

ACOFS - The Australian Council of Film Societies

Film Society Handbook

Chapter 15: OTHER ACTIVITIES

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Every film society is different and it is important to assess what your members really want. Listed below are a number of activities, other than the normal screenings, that film societies could be involved in.

Discussion Groups

A film society should aim at more than just film viewing. Some members wish to discuss films and societies should encourage and organise discussion groups for those members, even though they may constitute a minority, albeit an important minority. Some societies do this by holding discussions at the conclusion of their regular screenings either at the screening venue or adjourning to a coffee lounge or a private home for a more relaxed atmosphere. At the discussion, an informed person should give a short opening talk, offering a number of statements (possibly controversial) to get the discussion going.

Alternatively, you could arrange film screenings and discussions away from your normal venue (somewhere smaller and more friendly) with a program of films specially chosen for study and discussion. These could be chosen on special themes, and shorter films are ideal for this sort of group. Examples of programs suited to this type of study/discussion group would be the works of a particular experimental film maker, a particular studio (e.g. Zagreb, Disney or The National Film Board of Canada), a particular period (e.g. documentary classics from the 1950s & '60s), a comedian (e.g. Chaplin, Keaton, Lloyd) or a particular technology (e.g. computer animation, video). A bit of research of films in the NTLC will yield many more ideas.

Guest Speakers

Some societies organise a guest speaker to address their members, either to introduce a film and/or lead the discussion after the screening. These speakers can be film-makers (or actors, camera-men, editors, etc.) who are involved in the making of the film, or they can be lecturers or film critics. If you wish to contact a particular Australian film-maker or technician contact Screensound or the Australian Film Institute — they may know how to get in touch with them. Your State Film Commission/Office may also be helpful. Alternatively, your State Federation may be able to advise you, or provide you with a "lecturer". Remember that film-makers try to make a living from film and may wish to charge a lecture fee. You may organise refreshments and charge for these to offset the cost of the film-maker, but remember you may not be able to charge for the film itself. If you do have a guest speaker don't forget the publicity value in the press.

Film Festivals

Apart from a regular season, some film societies organise a special season of films shown over a short period (a weekend or a week). These festivals may cover a broad range of cinema or may be based on a single topic like Alfred Hitchcock, Early Australian Cinema or French New Wave. Again you may not charge for individual films if they are provided under non-theatrical borrowing conditions unless you arrange to pay an appropriate rental fee or rights fee, but may charge a subscription for the whole season or festival. Some societies organise film weekends in the country and may include accommodation and/or refreshments in the subscription price.

Where a film festival charges for admission to individual films the organisation would not be eligible to use films or DVDs from the NTLC or have access to the non-theatrical hire rates for films or the non-theatrical rate for DVD screening rights. They should however be able to negotiate reasonable “flat rate” charges with the distributors on the basis of their non-profit status.

If you propose to book any films or DVDs for a film festival you should contact the distributors/rights owners explaining the situation. A festival is not deemed to be part of a regular film society screening hence you may have to clear the rights to screen.

Many film festivals are run by member film societies and their membership with a federation is combined with their parent organisation. However there is no reason a film festival could not be a member of a federation in their own right as long as they meet the conditions of membership of that federation.

Community Activities

There are many organisations that will welcome assistance with film selection and screening for a specific purpose. Your film society may be in a position to handle all the arrangements from selection and booking of film to the actual screening with society equipment. Look around your community — the Arts Council may wish to screen an opera or ballet film, the local art gallery may wish to screen films on arts or artists. Look around... not only will you be helping other groups but you will make more people aware of your existence. That's good public relations and may mean more members!

Film-making

It's probably written down in your constitution but you haven't given it a second thought. Why don't you make films? It can be fun and it is an excellent way for interested members to acquire a working knowledge of the technical aspects of film making. The latest generation of video cameras make this very easy. Editing in a computer is now relatively easy with a little bit of guidance and practice.

Children's Films

Children have as much right as adults to be exposed to good quality cinema. Film societies should encourage the formation of junior groups, either as an adjunct to the work of, and run by, the adult film society, or as assistance to a separate group to form

and run a junior film society. This junior film group will be similar to the adult group in structure and working, but will use films specially chosen for a younger audience. When programming for the kids you should be prepared to introduce them to films that they would not normally be exposed to. The aim of a film society (and this also applies to kids) is to broaden members' experience and appreciation of cinema. Thus you should experiment a little with the kids program and include older historical material (try a silent Felix the Cat, an early Mickey Mouse or Buster Keaton) as well as some carefully chosen abstract and experimental films. Kids generally aren't set in their ways as their parents and will accept an occasional experimental short. Even if a number appear bored for a few minutes, you'll find that some are very impressed.

Community Cinemas

Many smaller country towns are on the lookout for activities that will bring the townspeople together. Why not start a Community Cinema. Run by volunteers and set up as a non-profit group it may be the activity that is needed.

As admission to community cinema screenings would normally be by paid admission, the group would have to pay hire rates and screening rights that are greater than for "Non-theatrical" screenings (ie members only) the distributors may be happy to settle on a moderate "flat rate" charge for your situation.

Community cinemas organisations are welcome to become members of a state federation and thus take advantage of the benefits of membership, apart from the preferential rates for non-theatrical film hire and DVD screening rights. See your federation for information.