

SO YOU WANT TO START A FILM SOCIETY

THIS IS ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW TO START WITH

A Venue

It must be adequate in size for projection and the comfort of your audience, in terms of seating, heating/cooling, blackout curtains and have facilities for refreshments. Investigate local halls, a movie theatre - most operate only on weekends in the country towns - schools, clubrooms, and member's homes.

If you are considering screening in a pub, club or café you must be able to isolate the film society (eg in a separate room) so that the public are not able to see or hear the movie. While an outdoor setting may be attractive, some DVD distributors regard such a setting as unacceptable for a film society seeking non-theatrical screening rights.

Equipment - 16mm film

You will need 2 projectors, changeover mechanism, spare reels, a screen, stereo amplifier and speakers. If they're not available at the venue they will need to be purchased. Local schools, garage sales, The Trading Post or eBay are good places to start looking. The FVFS may be able to advise on a good source of equipment. Information Sheet 15 lists a few known repair people who sometimes have equipment available. Note that two projectors are recommended for smooth reel changes and as a back up. Similarly more than one projectionist is desirable (encourage apprentices).

Screens can be built, or a white non-shiny wall can be used instead.

Many homes are now discarding their old stereo amps and speakers, replacing them with newer models, so some op shops or garage sales may have good bargains.

But don't forget that 16 mm films are becoming rarer and more expensive to hire, so it may not be wise to get into 16 mm now.

Equipment – DVD projection

If you are considering using DVDs you will need at least one DVD player, a stereo amplifier, two speakers, a video projector, screen and assorted cabling. One DVD player is sufficient, but two will allow better cueing and a smoother performance when changing between DVDs, in which case you will need appropriate switches as well. The comments regarding screen, amplifier and speakers for 16 mm applies here as well.

See FVFS Information sheet 18 for the description of a suitable projector package and sheet 7 for general specifications.

Equipment - 35mm film

If you are planning on screening 35mm films, and unless you have the knowledge and finance to set up a small cinema yourself, you will need to locate a venue which is already set up to screen 35mm film. It may be an operating cinema in which case you may be able to come to an arrangement with the operator to support your film society.

Equipment - DCP

In recent years most cinemas have replaced their 35mm equipment with digital projectors running from DCP (Digital Cinema Packages) and Dolby 5 or 7 channel sound.

Be aware that the film hire and rights charges are much greater for 35 mm and DCP than for DVDs. The ACOFS screening rights agreement is applicable to DVDs only.

The Program

Programming for 16 mm is limited because of the limited availability of films available.

If you screen DVDs you will be able screen almost any DVD that is available to purchase locally, because it will be certain that there is a distributor in Australia to approach for the rights. There is no guarantee that you will be able to get permission to screen a title purchased from overseas as there may be no Australian distributor.

The actual choice of program is entirely up to you – and your members – but we recommend you select a balanced program which includes a wide range of genres, countries and languages. Keep in mind that like-it-or-not, you are seen as being in competition with nearby cinemas, so offer something different!.

Source of Films and DVDs

DVDs are available from a number of sources, including the internet, with a variety of prices. But then under Australian copyright law, you must obtain permission to screen them in a public venue.

If you screen to members only (ie non-theatrically), membership of the FVFS entitles your society to borrow 16mm films or DVDs from the SLC (Screen Loans Collection) at the NFSA (National Film and Sound Archives) in Canberra.

The supply of 16mm film is becoming more difficult as distributors close, so many film societies have moved to DVD projection. This increases their programming options and is cheaper to operate (once a video projector is obtained). Projector quality should be at least High Definition, or BluRay quality for best results.

Typical prices of hiring films are as follows (as at June 2015). Return freight is not included.

35mm film (commercial distributor): \$200 to \$300 + freight

16mm film (commercial distributor): \$80 to \$200 + freight

16mm feature film (SLC): \$60 + freight both ways.

DVD hire (SLC): \$22 + return postage.

DVD purchase: typically \$20 to \$35.

DVD screening rights for an average size film society is \$55 per screening, where the rights are paid by the society to the DVD distributor under the ACOFS agreement. This applies where a DVD is owned by the society or borrowed privately. It does not include supply of the DVD from the distributor.

Outside of these agreements you could pay up to \$300 for the rights to screen a DVD.

“ReelNews”, the FVFS publication, provides regular information on films and programs from other film societies and reports on new film acquisitions and DVD availability. Information is also available on the FVFS website www.fvfs.org.au.

“The Bulletin” is the ACOFS publication, which covers information on DVD rights and any National news relevant to film societies and non-theatrical screenings.

Publicity

Small posters can be prepared on your computer/printer and photocopied, advertising your existence and your programs. These need to be spread around to local libraries, bookshops, cafes, schools etc. Notes describing the film(s) can be put together from the distributors' notes, catalogues and the internet. See magazines and newspapers for reviews on current

and older movies. Use the internet either through a search engine or by accessing specialised websites such as www.imdb.com or www.urbancinefile.com.au for film reviews. Many sites specialise on DVD availability and reviews.

A regular newsletter to your members is recommended with copies left in the local library to disperse information and encourage participation.

Legal Issues

You should have a committee operating under an agreed constitution, rules or by-laws. The minimum you need are rules and aims acceptable to the FVFS.

Copyright laws require that you are not permitted to screen a film or DVD in a public venue unless you have permission from the rights owner. This even applies to old films in private collections. In most cases rights may have to be negotiated, especially for DVDs, unless it comes with the film or DVD hire. ACOFS and the FVFS have procedures in place to facilitate obtaining and paying for screening rights.

Authentic film societies screen in a “non-theatrical” manner to members only, (ie. with no charges for single admission). The main advantage of being “non-theatrical” is the distributors’ reduced charges for film hire and DVD rights.

At a later stage you should consider incorporation. As an incorporated body (e.g. Filmsville Film Society inc), you acquire a legal status which protects members of your organisation in the case of a legal challenge. Information sheet 08 covers this subject – or go to Business and Consumer Affairs for information. Their website is www.consumer.vic.gov.au.

Insurance

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

Membership also entitles you to participate in attractively priced public liability insurance cover tailored for the needs of film societies, and commercial (fire & theft) cover. See Information sheet 23.

Costs and Finance

Income will be generated mainly by membership - Your fee needs to be calculated to cover basic costs - venue, films or DVDs, rights, insurance, publicity, FVFS membership etc. Fund raising and grants from your local council, arts councils, etc are other sources to cover purchases of equipment etc

Australian Business Number

There are advantages in applying to the ATO (Australian Tax Office) for an ABN (Australian Business Number), and then applying for charity status. This has distinct advantages when receiving payments from government or council bodies. This is covered in more detail in Information sheet 05.

The Budget

The following table may help you work out your annual budget (figures are approximate but should serve as a guide.)

Note that the largest cost will probably be your venue (unless you plan to screen in a private home). Seeking the best deal, sponsorship or “community rate” is therefore very important.

The equipment fund is to insure you against unexpected maintenance or unscheduled equipment upgrade.

Size of society	Large eg cinema	Medium eg hall	Medium eg hall	Medium eg hall	Small & private eg home
Source of film, DVD or DCP	35mm or DCP Distributor	SLC 16mm	SLC DVD	Owned DVD	Owned DVD
10 Feature Films	\$2500	\$600	\$220	\$250	\$250
10 x Rights	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$550	\$0
Short Films	\$100	\$0	\$25	\$25	\$0
Freight	\$500	\$500	\$40	\$0	\$0
Venue	\$3,000	\$600	\$600	\$600	\$0
FVFS Affiliation	\$110	\$75	\$75	\$75	\$30
Newsletter (By email)	\$100	\$60	\$10	\$10	\$0
Postage	\$200	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$0
Insurance (pub Liability)	\$270	\$270	\$270	\$270	\$0
Equipment fund (Depreciation)	\$200	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$30
Miscellaneous	\$300	\$200	\$60	\$60	\$50
TOTAL	\$7,280	\$2,505	\$1,500	\$2,040	\$360
Membership Fees (each)	\$50	\$50	\$50	\$50	\$25
Minimum Members	145	50	30	41	15

Your First Screening Is Key

Before the screening gather together 2 or 3 people who will be prepared to take the film society into its first year, and with them, make initial decisions on the style of films, source, venue and approximate budget. Check out the availability and prices of the different film or DVD libraries or sales outlets to ensure they hold the titles you wish to program at the prices you can afford.

Attract as large an audience as possible - advertise widely to “come and try” a free screening, show a film typical of the type you intend to screen and have an interesting speaker to open the proceedings.

Make people welcome - officially and informally.

Hold a brief public meeting prior to the film.

Explain the aims of the society, types of films and proposed activities.

Explain how the membership fee is calculated i.e. costs involved. Pensioners and seniors often get discounts at the cinema, but as they will probably represent a high proportion of members you can't afford to offer more than 10% discount for pensioners (but not seniors) – and allow for the discounted tickets in your budget.

Propose the first year's program and ask for suggestions or requests - try a survey including a rating of suggested films and a section for suggestions.

Ask for volunteers to join the committee as projectionists (and apprentices), catering, technical, film selection, research, newsletter etc. Committee members don't all need to be film “experts” as many are required for regular club tasks.

Ask the meeting to nominate the inaugural committee. Ask them to approve the initial fees, the program and the constitution.

Keep a record of those attending - names, addresses and perhaps a comments and suggestions section. This will enable the interim committee to follow up with personalised information, as well as advertising before the next screening - Don't leave it too long!

Screen your film and then have an enjoyable supper.

Sell memberships to anyone willing to pay up on the spot. Be in a position to sell membership tickets, or at least provide receipts.

You are now a functioning film society, so keep the reels or DVDs turning!

Complete your application to join the FVFS.

KEY STEPS TO STARTING A FILM SOCIETY

- Get together with others who will help.
- Decide on what type of film society you want to be.
- Decide on the type of program you will present.
- Locate a suitable venue
- Find the equipment.
- Decide on appropriate aims and rules.
- Promote a free screening to come and try it.
- Prepare an approximate budget.
- Prepare a suggested first year's program, with suggested titles and dates.
- Approach council or Arts association for a seeding grant, subsidy or equipment.
- Call a public meeting in the proposed venue.
- At the meeting,
 - Present your proposed rules, aims, membership charges.
 - Present the first year's program.
 - Get discussion going.
 - Select interested people who will assist run the society
 - Announce that this is the first AGM
 - Select and vote on official positions and committee.
 - Adopt rules and aims.
 - Now you have a treasurer, announce the membership fees and that no-one leaves until they are paid up! (laugh out loud)
 - Take the names of those that pay and give them a receipt or membership ticket.
 - Show the film.
 - Ask for feedback.
 - Have a great supper.
- Enjoy your first year of being a successful film society.

Remember that the second year is harder, as the first flush of enthusiasm has gone and members have to be persuaded to part with more cash for a second membership year.

If you need further information or assistance you can contact the FVFS on (03) 9874 5270 or at 17 Bruce St Mitcham 3132, or admin@fvfs.org.au
Or check our information sheets on www.fvfs.org.au

How to organise your screening rights is covered by the ACOFS Fact Sheet 3A and 3B available from www.acofs.org.au.