

### START A FILM SOCIETY – QUICK GUIDE

***This document should answer all your initial questions and help you start your own film society. The “key steps” are summarised on page 5.***

***You should also read the Quick-start guides at the start of Information Sheets 01 and 03. Other information sheets (now numbering up to #29) provide more details – but they can wait for now!***

### **Things you need to know.**

#### ***A Venue***

It must be adequate in size for projection and the comfort of your audience, in terms of seating, heating/cooling, blackout ability and have facilities for refreshments. Investigate local halls, movie theatres (most cinemas in the country operate only on weekends), schools, churches, clubrooms, and members' 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, and charge non-theatrical screening rights. See Appendix A for more information on non-theatrical screenings.

#### ***Equipment – if you plan to use 16mm film***

Ideally, you will need 2 projectors, changeover mechanism, spare reels, a screen, an amplifier and speaker. 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. 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. Also, repairers of 16mm equipment are becoming rarer and harder to find.

#### ***Equipment – If you plan to use DVD projection (Including BluRay and 4K Ultra discs)***

If you are considering using DVDs you will need at least one DVD player, a high definition video projector, screen and assorted cabling and at least a stereo amplifier with two speakers. 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.

*[Note: In this and other FVFS documents the term "DVD" includes BluRay and 4K Ultra discs]*

Most DVDs now offer 5+1 channel (Dolby) sound. While 2-channel stereo sound is sufficient, it is recommended that you invest in a 5.1 channel sound system to get the full benefit of screening DVDs. If you screen using a computer as the DVD player, you may not have the option of 5.1 channel sound.

See FVFS Information Sheet 18 for the description of a suitable projector package and Sheet 07 for general specifications.

### ***Equipment – if you plan to use 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 films. 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. Note however that most commercial cinemas have converted to DCP (Digital Cinema Package), and new film titles tend not to be available on 35mm film.

### ***Equipment – if you plan to use DCP***

In recent years most cinemas have replaced their 35mm equipment with digital projectors running from DCP (Digital Cinema Package) 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 (and discounted screening rights fees) is applicable to DVDs, BluRay and 4K Ultra discs only.

### ***The Program***

Programming for 16 mm or 35mm is limited because of the limited availability of films available.

If you screen DVDs (which includes BluRay and 4K Ultra) you will be able screen almost any disc 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 internet based suppliers, with a variety of prices. And then, under Australian copyright law, you must obtain permission from the rights owner to screen them if screening in a public venue or if public are admitted.

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 for a minimal charge.

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 digital projector is obtained). Projector quality should be at least High Definition, or BluRay quality for best results. Consider also the possibility of screening in 4K resolution, although not all titles are available in 4K!.

Typical prices of hiring films are as follows (as at 2024). 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 \$15 to \$25.

DVD screening rights for an average size film society is between \$50 and \$85 per screening (depending on the distributor and the audience size), 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.

If you charge for admission to a screening in a public venue you could pay up to \$350 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 what is happening in member film societies. Information is also available on the FVFS website [www.fvfs.org.au](http://www.fvfs.org.au).

“The ACOFS Bulletin” covers information on DVD rights, new acquisitions and any National news relevant to film societies and non-theatrical screenings. It is produced by ACOFS – The Australian Council of Film Societies. See [www.acofs.org.au](http://www.acofs.org.au).

### **Publicity**

Small posters can be prepared on your computer/printer and photocopied, advertising your existence and your programs. These could 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](http://www.imdb.com) for film reviews. Many sites specialise on DVD availability and reviews.

A regular newsletter to your members is recommended with copies emailed to members and 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. Information Sheet 03 offers several alternative constitutions for you to consider. You may copy and perhaps modify the one that best suits your situation.

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 screening rights will have to be sought, unless they are included with the film or DVD hire. ACOFS and the FVFS have procedures in place to facilitate obtaining and paying for DVD screening rights for DVDs that you own.

Most registered 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. See also Appendix A.

Once settled in and organised, societies should consider incorporation – especially the larger societies. As an incorporated body (e.g. Filmville 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 Consumer Affairs Victoria for information. Their website is [www.consumer.vic.gov.au](http://www.consumer.vic.gov.au).

Equipment insurance also available through the FVFS. Ask for details.

Membership also entitles you to participate in attractively priced public liability insurance cover tailored for the needs of film societies, and equipment insurance 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 which may help cover purchases of equipment etc. but you may need to have an ABN to be eligible for grants from Government sources.

### **Australian Business Number**

There are advantages in applying to the ATO (Australian Tax Office) for an ABN (Australian Business Number), and then applying to the ACNC (Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission) 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 and will depend on actual circumstances, 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 effectively a regular savings mechanism to protect you against unexpected maintenance costs or unscheduled equipment upgrades.

Size of society	Large eg cinema	Medium eg hall	Medium eg hall	Medium eg hall (Usual situation)	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	\$180	\$180
10 x Rights	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$700	\$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	\$2,120	\$260
Membership Fees (each)	\$50	\$50	\$50	\$50	\$25
Minimum Members	145	50	30	43	11

### ***Your First Screening Is Key***

Before the first screening gather together two or three 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 sources 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 screening 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 may choose not to offer even a small discount for pensioners, and certainly not seniors – and allow for the discounted tickets in your budget. Many societies have decided not to offer discounts because it can be difficult to manage and not always appreciated.

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.
- Optionally, 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 a 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 [admin@fvfs.org.au](mailto:admin@fvfs.org.au) - Or check our information sheets on [www.fvfs.org.au](http://www.fvfs.org.au)

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## **Appendix A: Just what is a “non-theatrical” screening?**

A “non-theatrical” screening is one where the audience comprises members only, where there is no additional payment required on entry, and there are no casual admissions, either paid or free. The only exception is where a potential member is invited to one screening for free to “come-and-try-it”.

This definition is important, because it is the basis of the ACOFS DVD rights agreement, where a film society registered with the FVFS can request permission to screen one of their own DVDs (ie seek screening rights) for a special agreed price. This price, agreed between the DVD distributors and ACOFS is only available to registered film societies screening non-theatrically. This “ACOFS DVD rights agreement” is administered by ACOFS and explained in the ACOFS Fact Sheets 3A and 3B. They are available for download from [www.acofs.org.au/resources/](http://www.acofs.org.au/resources/). The price of DVD screening rights under this agreement can vary, depending on the size of the society and the distributor, but is normally in the range of \$55 - \$85.

That is not to say that a film society can never charge for single admission to a screening. This is allowed under FVFS rules, but the audience should always consist of a majority of members. A member is defined as someone who has paid the required fee to the film society for a period membership which is normally one year, but must be a minimum of three months. Members would not be expected to pay any additional charge for admission to a screening. It should be emphasised, that in the situation where a film society charges even one person for admission, the screening is considered by the distributors as “commercial” and not “non-theatrical”, so the ACOFS agreement and prices would not apply. In this case the screening rights should be negotiated directly with the distributor, who would charge a commercial rate closer to \$300 per screening for the rights.

NPV (Not-for-Profit, Volunteer-run) Film Festivals and NPV cinemas are eligible to join the FVFS once they adopt appropriate constitutions, but because they both admit paid audience are not eligible to take part in the ACOFS agreement for cheaper DVD screening rights.

An explanation of these rules and a description of the different forms of organisation that can join the FVFS are described in more detail in the FVFS Information Sheets 01 to 03, which are often updated. These are among the 31 Information Sheets available for download from the FVFS website, at [www.fvfs.org.au/resources/](http://www.fvfs.org.au/resources/).

How to organise your screening rights is covered by the ACOFS Fact Sheet 3A and 3B available from [www.acofs.org.au](http://www.acofs.org.au).