.

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Although appropriate evaluative analysis of each film is essential, the usefulness of this data is limited unless it is analyzed in relationship to other films. By comparing important evaluation aspects of individual films to other films, management can develop trends or indicators as a means of improving the effectiveness of the products.

Information which is available on a movie-by-movie basis but not necessarily considered in relationship to other films includes -- the degree to which films are serving Agency themes as well as country objectives, target audiences to be reached, means through which posts intend to show films, and other specific considerations that enhance or limit the usefulness of the films. In addition, information regarding the number of film prints ordered by the overseas posts could be indicative of the potential success of a film and necessitate additional analysis as required.

Information of this type, although available, is not summarized on a continuing basis. Therefore, we analyzed available data on posts' reactions to 12 motion picture and 10 television documentary films which were distributed overseas during the period August 1970 through November 1971. The following paragraphs discuss the type of information which could be utilized by management to enable them to provide films which would be more responsive to program needs.

Agency Themes And Country Objectives

Data concerning the overseas posts' reactions as to how well films are supporting Agency themes and country objectives should be maintained and analyzed on a continual basis. These factors are particularly significant in view of the fact that the principal mission of the Screen Service is to provide films which will advance the achievement of U.S. foreign policy and individual country objectives.

Although this data is available, it is not maintained and analyzed on a comparative basis; therefore, the Screen Service is not in a position to most effectively evaluate the overall contribution its films are making to the advancement of U.S. objectives and to initiate changes in film policy, if indicated, in order to further its mission.

For example, we noted that substantially more posts stated that the film "One Man: Craig Fischer M.D." was more responsive to Agency themes and country objectives than a different type film such as the "Fourth of July." By comparing the evaluations of various films and exploring the reasons why substantial differences exist, management could determine whether these reactions are significant and recurring in order to capitalize on those factors which contribute the most effective support to Agency objectives.

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Target Audiences

Management should have, on a continual basis, information as to which audiences the USIA films will reach overseas. Since management has not tabulated the data submitted by the posts regarding target audiences, they can at best assume that the audiences suggested by the Screen Service are being reached.

Our review of circular airgrams announcing the release of films showed that usually suggested target audiences were enumerated as follows: political and government leaders, academic community, military officers, traditional leaders, communication and media leaders, professionals, creative-intellectual leaders, entrepreneurs-businessmen-managers, labor, and agriculture. From these airgrams it would appear that just about every conceivable type of audience was considered appropriate and that each post would reach some type of audience; however, our review of data on 22 worldwide films showed that on an average about 14 percent of the posts were not planning to show the films to any target audiences.

If management maintained data on more than a movie-by-movie basis, they would have an overview of the target audiences planned to be reached and could compare films which were to be shown to many target audiences, or to no target audiences, in order to determine ways of reaching more and different types of audiences.

Film Placement

Management should maintain information on the anticipated placement of films by the overseas posts as a means for improving film placement through all available outlets.

Although worldwide films are categorized as either motion picture or television films, provisions are generally made for showing these films through both outlets as well as via direct projection and loan distribution. We noted that guidance provided posts by the Screen Service regarding the "One Man" films indicated that because of various factors, including length, the films should be susceptible for good placement in commercial theaters as well as on television stations. Our analysis of available data showed, however, that a relatively low percentage of showings of the "One Man" films was intended to be through these outlets. For example, we noted that although the film "One Man: Walter Washington" was well received by posts in terms of prints ordered, anticipated exposure of this film through direct projection and loan distribution was significantly greater than through commercial outlets. It should be noted, however, that projected commercial placement of "One Man" films was greater than that for other films we reviewed.

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Although our review of available data did not establish which of the film placement outlets were considered the most important in terms of achieving overall USIA objectives, we believe that theatrical and television placement of films would be important because of the larger and more diversified audiences which could be reached. We recognize, however, that in a few countries film placement in commercial outlets may be difficult if not impossible due to government controls.

Nevertheless, management should be aware of the degree to which posts indicate that they plan to show films through the various outlets in comparison to the medium for which it was produced. This data, properly analyzed, could serve not only as an indicator of the effectiveness of the film itself but also as guidance in planning future productions.

Other Considerations Affecting Film Usage

Subject matter treatment, current interest, and political considerations are some of the factors that could affect the usefulness of a particular film. Comments made by overseas posts regarding these factors on individual films should be considered in conjunction with prior film evaluations as a means of determining whether they are recurring and significant. A comparative analysis of historical and current evaluation data could show the following:

- that certain kinds of films would have better reception if they were targeted to specific areas rather than given worldwide distribution,
- that recurring comments regarding offensive scenes might indicate a need for more thorough review of the concept treatment (research) for future films,
- that certain types of films have to be produced and released within a relatively short time to be effective, and
- that slow-paced films are more understandable and responsive to a greater cross section of target audiences throughout the world.

The following comments from overseas posts are cited as examples of the type of information that is presently available to management which we believe should be considered in relationship to other film evaluations:

I Am a Man

"Film is well done...Gives perspective...we could use more films of this nature....i.e.: imaginative, in depth reportage...instead of the 'arty' films we often get..."

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Two Senators

"...the concensus was that this film is dull, unimaginative and too U.S. oriented to be of much use...Beyond that, the Post's test print is of poor quality."

In Memorium Hue February 1968

"...exhumation of a three year old corpse counter productive any desirable target audience this post..."

Undercurrents

"Under the terms of the third country agreement the post can not obtain TV placement for this product."

The Eve of Eid el-Fitr

"...we all agreed that it was clear that whoever made this film did not know anything about Islam. For one thing, there is the girl in shorts seen entering the Mosque. This would be very bad if we showed it on TV..."

"The Post does agree that this is a most beautifully photographed film. However, it would not be very useful for current Post Objectives, Themes and Packaged Programs."

One Man: Walter Washington

"Film is easy to follow visually and the narration is slow paced enough for most audiences to follow and understand."

"A good, solid treatment of an important American and the job he is doing for the community and the nation."

Barrikade

"The film cannot be shown in...for political reasons."

"Polemic material is unacceptable in..."

One Man: Jim Plunkett

"...as a sample of the film genre showing a member of a minority achieving success in the American system through great personal effort, Jim Plunkett is a good film..."

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Viet-Nam! Viet-Nam!

"...largely of historical interest...little reason for USIS to open up a debate through widespread use of this film. The stark scenes of death and misery...might have the opposite of any desired program objective..."

"...It is felt, that...when there is an atmosphere of acceptance of Vietnamization a film as dated as this would be more likely to produce negative rather than positive reaction...would not pass...censorship."

"...far too bloody for...tastes..."

One Man: David Federle

"Very good product...Somebody this close to government yet not offensive to anyone is a good subject choice."

One Man: Peter Ney

"...The emphasis here--both legal and social--is such that the post cannot envision using this film widely. Showings to selected individuals--lawyers and teachers of law--are possible."

"The film covers the subject too superficially. The Post would like to have had the theme dwell more on the attorneys involvement in the welfare of the people of his community. Therefore, it was decided to use only one copy in the English language."

One Man: Ken Murray

"The film does not fit country objectives and will be of limited use. We can show to a few people interested in motion picture making."

"A pleasant film, but difficult to see illustrating that 'the essence of American institutions is freedom,' or 'innovation and creativity.' The clear treatment and glimpses of Hollywood life give the film some limited utility for showing to film clubs or youth groups. However, it cannot really be considered a useful program tool."

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The above comments are not all-inclusive of the reactions of the overseas posts to worldwide films and were cited primarily to depict

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the kinds of data requiring comparative analyses for the most effective production of films.

Film Prints

The number of posts ordering additional prints can serve as an indicator that analysis and review of a particular film, or type of film, is warranted. Furthermore, maintenance of this type of data on a continuous basis could provide an insight into those factors which should be emphasized in the planning of future productions.

The initial distribution of test prints, normally one to each post, is made without any charge to the posts. Under the Resource Management System, however, the cost of additional prints ordered is charged against each post's resources as the post has the option of determining the kind of media services desired, such as films or publications, as well as the relative amount of resources to be used in obtaining these services. Because of these factors, the number of posts ordering additional prints together with the number of actual prints ordered could be indicative of the success of a particular film in meeting program needs.

During our review we noted, for example, that 56 posts ordered 189 additional prints of "One Man: Walter Washington," which was more than for any other film we reviewed. An analysis should have been made to determine the reasons the posts responded favorably to this film with a view toward capitalizing upon those factors, if possible, in future productions. Conversely, at the time of our review, no posts had ordered additional prints of the television special "Changing of the Guard," a film dealing with the current U.S. policy on Vietnamization. This factor, in our opinion, should have initiated a review of this film in order to identify its apparent lack of success.

We believe that an analysis of the various aspects indicating the overall success or failure of films is paramount for the planning and production of the most effective films.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the Director, Screen Service:

- request that the Area Directors emphasize to the overseas posts the necessity for submitting evaluations of film test prints in order to provide sufficient timely data for meaningful analysis,

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- establish definitive criteria and guidelines to provide for the utilization of all evaluation data and the conversion of such data into meaningful analyses of film results,
- initiate action to revise present Agency instructions so that placement and local reaction reports furnished by the overseas posts will be provided on a more consistent and uniform basis, and
- maintain management data on a continuing basis for the comparative analysis of current and prior film evaluations.

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