

RUNNING A COMMUNITY FILM FESTIVAL – plus AIMS AND RULES

1. Why a Community Film Festival?

A community film festival can bring the community alive over a weekend and if co-ordinated with local businesses and groups can produce a significant boost to the economy and life of the community.

2. What is a Community Film Festival?

While a Community Cinema will attract local audiences to regular screenings throughout the year a Community Film Festival can attract local and out-of towners alike to come together to experience the best films in a cinematic and enthusiastic environment.

A film festival will also offer assorted activities that are an important element to lift the event from a series of screenings (eg a cinema) to that of an integrated film festival.

A Community Film Festival that is eligible for membership with the FVFS is one that:

1. Has acceptable aims.
2. Has acceptable rules.
3. Is not-for-profit.

A Community Film Festival can not qualify as a film society as it does not have defined members but attracts participants on a screening by screening basis.

A Community Film Festival would normally be run by a single person or committee which is either self-appointed or nominated by a parent organisation. In either case a Community Film Festival must have approved rules and aims and run as a non-profit organisation.

A Community Film Festival may be assisted by the FVFS, a local film society or Arts Association.

Admission to screenings would normally be by single session ticket or book of tickets. There would normally not be “members” of the Community Film Festival except for promotional reasons. Film hire rates and DVD rights charges would be based on flat rate or commercial rate depending on the agreement with the distributor. The Community Film Festival would not have access to the NTLC (Non Theatrical Loans Catalogue at the National Film and Sound Archive in Canberra) except by special arrangement.

Community Film Festivals are not-for-profit organisations run by volunteers on behalf of the community. Their focus is on bringing the community together on a once a year basis to enjoy films in a theatrical environment as well as offering a social event for the participants.

Information Sheets 2 and 3, which are aimed at Film Societies and Community Cinemas respectively, have many suggestions which are relevant to the starting and running of Community Film Festivals.

3. Starting up

Evaluate the interest in the community for such a venture by sending out a questionnaire which also outlines your proposals. State your ideas, a typical programme, anticipated prices and how the Community Film Festival might operate. Have it available at outlets throughout the town or printed in the local paper.

Hold a public meeting – possibly with a film screening.

Form an interim committee of a few interested participants who might help you to launch the Community Film Festival and take it into its first year.

4. Venue

A suitable venue may be an old cinema restored by council or Arts Association. In many cases such a venue may require considerable work to restore or upgrade and costly to run, or may just be unavailable.

In the case of an old cinema or large hall the equipment would normally be 35mm but in a smaller venue 16mm or projected DVD would be adequate.

35mm is the best quality but the most expensive.

New films are generally not being released in 16mm and it is hard to attract an audience for older films.

DVD is suitable as it is much cheaper to obtain and easier to project.

A Community Film Festival based on DVD would certainly be easier to get started as it would involve less start-up finance, technical expertise and running costs and would in turn, need fewer patrons to enable you to achieve a balanced budget.

An important consideration for a successful Community Film Festival is to consider what part it plays socially in the community and whether it should be associated with dinners, special suppers etc. The availability of catering facilities may be important in the selection of a venue.

5. Your Highlight Event

Your film festival must have a highlight that lifts it from being just a series of films into a really exciting event. Special guests, a short film competition, party night, raffles, organised meals, themed decoration, free coffee and guided walks and tours, talks and presentations. They all add to the good feeling of the festival.

6. Promotion

Whereas promotion of a Film Society is normally annually based and aimed at getting members to join up for the whole year, promotion of a Community Film Festival is aimed at attracting audiences to the one event. There is little opportunity to get feedback on how well the advertising is working and adjusting the advertising to suit because it will then be too late. You need to get it right from the start.

Good promotional material for the films is often available from the film supplier, but at a cost. The internet is also a good source of material for notices, posters, newspaper articles etc. Provision of good material to the local radio and TV stations is essential if they are to be supportive. The film society experience shows that the best promotion is personal recommendation. Flyers in local libraries and entries in newspaper "What's on" columns. Ensure you prepare appropriate material to satisfy each of these promotional opportunities.

The promotion should focus on the festival aspect of the event and any special offerings.

Good promotion of your Community Film Festival is essential.

You will need to get promotion right first time because if the promotion is not effective you will not get a second chance until the following film festival – and that is probably one year away.

Your promotion will have two main thrusts to it. Firstly you will be targeting the out-of-towners who need to be persuaded to come for the weekend and see a programme of films in a terrific environment. Promote the whole package, and get input from the local businesses who can provide accommodation and eating places.

Your second promotional thrust should be to the locals, or to anyone who would consider coming to just a day of films or to just one film.

Promotion should start early, with “coming events”, “Don’t miss... “ etc. while closer to the event you would focus on the individual films and events – especially to the locals.

7. Source of Films

There are many distributors of 35mm films listed in the White and Yellow Pages and on the internet directories.

There are very few distributors of 16mm films these days, and it is possible they will cease trading within a few years. The main distributors now are Amalgamated Movies www.amalgamatedmovies.com, Potential/Chapel see www.potential.com/catalogue.htm, Sharmill films www.sharmill.com.au or many smaller companies.

If you are interested in non-mainstream titles then 16mm will not have the range of titles to suit.

A DVD copy of just about any title you might want for digital projection should be available from one of the many DVD distributors throughout Australia or over the counter at DVD sales outlets. The screening rights for a DVD will be similar to that of a 16mm film but the range of titles available is much wider, approaching that of 35mm film titles. If the DVD is not available as a Region 4 version then it is unlikely that there is an Australian distributor and obtaining permission to screen in public may not be possible.

A Community Film Festival will not have access to the film library NTLC (Non Theatrical Loans Catalogue) at the NFSA (National Film and Sound Archives) as these are limited to non-theatrical users only. ie those that screen to members and do not sell individual admission.

8. Copyright Issues

Copyright laws require state that no-one may screen a film or DVD in public without the copyright owner’s permission and this usually requires a payment of a modest fee. Hire of an item from a distributor will imply permission and include a copyright fee. Any item borrowed from a private collection or owned by the Film Festival (a DVD for example) may be screened only if the copyright owner gives approval and a fee paid if requested.

9. Insurance

Membership of the FVFS includes free insurance for film and DVD loss and damage whilst in use or in transit.

FVFS Membership also entitles the Community Film Festival to participate in attractive priced public liability insurance tailored for your needs. See Information Sheet 8.

10. Tax

There are advantages in applying to the ATO (Australian Tax Office) for an ABN (Australian Business Number) and then applying for a charity status. There are distinct advantages when receiving payments from government or council bodies. For example, if you cannot quote an ABN, many payments to you, or grants may have 49% tax withheld. See Information sheet 5.

11. Volunteers

A Community Film Festival relies on volunteers. While the larger Community Film Festival may employ a projectionist and manager, it will still rely on volunteers for ticketing, ushering, promotion, programme planning, etc. One of the keys to a successful Community Film Festival is the volunteer effort that is available. The larger the Film Festival, the more attendances and the more films you screen, the more volunteer labour will be needed to keep it running efficiently.

When starting a small Community Film Festival think about the tasks involved and who might be available to help. Ensure that these people are involved in any steering groups set up in the early stages of development.

12. Management

Being a not-for-profit organisation, the Community Film Festival will generally be organised by a committee. Whilst the committee is not elected by members, as in a Film Society, they should still be organised in a similar manner. Select a President, Secretary and Treasurer and any other positions that seem appropriate. Ticketing, catering, programming and promotion are useful positions to identify.

For a larger Community Film Festival it may be necessary to employ staff to project and to manage the Film Festival. Be certain of your funding arrangements before heading down this track though. Better to start off small with volunteer labour as far as possible expanding only when proven feasible.

13. Dependent or Independent

A Community Film Festival may be set up by a “parent” organisation such as Arts Association or local council, in which case they might expect a major say in the running of the Community Film Festival and should nominate one or two people to be on the management committee.

An independent organisation is one in which the volunteers get together with a common objective of running the Community Film Festival for the community and answer to none but themselves.

Model Aims and Rules are proposed for each of these alternatives at the end of this information sheet.

14. Work with a committee

When selecting people to be part of a committee to run the Community Film Festival try to get a cross section of the community and a range of skills on the committee. For example it is useful to get a film “expert”, an accountant, a technical expert and so on.

Try to get enthusiastic people with a personal interest in the project succeeding. People with high credibility in the community will be important as they will be responsible for presenting the project to the community for endorsement.

Have a good set of guidelines for the committee to follow to minimise misunderstandings down the track. You will be spending community funds so it is important that this be done efficiently and transparently. This applies also to reporting guidelines.

15. Local Arts Councils

Many communities have Arts Councils or Regional Film Festival Officers who will be available to support and guide the Community Film Festival. Your screenings can be

co-ordinated with other community activities through them and promoted more widely than you could do on your own.

Local Arts Councils may be able to lobby local council on your behalf for further support or even support you directly with start-up funds or equipment.

16. Budget

A budget is essential. You will need to include the running cost of the organisation overall, on an annual basis, as well as the expected costs and income for the weekend of the festival. As the screenings are essentially your only source of income it is tempting to screen more films, but people will only attend so many movies and your attendance and thus income will fall away if you screen too many.

Try to put figures on each of the following cost and income items.

The table below assumes a small Community Film Festival that screens 8 films over a weekend of 2 ½ days using 35mm films.

Ticket Sales							
	Full Price		Concession		Income	Ratio c to full	Seats sold
	No:	Each \$	No:	Each \$	\$	%	
Season of 7	14	\$60.00	20	\$54.00	\$1,920.00	90%	238
Multipass	78	\$10.00	60	\$9.00	\$1,320.00	90%	138
1 session	30	\$11.00	35	\$10.00	\$680.00	91%	65
Late show	6	\$7.00	0	\$6.00	\$42.00	86%	6
The Lot (of 8)	16	\$87.00	27	\$80.00	\$3,552.00	92%	344
Less meals included in the above (43 x \$18) =					-\$774.00		
Totals for Ticket sales					\$6,740.00		
Total seats sold							791

Meal sales					
"The Lot" tickets include payment for Sat lunch and Friday dinner					
So 43 "The Lot" tickets are accounted for below					
	The Lot	Meal sales	Total meals	Each \$	Total
Fri Dinner	43	34	77	\$8	\$616
Sat Lunch	43	43	86	\$10	\$860
Totals for Meal sales					\$1,476
As 13 comps (Guests and helpers) were paid for by the festival					
13 x \$18 for meals is charged to the festival budget.					\$234.00
Grand total for meal cost recovery					\$1,710.00

Net cost of meals	\$5.00
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Expenditure	Cost
Leaflets	6,000 \$590
Posting leaflets	1156 \$458
Newspaper ads	\$338
Other publicity	\$800
Other posting	\$47
Films	\$2,100
Program	\$90

Freight		\$78
Interval refreshments		\$81
Travel allowance & guest accom		\$724
Complimentary meals		\$234
Theatre		\$500
Projectionist		\$450
Other		\$350
Membership with FVFS		\$180
Total Expenditure		\$7,020

So the Bottom line works out as follows:

Ticket Sales	\$6,740
Sponsorship	\$1,000
Net Meal costs	-\$5
Expenses	-\$7,020
Surplus	\$715

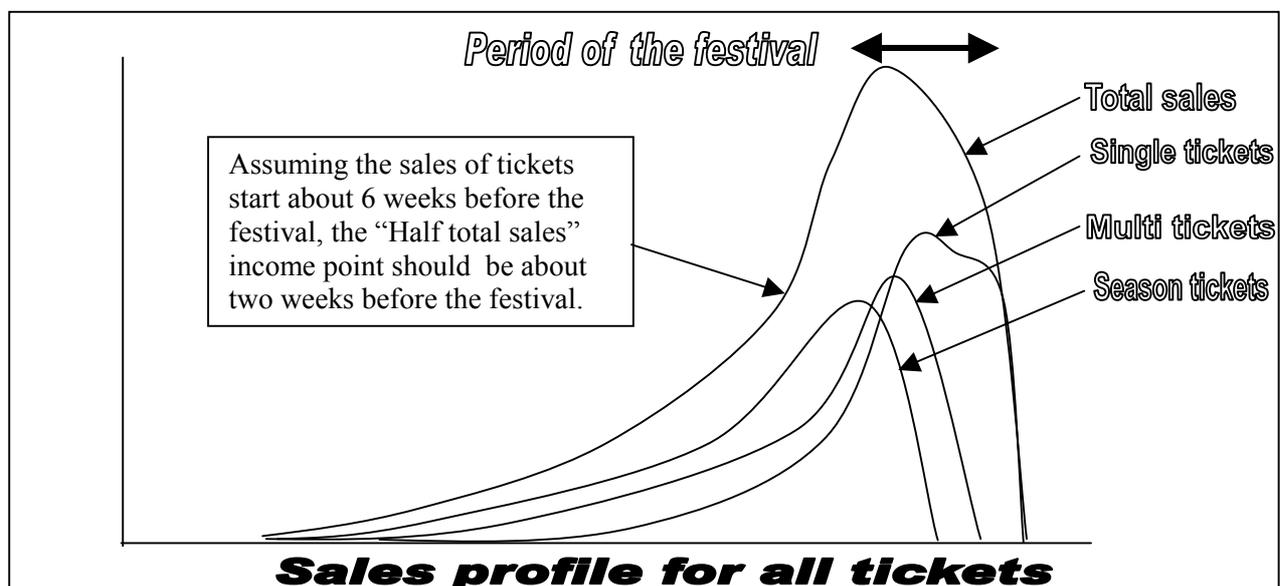
17. Charge implications

If you sell meals you may choose to sell them on at cost or a slight margin to allow for no-shows, cancellations or overheads. Too great a margin will impact on the numbers sold. The more you can sell the more patrons will enjoy the festival but remember this will not help the bottom line whereas every movie ticket sold will add to the bottom line.

It is assumed that the meals budget is self balancing – ie sales of all meal tickets should be sufficient to cover the cost of the meals plus wines after allowing for the cost of guests and complimentary meals (for helpers) charged to the festival proper.

As you can expect many seniors and pensioners to attend you should not be too generous with discounts. 80 – 85% of the full price is quite acceptable to the patrons and remember to allow for these discounts when doing your forward estimates.

Sales of season tickets should commence at least 6 weeks before the festival. Develop a feeling for how and when sales are made. Be aware of what advertising works for you by having suitably marked application forms for each location.



Make sure all sponsors and helpers are thanked, either in programme notes, promotion or during announcements. Announcements at each screening help make the difference between a cinema screening and a film festival.

18. Sponsorship

A number of local traders and organisations may be prepared to sponsor the Community Film Festival or place paid advertising on the screen, in the foyer or in your newsletter, programme or other publicity.

Not only may it be a good business decision to advertise with you but the advertiser may wish to raise their profile by being seen to support local activities and groups.

Don't forget that sponsorship support needs to be acknowledged by showing the company's logo or a note of thanks in your promotional material or at the screening.

19. Government interaction

There are many government run programs in support of local initiatives such as Community Film Festivals. They tend to be different in the different states, but may include Arts support programs, Community Cultural Development programs, Business Development, Regional Arts programs and Ministry for the Arts, Regional Film Festival Officer or even Screen Australia / NFSA.

If your Community Film Festival is operating in a heritage building you may be able to get additional funding through Heritage sources, or by setting up a tax-deductible appeal for donations.

20. Your Community

Your Community website has many information sheets available on running community or non-profit organisations. www.yourcommunity.com.au.

21. Dealing with Distributors

Booking recent release films from distributors may be difficult and expensive. Usually, new and box office type films are screened firstly in the larger cinema chains in the cities and suburbs. In most cases the charge for hiring such a film will be a percentage of the sales.

Most films will be available to smaller Film Festivals a few weeks after release, although this does depend on their popularity and whether they are still earning money in the big cinema chains. When they do become available to the smaller Film Festivals it is also more than likely that the distributor will be willing to make them available at a flat rate which is a much easier pricing structure to manage.

Most distributors expect you to pay freight both ways for your films. For 35mm, which are quite heavy, the price of freight can be significant.

If you screen from DVDs, the freight cost is insignificant, but because the main component of hiring a film is in the copyright don't expect the hire cost to be significantly smaller. While the corner DVD retailer can hire you a DVD for home viewing for as little as a few dollars, the price for screening a DVD in public to a larger audience can be as much as \$100-200 depending on the release date. You will not be able to take advantage of the ACOFS screening rights agreement because you are not operating non-theatrical screenings.

22. Your Audience

Understand your audience. Knowing your audience will help you determine the best time of the year to hold your festival, how many films to include and what sort of films they want to see.

Are you in a country town where most of your potential audience work on the land and are too busy to come to screening during sowing time, harvesting, lambing, shearing, or any other time demanded by the farm?

Would your audience prefer screenings in the winter when there is little happening on the farm and daylight is short, or would they prefer to come out in the warmer weather?

Are you targeting the young family, or the retired couples?

Do they want a fun filled festival or are they prepared to see films with substance? Do they want some retrospective films or only modern?

23. Programming

Your programming will depend firstly on the audience you hope to attract and how close you are to other film screening venues. If you are in or near a town where the audience appetite for box-office hits is met by a big cinema chain, you may find a strong support for an alternative “Art-House” or foreign film programme.

While it may be a good idea to try different styles of programming and learn from the results, it is always recommended to find your preferred programming style and stick with it. Your regular audience will get to know the style of film you tend to programme and come to trust your judgement.

24. Planning your Festival

For a successful film festival you will need to plan, plan and plan some more. You will need to involve the community as much as possible, getting their input and ideas and linking in to other activities

Planning and promotion are the keys to a successful festival – plus of course the right films at the right price at the right time and in the right venue!

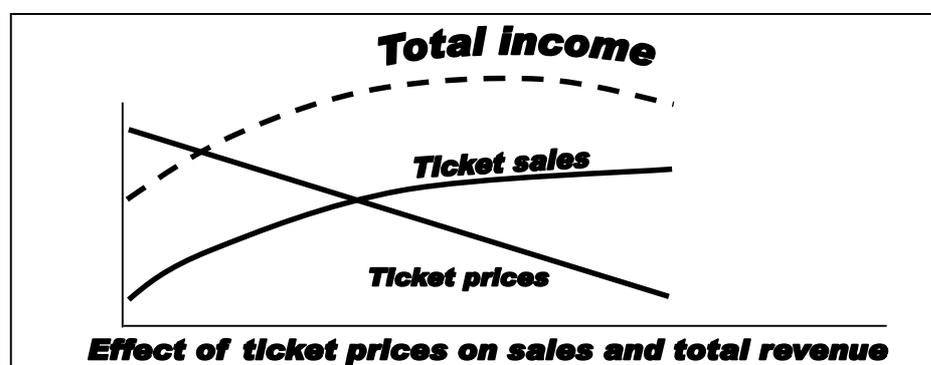
Use a spreadsheet to list all activities, who is to do them and when.

Have regular meetings to plan and keep the momentum going.

Prepare a costing spreadsheet so you know your expense budget for the different items, and know what your break-even point is. ie the number of tickets to sell to cover your costs.

Be aware that selling more tickets will bring in revenue but selling more accommodation and meals will not because they have a large per person cost associated with each item sold.

Have a play with the spreadsheet to see the impact of price changes, costs etc. remember the lower the ticket prices the more you will sell – up to a point. This is called the elasticity of demand.



25. Your Check List

Prepare a check list of what needs to be done, who is to do it and the deadlines for completion. As all tasks should be linked forward to the planned start date of the festival this is an ideal job for a spreadsheet in which all dates are calculated automatically. For example:

Allocation of jobs for the film festival

Assuming Festival starts on :-

9-Nov

Activity	Days before Festival	Best date	Person responsible
1 Book Venue	300	13-Jan	Fred
2 Book Projectionist	300	13-Jan	John
3 Prepare budget	90	11-Aug	John
4 Book meals and get quote	90	11-Aug	Peter
5 Arrange sponsors	90	11-Aug	
6 First Committee meeting	85	16-Aug	
7 Invite guests	60	10-Sep	
8 Finalise feature films	60	10-Sep	
9 2nd Committee meeting	60	10-Sep	
10 Arrange walk	60	10-Sep	
11 Complete flyer artwork	50	20-Sep	
12 Printing ready	45	25-Sep	
13 Post flyers	43	27-Sep	
14 Leaflets to theatres etc	43	27-Sep	
15 Complete posters	38	2-Oct	
16 Arrange PA system	30	10-Oct	
17 Select shorts	30	10-Oct	
18 Print tickets	30	10-Oct	
19 Press release	21	19-Oct	
20 3rd committee meeting	16	24-Oct	
21 Co-ordinate Film collection	16	24-Oct	
22 Sales at door - roster	16	24-Oct	
23 Ushering - roster	16	24-Oct	
24 Buy drinks and cups	14	26-Oct	
25 Friday catering - confirm	7	2-Nov	
26 Saturday catering - confirm	7	2-Nov	
27 Nametags	7	2-Nov	
28 Print programme	3	6-Nov	
29 Print feedback form	3	6-Nov	
30 Interval catering - purchase	2	7-Nov	
31 Setting up theatre	0	9-Nov	
32 Film return - co-ordinate	0	9-Nov	
33 Ticket advance sales		All	
34 Ticket posting		All	
35 Host guests		During	
36 Sound and focus		During	
37 Timekeeping		During	
38 MC		During	
39 Interviews		During	
40 Ticket checking - roster		During	
41 Interval catering - overseeing		During	

42	Friday catering - overseeing		During	
43	Saturday catering - overseeing		During	
44	Organise raffles		before and during	
45	Finalise receipts		after	
46	General cleaning up		During	

26. FVFS support

The FVFS may be able to give some assistance to get you started but any ongoing assistance will have a price attached, possibly on the basis of a share of the surplus, but this will depend on the assistance that is needed.

27. Aims and Rules

The FVFS has responsibilities to other organisations to ensure that members meet the requirements listed above. As a result, these organisations extend special privileges to FVFS members.

Before applying for membership with the FVFS it is necessary for your management committee to agree to meet the requirements of the FVFS.

To assist your management committee to prepare a set of aims and rules some models are attached. Your Community Film Festival may adopt the aims and rules as they stand or it may wish to make changes to the wording or add extra clauses. The models are considered to contain the minimum requirements to be acceptable to the FVFS.

Where a Community Film Festival is considering becoming incorporated the model rules supplied by Business Affairs should be considered for adoption. They are much more extensive and cover many more situations. If you choose to do so however, you will need to prepare and append your own statement of aims that define aims appropriate to a Community Film Festival.

See our information sheet No 8, on incorporation.

Where a Community Film Festival operates under the constitution of a parent organisation, that organisation must also be not-for-profit and have rules and aims consistent with those of a Community Film Festival. In this case also, the Community Film Festival needs to prepare and adopt for themselves, a set of appropriate aims and rules which may be less extensive than those of an independent organisation. Model aims and rules are attached.

AIMS AND RULES FOR AN INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY FILM FESTIVAL

Adopted (date)

[This set of aims and rules is designed for the situation where a Community Film Festival operates independently of any other organisation.]

AIMS

1. To provide an environment where an audience may experience a wide range of films in a comfortable, cinematic environment and discuss them with like-minded people.
2. To attract local and non-local audiences over a weekend, bringing the community together in a "Festival of Film" which includes film screenings and other activities relevant to film culture and other community interests.
3. To encourage interest in the film as an art and as a medium of information and education by means of the exhibition of films of all kinds.
4. To promote the study and appreciation of film by means of lectures, discussions, exhibitions and publications.

RULES

1. The Community Film Festival should have an ABN and be registered with the ATO as a charitable organisation supporting the Arts.
2. The Community Film Festival will be administered by a committee comprising at least:
Chairperson
Secretary
Treasurer
Additional people as required.
3. The Community Film Festival will operate as a non-profitmaking venture with any surplus being retained to further its aims.
4. Admission to screenings may be by season, multiple or single session tickets. [Note that by allowing admission by single ticket the Community Film Festival should expect to pay semi-commercial prices for film hire and DVD rental – generally a flat rate contract with the distributor.]
5. A management report and financial statement will be prepared annually and be presented to the committee.
6. Any payments made to another organisation must be limited to payment for services provided (eg rental) or identifiable and pertinent costs and must not be provided as fund raising for that organisation.
7. In the event of winding up the remaining assets and funds are to be distributed to another organisation with similar aims and not be distributed to individuals or unapproved organisations.
8. Should there be any dispute the matter shall be referred to the FVFS for resolution or to another person acceptable to both parties.
9. The officers and members of the committee shall not receive payment either direct or indirect for their services except for legitimate expenses incurred on behalf of the Community Film Festival.

AIMS AND RULES FOR A *DEPENDENT COMMUNITY FILM FESTIVAL*

Adopted (date)

[This set of aims and rules is designed for the situation where a community Film Festival operates under the constitution of a parent body such as a council or Arts council.]

AIMS

1. To provide an environment where audiences may experience a wide range of films in a comfortable, cinematic environment and discuss them with like-minded people.
2. To attract local and non-local audiences over a weekend, bringing the community together in a “Festival of Film” which includes film screenings and other activities relevant to film culture and other community interests.
3. To encourage interest in the film as an art and as a medium of information and education by means of the exhibition of films of all kinds.
4. To promote the study and appreciation of film by means of lectures, discussions, exhibitions and publications.

RULES

1. The Community Film Festival shall be administered by an independent committee or one operating under the guidance of the parent organisation and comprising at least -
Chairperson
Secretary
Treasurer
Additional people as required.
2. The Community Film Festival will operate as a non-profitmaking venture with any surplus being retained to further its aims
3. Admission to screenings may be by season, multiple or single session tickets. [Note that by allowing admission by single ticket the organisation should expect to pay semi-commercial prices for film hire and DVD rental – generally a flat rate contract with the distributor.]
4. A management report and financial statement will be prepared annually and provided to the committee and parent organisation.
5. Any payments made to another organisation, including a parent, must be limited to payment for services provided (eg rental) or identifiable and pertinent costs and must not be provided as fund raising for that organisation.
6. In the event of winding up the remaining assets and funds are to be distributed to another organisation with similar aims and not be distributed to individuals or unapproved organisations.
7. In all other respects the Community Film Festival will operate within the rules of the parent organisation.
8. Should there be any dispute the matter shall be referred to a person acceptable to all of the disputing parties to act as a mediator.
9. The officers and members of the committee shall not receive payment either direct or indirect for their services except for legitimate expenses incurred on behalf of the Community Film Festival.