

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY CINEMA?

A community cinema is any volunteer-led and non-profit organisation that shows films in its community. This includes film societies and clubs; pop-up cinemas; school film clubs; college and university student cinemas; screenings in village halls, arts centres, local cinemas, youth and community centres; mobile cinemas and local film festivals.

WHAT MAKES COMMUNITY CINEMA SPECIAL?

- **CHOICE:** Community cinemas are run by audiences - for audiences, and give communities the power to choose the films that they want to see, when they want to see them.
- **ATMOSPHERE:** Community cinemas specialise in providing a warm and friendly atmosphere, in which every audience member can feel welcomed and secure.
- **CONNECTIONS:** Community cinemas are the social heart of their community, providing opportunities to discuss and debate film and create connections between people who might otherwise be isolated.
- **CULTURE:** Community cinemas take films seriously, offering audiences varied and adventurous programming, bringing world cinema, classics and the very best new releases to audiences across the country, as well as short films, documentaries, animations and archive footage.
- **AVAILABILITY:** Community cinemas are hugely diverse – both in terms of where they are and what they show. Some operate in cities and towns, where films are readily available, whilst others are in rural areas where a local film society might be the only form of cinema provision. Both types programme provide an enjoyable communal atmosphere and develop the viewing experience with special seasons, discussions and social events.

'When attending, you get the full cinema experience without the risks and huge expense of going to a commercial cinema in town. The cinema is available to anyone in the community who wants to go. There is also access for anyone who has mobility problems. As a woman who attends on her own I know that there will always be a warm welcome, there is safe car parking and reasonably priced refreshments.'

Audience member at Murchfield

THINKING ABOUT SETTING UP A COMMUNITY CINEMA?

If you're thinking about setting up a community cinema, you're in good company. Over 750 community cinemas now exist in the UK, so you can feel confident that you're treading a well-defined path that many have followed successfully before you, and that every problem you encounter will have been solved many times before. If you take a look at the map on the homepage of our [website](#) you can search for your nearest community cinema.

Cinema For All exists to support you both whilst you start up your screening organisation, and to be there for you in the long term to help you maintain your sustainability. Cinema For All is at the heart of the network of UK community exhibitors, which means that we can help you share your experiences, bring you together with others in the same situation and with the same goals, and maintain a network of support that strengthens communities all around the country.

We recommend you start your journey by reading all of the Cinema For All advice documents online, available at <http://cinemaforall.org.uk/advice/>. As you go through the information, make notes of anything you're unsure about, or would like further information on, then give us a call on 0114 2210134 or email info@cinemaforall.org.uk for more bespoke advice and support. You can also like our page on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/BFFS.CinemaForAll> and follow us on Twitter [@cinemaforall](https://twitter.com/cinemaforall).

THE FIRST STEPS

Form a small working group

As much as it might be tempting, you can't do it on your own. Working as part of a small group can have the advantages of spreading the workload, sustaining morale and bringing more than one point of view to bear when it comes to decision-making. It's also critically important to encourage discussion at an early stage to help with some of the decisions you will make – such as the type of licensing arrangement you will have with film distributors. At the working group stage you will not have established roles in place but the way people engage with the working group will give a clear indication of their approach to committee work. Putting together an initial task plan is recommended, to ensure your group shares an understanding of what needs to be done, by whom and when.

Find a venue

The most useful first exercise a working group can undertake is to evaluate local venues and choose the best one to host your community cinema. This choice can have a determining effect. For example, there might be a venue with a 35mm or a DCP projector and projectionist available, which might lead you to screen in those formats. Otherwise, there might be a good sized local hall, community centre or library that fits your vision but may need equipment installing. This might lead you to decide to screen on DVD or Blu-ray, as the equipment will be cheaper, easier to install and more manageable without a trained projectionist. There is also the option of using alternate venues for each screening, which would mean that you would need your equipment to be portable.

If a venue is already a cinema and has a 35mm or DCP projector, you will need to evaluate the state of the equipment, the seating and the rental charge. Then you can decide whether a community cinema could be made to work there. If you are looking at installing your own equipment in a non-cinema venue, you'll need a DVD or Blu-ray player, a sound system and a screen. You'll also need to consider whether the venue will allow permanent installation, or whether you'll need to take your equipment apart after each screening. You also might want to consider whether the venue has black-out, or whether this can easily be installed; the sound of the venue; and anything that will improve your audience's comfort – good seating, tea and coffee making facilities, access for people with disabilities and adjustable heating/ air conditioning. For more information on equipment and venue please take a look at our equipment start up pack <http://cinemaforall.org.uk/advice/equipment/>.

DECIDE HOW YOU WISH TO OPERATE

Licences

No matter what kind of film screening organisation you plan to run, if you are going to show a film to an audience you must have a licence from the distributor who owns the rights to show the film. In practice this means hiring a copy of the film from the distributor or their agent on terms that include payment for the licence. Films can be hired this way on 35mm film, DCP, DVD, Blu-ray and (very

rarely) on VHS tape or 16mm film. Downloads are increasingly available through services such as Cinegi and Filmbank's Cinelink box.

In general, community cinemas have the choice of two ways of screening films:

- a **non-commercial single title licence** allows *members only* to attend the film screening. Usually this licence does not allow tickets to be paid for in advance or on the door, or permit any advertising of the film screening outside of the membership scheme.

OR

- a **commercial single title licence** allows members *and* the general public to attend the film screening. Payment can either be taken in advance of the screening or on the door. This licence allows you to freely advertising films screened under it.

Non-commercial licences may be funded by audience member subscriptions collected at the start of each season or year. Films are hired on a flat rate basis (around £85-£120), and less paperwork is involved as there is no need to file box office returns.

'We spoke to Cinema For All when we were dealing with all the practicalities for the first time: equipment, finances, licences, all the stuff that doesn't occur to you until you start to get really involved.'

Jon Kelly, Phantom Cinema

Commercial licences are paid for by a percentage (usually 35%) of the total ticket income OR a minimum amount - the 'minimum guarantee' (ranging from £85-£120 for DVD hire) - whichever is the greater. The amount paid is dependent on the size of the audience. After a screening using this licence type you will be required to complete a 'return' to the distributor that reports how many people attended and ticket income generated.

You will need a licence for each film that you screen. We strongly recommend that you book and confirm your films from the rights-holders before you begin to publicise them. This will require a bit of preparation, but is much preferable to being stuck without a film at the last minute due to lack of availability. Remember, not all films will be available and sometimes you'll need to do some research to track down the films you wish to screen. For more information on sourcing films, go to:

<http://cinemaforall.org.uk/advice/programming/sourcing-films/>

It is possible for a community cinema to put together a programme using both sorts of licences, although care must be taken to adhere to the conditions of the relevant licence for the corresponding film. In general, the use of the commercial licence gives greater freedom of operation, the ability to build an audience in the course of a season by external advertising, a much higher profile and the ability to access more potential members. Against this is the fact that more work is involved in publicising the programme and in running what is in effect a small not-for-profit business.

Membership

Membership schemes offer several advantages regardless of which sort of screening licence you use. Greater financial security can be derived from receiving most of your income at the start of the year or season (a part year of membership that may also cover entry to a number of films) and you have the freedom to be more adventurous in your choice of films – once people have paid their membership they are likely to come even to unfamiliar films.

If you are operating under a **non-commercial licence**, your audience will need to be members of your community cinema – so make sure you pay special attention getting the pricing right.

If you are screening using a **commercial licence** it still might be a good idea to operate a membership scheme or offer season tickets to members at prices that encourage enrolment. Having a bulk of your income come in this way will allow some security as the season progresses.

ORGANISE A TEST SCREENING

If you are ready to think about a test screening, then it's time to get in touch. We can help with advice on the choice of film and ways of getting hold of it. We may be able to help by lending you the equipment for your screening through our regional volunteer contacts, or by putting you in touch with community cinemas close by. A test screening is a good opportunity to ask people whether they'd prefer a membership scheme or to pay on the door, as well smaller but invaluable details such as which evenings are best for them and what films they'd like to see. Take down as many contact details as you can, and make sure everyone has a relaxing and enjoyable time.

FORM A COMMITTEE

Community cinema committees work best when they are made up of people ready to undertake a well-defined set of roles. A typical committee may look something like this.

- **The Chair** runs the meetings, keeps the committee members focused and makes sure key decisions are made.
- **The Secretary** organises meeting agendas, writes the minutes, replies to correspondence and is in charge of the general day-to-day administration of the organisation.
- **The Treasurer** monitors income and expenditure, keeps the books, prepares the annual accounts and is involved in obtaining grants and fundraising.
- **A Membership Secretary** for managing applications, records and communications can be very helpful to share the load with the secretary.
- **The Booking Officer** ensures that once a programme is settled all films are booked, that they subsequently arrive and are available for projection.
- **The Publicity Officer** produces the publicity materials and may have a strategic role in planning publicity activities. They will often also be in control of any social media streams, however this a task that can be shared out amongst the committee.
- **The Front-of-House Manager** is responsible for all ticketing, handling money at the door and banking it, and making returns on the take and on the audience size. They may also develop a working relationship with venue staff.
- **The Projectionist** may also be the technical supremo, responsible for ensuring the quality of the viewing experience.

Note that some of the roles can be combined but the first three are best kept separate. Most of the roles require a certain level of expertise and benefit from being performed by someone of an appropriate professional background (e.g. a book-keeper as treasurer).

PUTTING ON A FILM

As mentioned above, your venue type will influence what format you'll screen your films on. Around 85% of UK Community cinemas project from DVD/ Blu-Ray, the rest screening on DCP or 35mm if they still have the facilities to do so.

If you have access to high-end digital projection or 35mm, then it's likely that you will have access to a cinema style venue and professional projection staff. In such circumstances, as long as the finances make sense, you should take advantage of these facilities. You will have to acquire a distinct set of working practices, as well as the knowledge that goes with them, but nothing too demanding is involved and the venue will be able to support the process.

DVD/ Blu-ray projection equipment is relatively cheap and easy to configure and operate. The film distribution industry is now fairly well geared up to DVD rentals for exhibition, and an increasing amount of Blu-rays are now available.

GET ORGANISED - FINANCES AND BUDGETS

By this time you'll have a good idea of the sort of organisation you want to be, the sort of things you want to achieve and how you'll go about putting this into practice. This means it's time to draft a constitution. This will describe your aims and objectives, your membership scheme and how you will operate financially. It is invaluable for obtaining grants and should include an aim of 'education'.

Contact Cinema For All for a model constitution to fit your needs.

Once you've started looking into the possibilities of venues, licences and equipment you'll have a much clearer idea of the start-up and running costs for your organisation. At this stage some financial modelling is in order as you consider your expenditures and estimate your income. For example, the number of members and/or ticket buyers you can expect will help you set membership subscriptions/ticket prices. It is important to consider what other income you can expect from sales of refreshments or by advertising local businesses in your programme. This will enable you to put together a rough budget and a cash-flow for your first year of operation. Remember to include your insurance needs e.g., equipment damage/loss and public liability cover. It is good practice to build up a contingency fund for unexpected events.

CINEMA FOR ALL MEMBERSHIP

When looking at finances and budgets bear in mind some of the discounts and offers available to members of Cinema For All. Cinema For All Members and Associates can access a huge range of special deals, such as public liability and equipment insurance discounts through our partners at [WRS Insurance](#), and access to low-cost film hire via the [Cinema For All Booking Scheme](#). In an exclusive offer with major distributors [Filmbankmedia](#) new Cinema For All Members and Associates will no longer have to pay a deposit when opening a Filmbankmedia account (a saving of £150). You can also access a discount of 10% off equipment purchases from [Soundsmith Audio Visual](#), which has saved some of our members up to £1000!

FUNDRAISE

It is possible to start with borrowed equipment, and initially Cinema For All may be able to help with this with our equipment hire scheme <http://cinemaforall.org.uk/advice/equipment/equipment-hire-scheme/>. However, it is always a good idea to make fundraising to buy your own equipment your first priority. Fundraising will also allow you to cover pre-season costs such as publicity, and cope with any shortfall in box office receipts if you are operating on a commercial licence.

Your fundraising strategy should have four main strands:

1. Take a look at the [BFI Neighbourhood Cinema Funds](#), including the BFI Neighbourhood Cinema Equipment Fund which grants equipment sets to groups who have been running for 6 months or

longer. In order to apply to the funds you will need a profile on the [BFI Neighbourhood Cinema website](#), making a profile is also useful for publicising your community cinema.

2. Check whether your local Film Hub is operating any funding schemes that you may be able to apply to. The [BFI Film Audience Network](#) is made up of nine Film Hubs which cover the whole of the UK. Each Film Hub is led by a Film Hub Lead Organisation (FHLO) receives funding from the BFI to deliver extensive programming, audience development activity and support sector training in their region. Becoming a member of your local Film Hub is free and will give you access to lots of opportunities for funding and development.
3. Make an application to the Big Lottery Fund, or other funding agency (such as Awards for All) that manages funds nationally.
4. Visit your local council to find whether there are any local funds to which you can apply.
5. Check out schemes supporting rural arts and community activity, such as [Cine North](#) or [Regional Screen Scotland](#).

Your constitution will be vital here, in addition to a business plan describing how you intend to move your organisation forward with the funds. Ask around, in your committee and beyond, to find people with a track record of successful applications to funding agencies. Another thing to bear in mind when applying to funds is that a lot of funds will require your organisation to be legally registered. Cinema For All can help you with advice on the process, so please get in touch with us if you decide to go down this route.

PUBLICITY AND MARKETING

It is vital to let your members know what's coming up, but for a community cinema whose audience includes members of the public, it is essential to broadcast your upcoming titles. If your films aren't well publicised people won't come to see them. An effective publicity campaign will include:

- creating your own **website** – if your budget is tight try setting up a **free Wordpress or Tumblr** blog.
- setting up a **Twitter** and **Facebook** account will allow to reach a huge potential audience.
- a well-produced **leaflet or flyer**, widely-distributed among your members and placed in key areas such as libraries, shops, theatres, concert halls and at your venue
- attractive, informative and easy-to-read **posters** placed in libraries, community poster sites and at other venues
- free advertising and **editorial in local papers** and on **radio stations** (well-timed press releases are the key to this)
- inclusion in **mailshots** by your other local arts and cultural organisations
- inclusion in your venue's publicity and **mailings**

Experience has shown that some of the best publicity is by word-of-mouth. Be shameless, brag about your new community cinema, tell all your friends, make sure everyone at work knows about it, and most importantly, make sure all committee members always carry some flyers, brochures and membership forms.

SOURCING YOUR FILMS AND LICENCES

There is no one place to source your films, and you might need to approach several different distributors to find the films you're looking for. Below are some of the larger providers of films and

licences, and it's recommended that you take a look at all of their offerings to create a balanced programme. For more information and advice on programming take a look at our dedicated starter pack <http://cinemaforall.org.uk/advice/programming/>.

FILMBANKMEDIA: One of the larger providers of film for non-theatrical organisations, Filmbank represent films from Warner, Sony, Lionsgate and many more. Remember that members of Cinema For All do not have to pay the initial set-up deposit of £150 to open a Filmbank account, so join up first!

MPLC: many titles are available through the MPLC Movie Licence, including a special collection that can be booked through our Booking Scheme.

CINEMA FOR ALL BOOKING SCHEME: 800 titles of world and classic cinema, available at a discounted rate for Cinema For All members. The scheme covers films from Dogwoof, Arrow, Axiom, Network and many more.

BFI NON-THEATRICAL: hundreds of British films, world classics and recent gems, including those from Artificial Eye and the BFI's own releases.

PARK CIRCUS: specialising in re-releases, Park Circus has a vast and interesting collection available.

INDEPENDENT DISTRIBUTORS: from time to time you'll need to approach independent distributors or producers if they are not covered by the providers above. These include films from Soda Pictures, Momentum.

LEGAL ISSUES

Some of the things that you need to consider are:

- As of April 2015 in England and Wales you will no longer need a Premises Licence to screen films, provided it is a not-for-profit screening between the hours of 8.30am and 11.00pm. It is still worth double checking with your local council to check that you are eligible. If there is any other activity in the venue this still requires a premises licence. In Northern Ireland you still need a Premises Licence to screen films and in Scotland although a Premises Licence is often free for not for profit venues you will need a Cinemas Licence. To find out more read our Scottish Starter Pack <http://cinemaforall.org.uk/advice/scottish-starter-pack/>.
- Are there any restrictions under the fire and building regulations? The venue and your local authority will be able to provide advice and assistance.
- Is your venue accessible to all, including people with disabilities? Advice and information on increasing the accessibility of your venue is available from: www.yourlocalcinema.com and [Action on Hearing Loss](#)
- Does your venue have public liability insurance, and does this cover your film screenings? Being a member of Cinema For All will give you access to a competitive insurance package to cover equipment and public liability insurance with WRS insurance: <http://www.wrsinsurance.co.uk/wrs-insurance-services/cinemainsurance>
- Does your venue have a performing rights licence to cover music? Advice and information is available from: www.prsformusic.com
- Do you have confirmation and permission from the rights holder to screen your chosen films? Take a look at our guide to sourcing films to help you find the distributor <http://cinemaforall.org.uk/advice/programming/sourcing-films/>
- Have you made your viewers aware of the film's classification, if it has been classified? If not, you will need to obtain local classification from your council. Classification must be clearly displayed on any publicity materials, including websites, programmes, posters, etc. You can

find a film's classification on the British Board of Film Classification's website:

<http://www.bbfc.co.uk/>

GOOD LUCK!

We wish you the best of luck, but with common sense, teamwork, effective planning and making good use of the resources around you, you'll find that running a community cinema can be a rewarding and fulfilling experience. Cinema For All is here to support you all the way through your life as a film society, so don't hesitate to get in touch by phone: 0114 2210314 or by email:

info@cinemaforall.org.uk

CHECKLISTS

Venue checklist

- Venue size - can you fit in a decent sized screen? Is there sufficient room for your projector (and are there enough power points)?
- Is there space for a front-of-house desk?
- Does it have black-out?
- Will noise or acoustics cause a problem? Consider if the noise of your projector, or other activity at or near the venue, will interfere with your screening. Reverberation ('echo') can be checked by clapping and listening to what comes back.
- How many people will it comfortably hold? There must be a gap between the screen and the front row and you need to take wheelchair access into account. Seating layout is usually fan-shaped, not rectangular to enable the best view for the most.
- Is the seating comfortable enough? This is much more important than you might think.
- Are the heating and cooling systems effective?
- Are key facilities (e.g., toilets) available and easily accessible to all, including audience members with disabilities?
- Is there a kitchen or bar area with the capacity to provide refreshments?
- Is there car-parking nearby?
- Have you checked whether you are eligible for the [premises licence exemption](#) (page 99, section 15.6)?
- Is the venue fully insured for public liability, and does this cover your film screenings e.g., equipment?

Start-up costs checklist

- equipment (and insurance for it)
- print publicity (design, print and distribution)
- other publicity resources (news releases, parish magazines etc)
- tickets (if you have to produce them)
- contingency (losses from low attendance at initial shows etc)

Ongoing costs checklist

- venue hire, projectionists etc

- publicity
- film hire/licence fee
- equipment insurance and public liability insurance
- Cinema For All membership (50% discount for organisations in their first year, 25% discount for organisations in their second year)
- replacement projection bulbs
- contingency fund for equipment

Digital projection DVD equipment - what you will need

- a DLP (or LCD) digital projector
- a player (DVD, Blu-ray or desktop)
- a sound system (including a receiver or amplifier and loudspeakers)
- a screen
- a cuing display (this is very useful for the projectionist)
- hard cases for each item (must have for portable equipment)
- cables to connect the equipment