

Federation of Victorian Film Societies Inc

INFORMATION SHEET 14 - (30th March 2026)



RANDOM FAQs

[Previously “Other FAQs”]

This Info Sheet contains a number of Frequently Asked Questions on a variety of issues, many of which have been published in ReelNews over the years.

FAQ dealing with DVD and rights issues can be found in Information Sheets 22 and 31.

Q1: What is a depreciation account and do I need one?

A: A depreciation account is simply an account where you save a given amount per year to allow for equipment replacement. It may be a separate account or an earmarked amount in your normal account. Theoretically it should grow each year by the value of your equipment divided by its expected lifetime, so that when it eventually has to be replaced your depreciation account can afford the cost of new equipment.

Q2: Can I charge for single admission to a film society screening?

A: A film society that screens in a public venue is operating in a non-theatrical environment. Film societies are defined as not-for-profit organisations which screen to financial members of the film society. The DVD distributors have agreed (through the ACOFS agreement) to offer discounted rates for screening rights when a society-owned DVD is being screened to members only. The occasional guest is permitted on a come-and-try-it basis, but should not be charged directly for entry to the screening.

That is not to say that a film society can never charge for a screening, but single, paid admission to a screening makes it a theatrical screening where rights payments are generally more expensive or determined as a percentage of the total door sales.

Many of the larger film societies who screen using DCP (Digital Cinema Package) and in larger theatres are already obliged to pay higher rights fees, and admitting members of the public on a single-screening paid basis, under this circumstance, is acceptable.

Q3: Do I have to call my organisation a film society?

A: No. To be affiliated with the FVFS your organisation needs to behave in accordance with rules laid down for film societies, but what you call yourself is irrelevant. In fact many groups prefer to call themselves film groups, film clubs, film festivals or something else much more “upmarket”. Just a note though, having the name of your suburb or venue in the title can be an advantage when promoting the film society. A further point is that the Tax office is asking all not-for-profit groups to be registered with the ACNC or self-assess their status every year. A group with “film society” as part of their name may in future, find it easier to prove not-for-profit status.

Q4: Can the FVFS please publicise my film society?

A: The FVFS is pleased to promote each and every film society and their activities at any time through ReelNews. Just post your newsletter or notices to The FVFS Secretary, c/o 17 Bruce St Mitcham Vic 3132 or email us at secretary@fvfs.org.au.

The FVFS will also list your film societies’ contact names and email addresses (and a link to your website) on the FVFS website.

Q5: Can I change my FVFS Public Liability insurance cover mid-year?

A: If you have a public liability insurance policy or an equipment loss policy you may normally make changes to your cover without penalty at renewal time. Changes made mid-term will normally be charged a pro-rata rate plus an additional amount to cover broker’s fees.

Q6: Is my film society automatically covered by any insurance policy when I join the FVFS?

A: No. General insurance cover is an optional extra available to financial members of the FVFS and the FVFS can recommend a company for public liability cover. For more information email admin@fvfs.org.au or call 9874 5270.

Q7: Is my film society covered by public liability insurance if the venue operator has insurance cover?

A: Not necessarily. Any insurance cover carried by the venue operator will cover them for accidents or loss caused by anything for which they are responsible, such as carpets, fittings, chairs, lighting etc. This insurance is not likely to cover the hirer for liability in relation to accidents caused by members, crowd control, hot water, cables, equipment brought in etc. If in doubt check with your venue operator.

Q8: What is incorporation and how does it relate to public liability insurance?

A: Being incorporated means that should the society be sued for any reason, liability is limited to the society as an entity. The individual members and committee are protected. Public liability insurance protects the assets of the society in the event that they are sued and have to pay damages.

Q9. Can I advertise the films to be screened at the society?

A. Yes, but with some qualification.

Many film societies find it worthwhile notifying the local papers and radio stations of upcoming films at the film society, but societies should ensure that any announcements should promote the society itself and clearly state that memberships are available and to ring for details about membership. You should not give the impression that tickets can be bought at the door for individual screenings.

Q10. Can I promote my film society?

A. Yes, most certainly. Not only may you promote your film society but in most cases you must promote yourselves to survive.

The FVFS has held several promotion workshops over the years and there are several messages that emerge from them all.

When you promote the society, emphasise the membership, fellowship, quality films and the social aspect of the film society.

You may mention film titles and use them in your promotion to attract interest but at all times focus on membership with the society.

Your best promotion is word-of-mouth, so prepare an attractive annual calendar of films and a leaflet highlighting the advantages of joining, and make plenty of copies available to members to pass on to friends, as well as supplying copious quantities to local libraries, shops etc.

Q11. As a “Not-for-profit” organization I find it very difficult to survive if I can’t make a profit to protect against future expenses.

A. A “Not-for-profit” organization, is not prohibited from making a reasonable profit (let’s call it “surplus”. It is what you do with any surplus that is important. Basically, any surplus must be used to further the aims of the organization. You are not permitted to pass it on to members or “shareholders” in the form of distribution or payment (except to cover legitimate expenses).

Any business – even a not-for-profit organization – should budget for a small surplus each year. It is good practice to build up reserves or put aside an “equipment” fund for future expansion or unforeseen expenses (a depreciation account). The exception is where the business has enough funding already in reserve. The choice of what is an adequate reserve depends on the annual financial report, your aims and future plans.

Q12. What do I do if I have a dispute with a DVD or film supplier? (July 2009)

A. Check out FEDCAT (Film Exhibition and Distribution Code Administration Committee) who have a website at www.filmcode.info. This website explains your rights and procedures to follow if you have a dispute.

“The rules allow an independent person from the secretariat or, where appropriate, the Code Conciliator to take up the complaint in the initial stages with no cost to the Code signatory making the complaint.”

See their information sheet on www.filmcode.info/IB_1_01.doc

Q13. How do I stop a DVD from pausing or stopping half way or jumping sections?

A. Try investing in a DVD repair kit available from most retailers. They remove all fingerprints and most scratches which can cause this behavior. At least use a soft cleaning kit (soft optical cloth and cleaning liquid) and clean all DVDs before use. Only wipe from the center out, not around the DVD as the data is written around the DVD in a long spiral and any marks along the spiral will cause more problems than radial marks.

Another suggestion is that you try another player. Some are more susceptible to scratches or out-of-tolerance DVDs than others. Oddly, the cheaper the player the more reliable they seem to be in this regard!

This question highlights good reasons for buying your own DVDs. New ones are guaranteed to be free of scratches and marks and they are able to be tested in advance and extras previewed. As well, you will end up with a DVD which can be placed in the society library for members to borrow at any time later.

Remember the DVD reads data from the inner tracks first, so if it does not start to play the problem is likely to be dirt or scratches on the inner region of the disc. (Assuming it is the right Region!)

A more drastic approach is to polish the DVD with a special machine, which usually includes a rotating disc of felt, to remove more serious scratches. Some scratches or cracks are however beyond repair.

Q14. When I screen a “Widescreen” DVD, how do I remove the dark areas above and below the image?

A. The short answer is “You can’t”, or more accurately, “You shouldn’t”. There are actually several ways but you should resist them!

Set the DVD player output or TV type to Standard 4x3 or widescreen 16x9 depending on the TV screen or projector capability and select “letterbox” or “LB” in preference to “pan and scan”, “zoom” or “full screen”.

To get the most from the projector set it to “normal”.

It is not always easy to identify when an actor is too tall or too fat – the common complaint to an incorrect screen ratio.

If you have any concern that your final image may be distorted, play a DVD and check that no part of the image is lost. Then pause when you see the first round object (viewed flat-on to the camera) such as a car wheel or clock, and check that it is actually round on screen.

If you are worried that the black bars top and bottom of the screen, upgrade to a 16x9 ratio screen and zoom the image to fill the screen. Make sure it is within the movie itself as sometimes the menu or intro to the movie is a different ratio!

A more detailed discussion, plus examples can be found in Information Sheet 13 – Image ratios.

For further information, or to lodge a question of your own admin@fvfs.org.au

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