

Inviting a guest speaker/ conducting a Q&A can be a wonderful addition to your film programme, enriching and expanding on your film selection, as well as offering a different perspective on your programmed film. By offering an additional extra to the regular screening experience, you are giving your audience excellent value for money, which will help you develop a regular and engaged group of attendees. This help sheet offers a step-by-step guide to hosting a guest speaker/ conducting a post-film Q&A, and features valuable top-tips gathered from both the Cinema For All team and the community cinemas we proudly represent.

Before you get started

CHOOSING YOUR GUEST SPEAKER

Inviting a guest speaker along to your screening can really add value and enjoyment to your screening, and offer context for you audience members. Think carefully about who you might want to invite – perhaps they have something to do to with the film, or they might have something interesting to say about the topics covered.

Some suggestions:

- The director/ writer/ producer of the film – this is often very hard to achieve with a well-known film, however if you are screening a film with a local connection, or a film with limited distribution, it might be more achievable. Bear in mind that the speaker may request a fee, or at least travel expenses, so build this into your budget/ be prepared to negotiate. Social media has made it much easier to contact filmmakers directly, so try reaching out in this more informal setting, as going via an agent can often be time consuming.
- A local academic – an achievable option and very worthwhile. Don't just feel you need to stick to film lecturers though. Subject experts (such as in history, politics, languages, psychology) can often contribute by talking about the themes or topics of a film, which can often add a very interesting element to your screening.
- A speaker from a relevant charitable organisation – i.e. the National Autistic Society (*Life, Animated*), The Trussell Trust (*I, Daniel Blake*), Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (*My Nazi Legacy*). These are often experienced speakers who may be able to bring additional materials (flyers, clips) that can really add context to your film screening.

BE CLEAR ON THE PRACTICALITIES

- You may choose to have your guest just introduce the film, or ask you may also want them to stay after the film for a Q&A. Both options are great for giving your audience context and a more rounded film experience. Many speakers will be happy to do both, but there will be some more work on your part if you decide to host a Q&A.
- Be sure you are clear with the speaker about your expectations, as well as being clear with them about what they should expect on the night. They may be unfamiliar with what a community cinema is, so it's a good idea to spend a bit of time explaining more about your organisation and what your aims are.
- Be clear about timings – if they are doing a solo introduction, tell them how long they will need to speak for (15-20mins is a good guide) and what you want them to cover. You will also need to be clear on when you will need them arrive, and whether someone will meet them at the train station. If they are staying for a post film Q&A, plan for it to last no more than 30-40mins after the film.
- Let your speaker know if you are able to offer any tech – some speakers may want to project some images/ slides onto your screen, or even show a few clips. Make sure they know what you are able to offer in advance.

- Be very clear about whether there is a fee and be sure to explain how they can claim expenses. Some speakers may be happy to waive a fee for a volunteer-led group, but it is good practice to still offer basic travel expenses.
- Ask them for their phone number and give them yours – it's important to be able to contact them quickly if anything changes, or they happen to be late.

MARKETING

Think carefully about how you tell your audience about the upcoming event. Don't just spring it on them on the day - make sure they know well in advance. It's a good idea to make an announcement before any earlier screenings, as well as using social media to notify anyone who is a less regular attendee. Always use images, give as much info as you can and make it fun! If you have a very special guest i.e. the star or the director, try to get some press coverage.

On the day of the event

- Do some final social media posts to remind people that you have a special guest.
- If you are screening a film from the Film Discovery 101 Menu, print off the fact sheet that accompanies your film. Having a shared reference point will help get the discussion flowing/ will help your audience think of some questions.
- If you are holding a Q&A after the film, make sure you have assigned a key facilitator from your committee/ group of organisers. This may be you, or you may have selected someone else from your committee. Either way, it's important to have someone to direct the conversation, keep things running to time, and be able to comfortably deal with any silences or awkward moments.
- Make sure that you/ the facilitator feels prepared to chair the Q&A. If you are screening from the Film Discovery 101 menu, our fact-sheets will help you feel familiar with the issues surrounding the film, and offers some suggestions of where to point your audience to next, if they are interested to explore further.
- As many community cinema venues can be a little echoey, consider hiring in some hand-held microphones. This is also a very considerate towards any audience members that may have hearing loss, as well as supporting a more quietly spoken guest.

Getting started

- Even if you've only asked your guest speaker to introduce the film, you, or someone from your team will need to say a few words first to introduce them and welcome them to your venue.
- Give your guest the freedom to say what they have prepared – but be ready to step in if things are starting to go over time, especially if they are staying for a Q&A afterwards.
- Whilst the film is playing, bear in mind that the special guest may not wish to watch the film (especially if they made it!). Be prepared to entertain them for a while (this is also a good time for you to run your set of questions by them and ask them if they have anything they'd like to avoid talking about). If they prefer to have a wander, make sure they are aware of what time they need to be back by (always err on the side on early and make sure you have their phone number!)

Chairing a Q&A

- Come prepared with a list of questions to ask your guest. If it makes you feel more comfortable, you may wish to share the list with your guest in advance, so they know what is coming and can feel prepared too. However, sometimes the best questions can come to you in the moment, so don't worry about going off script.
- After you have asked a few (3-5) questions, it's time to open up to the audience. As the chair, you will ask for a show of hands and select which people ask their questions and when. It's natural for audiences to be a little shy at first, so don't worry if it takes a moment for some hands to be raised.
- Don't panic if things start to slow down. Sometimes a silence can be a good thing and can give a quieter audience member the chance to speak up. It can even allow your guest a moment to gather their thoughts.

- Be prepared to offer your own thoughts/ opinions to keep the momentum flowing. Have a few back up questions in your notes, just in case.
- Don't forget to listen carefully to your guest's response, rather than thinking of your next question. Their answer may lead your discussion in an interesting direction, so it's important to stay alert.

Good luck!

We wish you all the best of luck with your new film discovery activities, but with preparation, an injection of confidence and the passion community cinema volunteers are known for, we are sure your new activities will be a success. To let us know how your film activity went, please head to our online form: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/YZGVPBM> which should only take a few minutes to complete.

What's next?

Do check out the other help-sheets in this series:

Helpsheet #1: holding a post-film discussion

Helpsheet #3: creating a film discovery presentation (coming soon)

As well as the 6 fact sheets expanding on films from the Film Discovery 101 Film Menu:

Neruda

*Hidden Figures**

The Olive Tree

The Red Balloon

Alice in the Cities

The Passion of Joan of Arc

Film Discovery 101 is supported by the BFI Audience Award. Its writers and contributors are: Jaq Chell, Gemma Bird, Linnea Pettersson, Abi Standish and Deborah Parker.

www.cinemaforall.org.uk