



EQUIPMENT

Equipment can be an expensive and overwhelming element of showing films in your local community. However, in order to ensure audience satisfaction and consistency of projection it's important to have reliable equipment that will screen films to a cinematic standard. Whether you are high or low on funds there are some items you should always make sure you have. Cinema For All has sets of high-quality equipment all around the country available to hire. Learn more by going to cinemaforall.org.uk.

ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT

PROJECTOR

Projectors come in all sorts of shapes and sizes, and with many different specifications. It's important that your projector has a resolution of at least 1080p, so the image will be the best possible quality. You should aim for a projector with a brightness of at least 3000 ANSI Lumens, but if your venue isn't particularly dark you may need one with a higher brightness. If you have a big enough budget, it could be worth considering projectors with a laser light source, which don't require costly lamp replacements like traditional digital projectors.

SCREEN

Using a dedicated projector screen makes for a much better viewing experience than a white sheet or wall for many different reasons. There are good quality portable 'fast fold' screens available, 'fixed frame' screens to fix to a wall, as well as manual and electric pull-down screens that can be wall or ceiling mounted. Aim for the biggest screen that fits in your venue and your budget allows, but remember: the bigger the screen, the further away the projector needs to be!

PLAYER

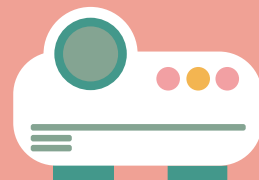
Most film societies and community cinemas screen films using a Blu-Ray player. These can play both Blu-Rays and lesser-quality DVDs, and often have the facility to play files from a USB hard drive. It's also possible to use a laptop, but just make sure that it can play Blu-Rays! Some groups have the facilities to screen from DCPs, but if the equipment isn't already installed it is usually very expensive to get set up.

SOUND SYSTEM

If you want to use surround sound, or even just add a centre speaker to aid dialogue clarity, you'll need an AV amp or receiver as well as however many speakers you want to use. This also gives you the option of adding a subwoofer for the full cinematic feel. A good quality PA system is also suitable for film screenings as well as live music, and these are available in portable models or ones that can be installed in a venue.

CABLES

Don't forget that you'll need cables to connect everything together! When budgeting, remember to bear in mind that good cables will cost around 10% of the overall cost of equipment. It's also important to bear in mind the distance between your equipment and that the longer cables are the more difficult they are to manage.



EQUIPMENT CONSIDERATIONS INSTALLED OR PORTABLE?

When purchasing equipment it's important to first consider whether you'll be installing it in your venue, or setting it up and taking it down before and after each screening. If you can't install it in the venue, maybe you can store it there securely to save transporting it for each screening.



PORTABLE

PERMISSION

Do you own the venue or is it hired? If it's a hired venue then you will need to consider whether you can get permission to store equipment there or even have it installed.

PROJECTOR MOUNTING

If you have the option, mounting a projector on the ceiling is a great idea. It saves you time when setting up for a screening, and means that the image won't be obstructed by people walking in front of your projector. You can also mount a projector on the wall at the back of a venue, but you may need to a projector with a 'long throw' lens.

SCREEN MOUNTING

Permanent 'fixed frame' screens can be mounted on a wall, and pull down screens can usually be mounted on a wall or the ceiling. Manual pull down screens are available, but if your budget allows you should get a 'tab-tensioned' electric screen for the best viewing experience. If you are on a very tight budget, you may consider painting a screen on the wall, however you will need to make sure you use highly reflective acrylic paint manufactured especially for this purpose.

CABLES

Plan out which cables will need to be run where in order to connect your installed system together. If you have the budget, get them professionally installed. If you're on a tighter budget then plastic cable covers are commercially available, but always bear in mind health and safety.

EQUIPMENT CONSIDERATIONS INSTALLED OR PORTABLE?



INSTALLED

POSITIONING

Remember that if you're using a projector that isn't mounted on the wall or ceiling, it will need to be placed around five metres in front of the screen with nothing obstructing its light path.

SCREEN

If you'll be changing venue frequently, a portable PA system can be a really good solution. They're easy to set up and designed to be transported, so are very durable. Soundbars and column PA systems are becoming more popular and portable - however it does tend to be the case that only the top-end products are good enough for larger venues.

SOUND

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CASE

When transporting equipment good quality casing is invaluable. Always make room for it in your budget, and don't skimp if you're prone to dropping things!

MAKING YOUR VENUE CINEMATIC



As important as it is to have the right equipment for your venue, there are several other things you can do to improve your cinema set up. Often factors such as venue lighting, running schedules and audience comfort can have a huge impact on the success of your screenings. As much as a high quality projection might draw in an audience, a great atmosphere is something that everyone will value.

BLACKOUT

How dark can you make your venue for when the film starts? Remember, in the summer months it often doesn't get dark until after the film finishes. Different types of blackout blinds are available, or thick bin bags and gaffer tape work if you're on a budget! If you go for this option, make sure they have been fire safety checked.

LIGHTING

It's always handy if you can adjust the lights in your venue yourself. In an ideal world there would be lights on the audience as they're coming in which are then dimmed once the film starts. It's a good idea to familiarise yourself with which switches do what prior to a screening.

RUNNING SCHEDULE

A running schedule generally encourages the smooth running of a screening. Making a list of when lights come on and off, the order of pre-film material, any announcements and the film's running time can be a good way of making sure the screening goes as planned.

PROPER PRESENTATION

If possible try not to show the DVD menu on the screen before a film. This can be avoided by either using the projector's blanking function, the player's pause function or even just putting a piece of cardboard in front of the projector before starting the film. If showing pre-film material it may even be a good idea to invest in a separate monitor.

COMFORT

Something so easy to forget but something so important. Are the toilets easy to find? Is it easy to navigate your way out of a dark screening to find them? Are they at the back of the hall so to minimise disruption? Is there a kitchen? Is there any food and drink available at your screening? Are the seats comfortable? Is the venue accessible to all? Audiences are willing to forgive technical blips, but may not return if they've had an uncomfortable evening.

REMEMBER

Your venue should be your guiding point for what equipment you use - a permanent venue and a temporary venue will call for different types of equipment. Where possible try and arrange a test-screening to see what equipment works best in your venue. High quality equipment isn't all that matters - pay attention to your audiences' needs.

HANDY EXTRAS

As well as your basic equipment there are several things that are always a good idea to have on hand when screening a film:

- Ga a tape (for taping down any loose cables)
- Spare projector bulb
- Kettle leads, figure 8 power cable and an extension lead
- Phono / RCA cables
- Spare batteries

HOLDING A TEST SCREENING

Before purchasing equipment you should always ask if the seller will allow you to hold a test screening. Most manufacturers will allow a test screening upon receipt of a deposit, or...

Cinema For All members can hold a test screening using our equipment for £25.

Another idea is borrowing some equipment from a nearby community cinema for a test screening!

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