

Film Exhibition Fund Guidelines 2026-29

Awards of up to £9,000 per year to support independent film exhibitors to create opportunities for people to engage with UK independent and international film and the wider moving image across the South West.



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Key Information at a Glance

Total amount available in the South West: circa £82,000 (2026-27)

Funding range: £2,000 to £9,000: average award is £4,500 based on 2026-29.

Aim: To develop South West audiences for UK independent and/or international film, screen heritage and the wider moving image.

Open calls: Two rounds

First round deadline:

- Applications close: 5pm Wed 13 May 2026
- Decisions will be confirmed by end of June 2026

Second round deadline:

- Applications close: 5pm Wed 9 Sept 2026
- Decisions will be confirmed by early October 2026

Annual projects

- July 2026 - March 2027
- All activity must be completed and reported by 30 March 2027

Multi-year funding (up to 3 years)

- Multi-year proposals (July 2026 - mid March 2029) will be considered.

Introduction



Image credit: Create Studios, Swindon

The BFI Film Audience Network (FAN) reaches out across the UK to ensure people have opportunities to watch and enjoy a diverse range of films and moving image, regardless of geography or circumstance.

Watershed, as the Film Hub Lead Organisation for the South West, has been awarded funding from the BFI National Lottery to support member organisations across the region to deliver activity aligned with the priorities set out in the BFI's Screen Culture 2033 strategy.

What is the Film Exhibition Fund (FEF)?

The Film Exhibition Fund supports the independent film exhibition sector to deliver impactful screening and audience development activity that supports the objectives of the BFI's Screen Culture 2033 strategy.

The fund is open to South West-based FAN member organisations including cinemas, mixed arts centres, community cinemas, film societies, film festivals, touring operators and other organisations engaged in screening films to the public.

Members can request **between £2,000 and £9,000** for new or additional activity, including programming, marketing, access costs and wraparound events.



Image credit: Purbeck Film Festival – Jean Dixon

Public Engagement

The main focus of the Film Exhibition Fund is to support in-person events that bring audiences together for a communal film viewing experience.



Image credit: Inspired 2024 – Kelvin Williams

Hybrid and online activities are not a priority but will be considered where they add value and create meaningful engagement (e.g. removing barriers and improving access for disabled audiences).

The fund prioritises UK independent and international films and moving image works such as TV and archive materials. Broader screen activity such as VR, AR and XR may be considered where aligned with audience development priorities.

Activity must target specific audience groups and demonstrate how funding is necessary to reach those audiences.

Fund priorities

Priority will be given to projects responding to one or more of the following:

1. Creating opportunities for young audiences

We want to support organisations in engaging with children, families and young people (aged 25 or under), nurturing future generations of cinemagoers with an appetite for a more diverse screen culture. This might include young curators/influencers schemes, marketing campaigns, targeted programming and ticket initiatives, collaborations with talent development programmes such as BFI Academy South West and Into Film are encouraged but note that our support is focussed on public facing activity rather than formal education programmes. Organisations will need to demonstrate that they have safeguarding policies in place. If you are not sure where to start, refer to [our guide about working with young people](#) or get in touch.

2. Tackling barriers to inclusion

We want to improve access to screen culture for people across the South West by lowering barriers such as prohibitive costs, lack of cultural provision, lack of accessible screenings and threshold anxiety. We are also committed to tackling under-representation in the exhibition industry: be that on our screens, in the workforce or among audiences. Particular attention will be paid to projects that address social, economic and geographical barriers for audiences in new and meaningful ways. For example, activity led by and for communities (such as people of Black and Global Majority heritage, those that identify as d/Deaf and disabled or working class and/or are experiencing economic hardship) and activity that prioritises outreach with community engagement at their heart.

If you are not sure where to start, get in touch with the Film Hub team. We can also put you in touch with a range of curators that have participated in our [Beyond Boundaries 360 Programme](#).

3. Screen Heritage

The fund can support activity that showcases archive materials that reflect the diversity of the UK and the region; tapping into national and regional archive collections (such as [The Box Archive](#)), and other moving image collections. Please ensure you have contacted the relevant collection before seeking support from us and consult resources such as [our guide to working with The Box](#) and [FAN's best practice guide for working with archive collections](#).

Fundamental Principles

Underpinning our work are the following cross-cutting principles that all supported activity will need to address.



Image credit: Bristol Palestine Film Festival

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

The Film Audience Network champions everyday inclusion. We would like to see how your project diversifies audiences for a wide range of cinema, breaking down social, economic and geographical barriers for audiences.

Additional advice and support may be available to projects with strong inclusion aims, that specifically address:

- Economic barriers and/or engagement of working-class audiences
- Disability
- Engaging children, families and young audiences

Proposals that focus on one or more of these areas may be shared with specialist FAN freelancers, who will review a select number of projects, from across the UK-wide network. Any eligible applicants will be contacted to discuss what, if any, support might be of use. If you require more information, please contact us.

Environmental Sustainability

We are committed to minimising the negative environmental impact of the work we support and ask all funding recipients to contribute to this aim. In your proposal, please summarise steps your organisation is taking to minimise the environmental impact of your activity. Due to the limited resources available, and FAN's commitment to environmental sustainability, drive-in screenings will not be supported through this fund.



Image credit: Exeter Phoenix

Some inspiring examples of exhibitors working in this area include: [Scott Cinemas](#), [HOME](#), [Curzon](#) and [Depot](#). We've also commissioned this [Simple Guide to Making Your Cinema Greener](#) and the BFI and [Julie's Bicycle](#) have a number of [recommended resources](#) that may be useful when planning around sustainability.

Prevention of Bullying, Harassment and Racism

Bullying, harassment and racism have no place in our industries, and we expect all organisations we fund to share our commitment to this principle.

The BFI and BAFTA have developed a set of principles and zero-tolerance guidance in consultation with organisations, unions and industry bodies across the film, television and games industry in response to urgent and systemic issues.

These documents can be found in the [**BFI Bullying and harassment prevention hub**](#).

We ask all applicants to engage with these principles by, as a minimum, reading these documents and sharing them within your organisation.

Applicants are asked to confirm that they have, or intend to put in place, an anti-bullying and harassment policy for their organisation.

If you do not currently have a policy in place, please get in touch and we can signpost you to additional resources to help you to develop your policy.

Safeguarding

For initiatives involving children, young people 18 or under or adults at risk, applicants are asked to confirm that they have safeguarding and child protection policies in place.

If you do not currently have a policy in place, please get in touch and we can signpost you to resources to help you to develop your policy such as this [**Guide to Safeguarding for Film Exhibitors**](#) published by our FAN colleagues at Film Hub London.

Our commitment to Inclusion: BFI Diversity Standards

All project proposals should take an inclusive approach to audience development, setting out how they will respond to the BFI diversity standards. This means giving clear consideration to fair and diverse representation on screen, in the workforce (where applicable) and ensuring that audiences feel welcome in your spaces.

The Standards focus on the protected characteristics defined in the UK Equality Act 2010, in relation to age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation, gender fluid and non-binary identities, religion and belief - as well as socio-economic background, language, caring responsibilities, geographical location and wider intersectional experiences.

You should particularly focus on Standard D - how your proposal provides inclusive audience development opportunities and Standard E - showing conscious commitment and tangible actions to improve overall accessibility.



Image credit: Cables and Cameras: Inspired 2023 - Kelvin Williams

Larger awards will be expected to respond in more detail. Get in touch if you need help interpreting the Standards and here are some resources that you might find useful:

- [**BFI Diversity Standards Resources**](#)
- [**Inclusive Cinema**](#)
- [**7 Principles for an Inclusive Recovery**](#)
- [**SQIFF Deaf + Disabled Access Guide**](#)

Am I eligible?

To access Film Hub South West funding support, you must be legally constituted FAN member organisation operating in the *South West (including Hampshire and the Isle of Wight), as this fund is about developing the regional sector.

If you are not already a member, **[please visit our website](#)** for membership eligibility and register online, before submitting your proposal.

** We expect funded activity to be led and delivered by organisations that screens films to public audiences (or has plans to do so within 12 months of joining) and have a demonstrable presence in the South West (Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, West of England, Hampshire, The Isle of Wight and The Isles of Scilly.) This includes having key decision-makers and delivery teams based in the region. The Film Hub South West team will use its discretion to determine whether an organisation has sufficient regional presence and capacity to deliver the proposed activity effectively.*

We cannot award funds to individuals or unconstituted organisations.

We will only fund one FEF project per year for any single organisation (though there may be further opportunities for support through other strands such as the [Cinema Incentive Scheme](#), [Audience Pitch Pot](#) and Cross FAN Programming.) Proposals to the FEF should be for new projects or the development of activity that is not supported by BFI through other funding arrangements.

Recipients of previous funding accessed through Film Hub South West will need to have completed their activity and reporting (including some audience surveys) before being able to access further support.

Please get in touch with us as soon as possible if this applies to you and you are having an issue with your project.

We can only accept proposals from legally constituted organisations operating in the south west (including Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.) A legally constituted organisation may be one of the following:

- A charity
- Private company limited by guarantee or shares, including CICs.
- Legally constituted partnerships
- Local authorities
- Other public sector bodies
- Universities

We are not able to award funds to individuals, to un-constituted organisations or non-Film Hub member organisations. **[You can apply for membership here.](#)**

You may also need to supply relevant supporting documents such as your most recent annual or semi-annual report and accounts (as submitted to Companies House), evidence of your organisation's bank account, or any other documents necessary for Film Hub South West to complete a financial health check.

Film Hub Lead Organisations are not eligible to apply.

If you are a UK-wide organisation based in another region wishing to establish work in South West such as touring programmes, this will not be a priority as we are mainly focused on developing the capacity and capability of organisations based in the South West. You may seek support if you can demonstrate demand from South West venues at proposal stage. We suggest you speak to your 'home' Film Hub Lead Organisation as a first step to establish process.

You should also read the **[BFI Audience Project Fund guidance](#)** to see if your plans meet these criteria.

How much can I ask for?

Project range: £2,000* to £9,000 (for up to three years for multi-year projects)

*Note that if you need a smaller amount than the Film Exhibition Fund minimum, we recommend you look at our rolling [Audience Pitch Pot](#).

We are not able to fund 100% of activity costs. We expect to see box office income and other partnership support - whether in cash, volunteer time or other in-kind contributions - included in the budget (circa 20%).

Activity you are applying for cannot be supported by other National Lottery funds awarded by BFI such as BFI NETWORK, BFI Academy, Cross FAN and BFI Audiences Project Fund as this would constitute double funding. However, we welcome complementary programmes.

The total pot available for this call for South West FAN members is circa £82,000 in 2026-27.

Image credit: Reel Life Monsters - Sal Creber



Use of Funding

Each organisation will have its individual needs - however, broadly speaking, the Film Exhibition Fund can support the following costs:

Eligible expenses

- Film rights and print transport.
- Activity-specific staffing costs – e.g., curation, marketing or project management expenses
- Venue hire and activity-specific equipment costs.
- Marketing, Advertising and PR campaigns.
- Event costs for enhanced screenings – e.g., speaker, talent or artists fees
- Volunteer and evaluation expenses
- Accessibility costs – e.g., creating accessible supporting materials, subtitling fees.
- Outreach and community inclusion costs – e.g., providing transport for isolated audiences.
- Audience development expenses – e.g., young programmer's workshops
- Rights clearances and curation fees for screen heritage materials
- Costs related to online activity such as web platform or hosting fees.

This list is not exhaustive and other items may be considered.

All proposed spend should contribute to the activity proposed.

Beyond this, there are some areas not suitable for support from the Film Exhibition Fund.

Ineligible expenses

- Filmmaking costs (including workshops), support for filmmakers to develop or distribute their own work, or for programmes that are only open to filmmakers.
- Capital costs covering building repairs, core-equipment purchases and other capital expenditure.
- Programmes entirely comprised of free events unless these are demonstrably for the purpose of reaching a specific target audience AND are part of a wider audience strategy.
- Un-ticketed events or screenings where audience numbers cannot be reported (such as gallery installations).
- Private events.
- General running costs of organisations not specifically related to the activity.
- Activity that should be covered by statutory education, including events taking place on school grounds/in school hours.
- Events not primarily focused on film exhibition.
- Activity covered by existing funding arrangements.
- Programmes that duplicate provision in the same area
- Activity taking place in a venue not open to the public - e.g., members-only venues.
- The set-up of new film clubs and opening of new cinema venues.

How to apply

Start by reading the full guidelines to ensure your activity fits the eligibility criteria and investment priorities outlined.

If you have not accessed funding from Film Hub South West in the past, we strongly encourage you to contact us in advance to discuss your ideas.

If you have access requirements, you can [get support from BFI](#) and/or contact the Film Hub team via email: filmhub@watershed.co.uk

We invite members to [submit a proposal online](#) and upload the following completed documents provided in the [template folder](#).

Note that you will not be able to save this form as you go along so we recommend you keep an offline copy (see word version in the template folder) and suggest preparing those documents before upload in advance.

Once you have completed your form, you have the option to have your proposal emailed to you when you submit your form.

- [A Delivery Timetable](#)
- [An income and expenditure budget form.](#)
- [Multi-Year applications ONLY - Income and Expenditure budget form](#)

Do not use any other version of these forms and templates. Your proposal may be delayed or rejected if older templates are used.

[An FAQ can be found here](#) that will be updated as questions arise.

How Will Proposals Be Assessed?

First round deadline: 5pm Wed 13 May 2026
Decisions will be confirmed by end of June 2026

Second round deadline: 5pm Wed 9 Sept 2026
Decisions will be confirmed by beginning of October 2026

Your proposal will be assessed by the Film Hub South West Team with the input of two external independent advisors against the following criteria:

- **Activity eligibility:** Does the proposed activity meet the priorities and timescale of the fund? There should be at least four weeks lead-time between your activity starting and the award being confirmed
- **Fit with Fund Priorities:** Will the proposal address at least one of the fund priorities as set out in these Guidelines? Does it clearly respond to the BFI Diversity Standards? How have environmental sustainability considerations been taken into account?
- **Audience reach:** Are projected admissions realistic? Is there a clear need for the activity - does it provide audiences with access to films otherwise unavailable locally? Focus areas and subsidy per head will be a consideration. Whilst we appreciate predicting admissions is difficult, please provide carefully considered estimates and contact us for advice if needed.
- **Impact:** Will the proposal re-engage audiences with culturally valuable film programming? Does the activity respond to any of the fund's other key focus areas? What is the wider potential impact of the proposed programme?
- **Legacy:** How does the activity fit into the organisation's longer-term audience development plans? Are there partnerships in place to deliver the activity effectively and sustainably?

- **Organisational capacity:** Is the organisation able to carry out the proposed activity, including delivering marketing, audience development and evaluation plans? This will include consideration of project management, management oversight, risk management, marketing, audience development and evaluation plans.
- **Budget:** Are all reasonable costs considered? Does the budget balance and are all costs eligible? Have access costs and income been included? Does the project represent value for money? Have appropriate staffing costs been included?
- **Partnerships & Match-funding:** Film Hub South West is not able to support 100% of costs and would expect to see some partnership support. Whether in cash, volunteer time or other in-kind contributions this is an important demonstration that there is genuine support for the activity and potential added value. You may be asked for evidence of match-funding from other organisations at application/reporting stage.
- **Geographical spread:** We seek to ensure a wide range of organisations and areas are receiving Film Hub South West support, to enable audiences across the region to benefit from increased access to cultural cinema beyond the mainstream offer. All hub-funded activity should take place within the **South West FAN Region**.

Please note that we expect this fund to be oversubscribed and may not be able to fund your activity even if it meets the criteria. The larger the amount you are seeking, the higher we would expect your project to score in assessment.

Unsuccessful Proposals

Being unsuccessful does not prevent you from accessing future Hub opportunities, however you will not be able to resubmit a declined proposal to the Film Exhibition Fund in the same financial year. If you wish to submit the same or a similar proposal in future years, you should contact us first to discuss your plans.

Successful Proposals

If your proposal is successful, the assessment panel may discuss any required amendments and wish to see a revised delivery plan, timetable, and budget before confirming funding. This process can take additional time. Activity timelines will need to accommodate this.

If there are no recommendations or amendments to be made, you will be sent a confirmation email setting out the terms and conditions attached to the funding.

These will cover payment information, financial due diligence, crediting guidelines, monitoring and reporting requirements.

Monies for successful proposals will be allocated in instalments which can vary from project to project. This is typically given as an 80% upfront payment before the project commences and 20% upon completion of activity, subject to satisfactory reporting. We reserve the right to withhold the last instalment of funding should unsatisfactory or non-reporting occur.

Please note: final confirmation of support will be subject to the availability of National Lottery Funding.

Reporting requirements

All funded organisations will need to carry out online BFI FAN surveys of their audiences - please bear this in mind when planning your evaluation strategies as this is key to sustaining future funding from National Lottery.

On the completion of projects, funded organisations will be expected to submit reports within a month of completion. Please consider this as part of your planning and note that all reporting needs to be completed by mid-March.

- You will be asked to submit:
- A completed reporting template outlining activity outcomes.
- A completed Project Log listing the events and films screened and audience numbers. We recommend you complete this as you move through planning and delivery to make it easier at the end.
- Completed audience surveys (or evidence of surveys being offered) post-event, using the QR code or link supplied (note that across our portfolio of investments, we are aiming for survey return rates of 10%.)
- Updated income and expenditure budget with actual figures post-event.
- Photos/press or promotional materials from your events (or links to them)
- A case study of your project, if requested.

Complaints and Appeals

Watershed Arts Trust is the Film Hub Lead Organisation for the South West as part of BFI's UK wide Film Audience Network with support from National Lottery funding.

In relation to this fund, the Film Hub South West team's decision is final. Inevitably, proposals will be declined, and some applicants may be disappointed by this result. Formal appeals against the final decision will not be considered unless the applicant has good cause to believe that the procedures for processing the proposal were not adhered to or applied in such a way as to prejudice the outcome of the process.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Watershed's Head of Film Maddy Probst in the first instance: maddy.p@watershed.co.uk

However, if this is not appropriate for any reason, please refer to Watershed's [**Complaint Policy**](#).

Image credit: Create Swindon Curation Workshop 2024



Getting in touch

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions, concerns or specific access requirements regarding the process or guidelines. We are very happy to discuss your project with you before you apply and will advise and support wherever possible.

In the first instance contact: filmhub@watershed.co.uk

To find out more about Film Hub South West and what we do, visit: watershed.co.uk/filmhub

Please note: these guidelines are subject to change at any point.

Film Hub South West reserves the right to review and alter its policies, procedures, and assessment criteria.



THE
NATIONAL
LOTTERY



South West