

# **ACOFS - The Australian Council of Film Societies**

## **Film Society Handbook**

### **Chapter 2: STARTING A FILM SOCIETY**

[November 2009]

One or two enthusiasts who enjoy watching films and want to share their enjoyment with others are all that is needed to start a basic film society.

#### ***Reasons for Starting a Film Society***

One important reason to form a start society may be to gain access to films from the NTLC (Non-Theatrical Lending Collection) administered by the NFSA (National Film and Sound Archives) in Canberra, which has a vast resource of feature films on 16mm and DVD. To borrow from this collection you need to be a film society and also join your local Federation. Otherwise you may hire film from commercial sources at about 10 times the cost compared with the Collection.

Now that most films are available on DVD, many film societies have changed to digital projection and now use this medium. Being a recognised film society and member of a state Federation allows you to use the “ACOFS agreement” with key DVD distributors for inexpensive DVD screening rights.

Being a registered Film Society gives you credibility with film and DVD distributors, businesses, councils and government departments.

Being a member of a state Federation provides you with automatic film loss and damage insurance and in some states allows you to participate in Public Liability and General Insurance arranged by the Federations.

State Federations can provide assistance and advice when needed and most produce a regular newsletter with the latest film and DVD news and information.

Interaction with other Film Societies is informative, allows you to swap ideas and in some cases films or DVDs.

However, a certain amount of groundwork needs to be done before a film society can be established.

#### ***Key steps in Starting at Film Society***

A film society can be as formal or as informal as you want it to be but to qualify as a Film Society it must have acceptable aims, be a non-profit organisation and have defined members.

To gain access to the NTLC and benefit from the cheaper “Non-theatrical” rental and rights fees, a film society must also be a member of a state Federation and operate “non-theatrically”. This means it must screen to members only and the

individual screenings should be free-of-charge. A film society may however, charge at the door and advertise individual films screenings if it is prepared to pay commercial rates for the films. As long as the organisation meets the criteria of having acceptable aims, being a non-profit organisation and having identifiable members it still meets the definition of a Film Society.

The core of a film society could be as few as three people as "office bearers". A one or two person film society places too much burden on those persons as well as placing the society in a precarious position should they become unavailable for any reason.

The main office bearers are President, Secretary and Treasurer who have traditional job functions. Then there could be other positions specifically designed for Film Societies such as projectionist, film selection etc. These are expanded later.

### ***Steps to Getting Started***

You will at some stage need to call a public meeting to launch the society and attract members. Before the meeting you should get the details of the availability and cost of a regular venue and projection equipment and screen. You also should have a proposed program, budget and charges for the first season and preferably have a draft constitution.

You will, of course, be advertising the evening so be aware that you will have to negotiate with NFSA if you wish to show one of their films since it generally only lends to existing film societies, or the DVD distributor if you wish to screen a DVD.

At this meeting you should outline your proposals. Call for nominations for committee, adopt the constitution and aims, and call for further suggestions for the program. Have membership application forms ready so that people can join straight away. If people at the meeting don't want to join immediately, make sure that you note their names and addresses so that when your first plans are more concrete you can send them information. If you are able to do all that in the first meeting you will be doing well. If you have done your homework before the meeting your proposals should be enthusiastically accepted. Once you have even one person signed up as a member then you have started your Film Society so there is no stopping you from here!

You should also connect with your state Federation of film societies. The Federations provide assistance and guidance, publish newsletters, run film appraisal sessions, arrange film festivals and most importantly run an insurance scheme which covers loss or damage to films whilst in your possession or in transit. Some Federations have also arranged optional umbrella insurance policies for public liability and equipment insurance. The respective Federation secretary will gladly give you further information and encouragement.

## **The Committee**

There are other jobs that need to be done and consequently many film society committees are made up of 6-12 people to help select films, to organise the show on the night, arrange and help with the printing and distribution of programme notes, newsletters, appraisal forms, etc.

There are many jobs that need to be done but in a smaller society with a small committee some of the roles could be combined while taking care not to overload any single person. Non-committee members can also help, for example as supper assistants.

To attract members on to the committee the work needs to be interesting and rewarding. Approach members individually at screenings and take advantage of any expertise and expressions of interest. Suggest interested members come along to see how the committee works before committing themselves.

### **President**

The President (or Chairperson) co-ordinates the committee and runs meetings.

### **Secretary**

The Secretary handles all correspondence, keeps a record of committee meetings and memberships, and books the films and venues. Some societies have a separate minute secretary, film booking officer and membership secretary.

### **Treasurer**

The Treasurer who deals with the financial side, gives progressive financial reports, prepares a budget and presents an annual financial report.

### **Publicity Officer**

The Publicity Officer organises newspaper, radio and television publicity as well as the design, printing and distribution of programme brochures and posters. The Publicity officer may also manage the website or delegate this specialist function.

### **Projectionist**

Sets up and run the projection equipment (Film or DVD) on the night, and takes responsibility for running a quality presentation efficiently and on time.

### **Technical officer**

Ensures all equipment is always in good repair and reliable. Selects and introduces new equipment when required and develops procedures and practices which will maintain a high quality presentation.

### **Programming**

Selects and books appropriate films or DVDs for the society, taking into account members' requirements as well as the need for a balanced program.

## **Newsletter**

Researches film information, edits and publishes a regular newsletter, prints, folds and posts it regularly as required by the committee.

## **Catering**

Provides a lovely supper at each screening and buys the supplies to make this possible.

## **Membership Officer**

Maintains a list of all members, accepts new memberships and renewals when appropriate and is the contact point for new membership enquiries.

## **Front of House Manager**

Before each screening ensure all seats are arranged correctly, heating or cooling is set correctly, the venue is clean and tidy and generally ready for the members. Ensure members are welcomed on arrival and generally looked after. Ensure the picture focus and sound level is correct during the screening.

## **Federation Representatives**

Be the delegates to their state Federation and represent their needs and enquiries at meetings of that Federation. Report to the society committee on activities and news from the Federation and ACOFS.

## ***The Constitution***

A constitution is a statement of the aims and rules which the members of the society agree to follow. In a small society they may be less formal but as the society grows it is important that some thought is given to what the aims of the society are and its rules of conduct. Most of these are common sense but writing them down has the advantage of legitimising the society even if only in the eyes of the members.

A typical constitution is given below but this is only a guide. Each society should think carefully about the intent of each of the categories, which can be made as simple or as complicated as appropriate to the circumstances.

## ***A Sample Constitution***

1 Name: The Society shall be known as the "Forward Looking Film Society". hereinafter referred to in this document as "The Society".

2 Objects: The objects of the Society shall be:

2.1 To encourage interest in films as an art form by means of the exhibition of films of all kinds.

2.2 To promote the study and appreciation of film by means of lectures, discussions, exhibitions and publications.

2.3 To provide a means of bringing the community together on a regular basis in a spirit of goodwill.

3 Membership: Membership shall be open to the public at an annual subscription rate which will be fixed by the Society on recommendation of the Committee of Management.

4 Management: The management of the Society shall rest with a committee consisting of not more than 10 members including a President, Secretary and Treasurer and such other Officers as may from time to time be appointed by the Society.

5 Finance:

5.1 The Treasurer shall maintain a record of all payments and receipts of the society.

5.2 The Treasurer shall present prior to or at the Annual General Meeting of the Society a statement of the financial affairs of the Society and how it has changed since the previous Annual General Meeting.

5.2 The film society is a not-for-profit organisation. The funds of the Society shall be used only for the furtherance of the aims of the Society and no part shall be paid or transferred directly or indirectly by way of dividend, bonus or otherwise by way of pecuniary profit to members.

5.3 The officers and members of the committee shall not receive payment either directly or indirectly for their services as members of the Committee.

5.4 The society may employ such persons as are considered necessary by the Committee for furtherance of the Societies aims and remuneration may be paid to such persons for services actually rendered.

5.5 The society may operate a bank account but it shall require the signature of two members of committee to enable withdrawal or payment of funds.

6 General Meetings

6.1 An Annual General Meeting will be held once each calendar year and not more than eighteen months after the previous Annual General Meeting. Notice of the meeting shall be in writing and circulated to all financial members at least one month prior to the date of the meeting.

6.2 A report of the activities of the Society since the previous Annual General Meeting will be made at each Annual General Meeting.

6.3 The Committee shall be elected at the Annual General Meeting and shall hold office until the conclusion of the next Annual General Meeting following appointment.

6.4 A Special General Meeting may be called at any time by the committee or upon a request in writing being made to the Secretary and signed by at least one tenth of the financial members of the Society stating the nature of the business.

6.5 The Secretary shall give at least fourteen days notice of a Special General Meeting to all financial members of the Society; the notice shall be in writing, stating the nature of the business to be discussed.

6.6 The quorum for an Annual or Special General Meeting shall be at least one quarter of all financial members.

## 7 Alteration of the Constitution

7.1 No alteration to the Constitution shall be made except at an Annual General Meeting or a Special General Meeting of the Society, provided that any proposed alteration will have been circulated in writing to all financial members at least one month prior to the meeting and that the proposals shall be supported by a two-thirds majority of the financial members.

8 Winding Up: The Society will not be wound up except by resolution of three quarters of those members present at a Special General Meeting called for the purpose. In the event of the winding up of the Society the remaining assets and funds shall not be distributed amongst members of the Society, but shall be devoted to groups similar to those of the Society and approved by the majority of the members present.

## ***Further Considerations:***

Once the Film Society has started you may wish to become 'incorporated' ie become a legal entity. This has the advantage that office bearers are not liable for debts incurred by the society but the disadvantage that the society has to register through a State Government authority (in NSW it is Department of Fair Trading and in Victoria Business Affairs). A constitution is mandatory. The Department (or its equivalent in other States) can supply a Model Constitution as the wording is more detailed than in the example above.

Other Chapters of this "Handbook" available on the website cover issues such as promotion, registering for an ABN, insurance, copyright, budget, taxation etc. It is recommended that you study all chapters before approaching your state Federation for assistance in setting up your Film Society.