



# How To Start a Community Cinema Starter Pack



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# Welcome!

This guide will provide the key information you need to start your very own community cinema in the UK, as well as some handy top tips to make your cinema extra special.

Cinema For All is the national charity organisation that supports volunteer led cinema across the UK. We have been running since 1946 and now proudly support over 1700 community cinemas. We've seen community cinemas take many different forms, from a rural cinema club bringing fresh films to their community, to a pop-up immersive cinemas in cities sharing their love of film through fancy dress, food and live performance at their screenings - so you are in very good company.



2025 marks 100 years of community cinema, which is an incredible milestone – why not be part of this rich history with your own fantastic screenings for your communities.

Some groups set up a community cinema for the simple reason that they don't have a cinema nearby, while others want to offer something different to what is on at their local cinemas, be it: providing a greater range of films, accessible spaces and/or affordability. Whatever your reason for getting started community cinemas are special because they are created for and by the community. Continue with this guide to get yours started today!



# Essential licences and insurances to screening films legally

To kick things off, here is a list of the licences and insurances you must have to screen films to the public, legally and safely. Feel free to tick these off as you complete them.

Type of Licence or Insurance	What this licence or insurance provides	Done?
Public Liability Insurance	<p>This is an insurance you need to have as an organisation to protect you, your audience and volunteers. It is best to not rely on the Public Liability Insurance of your venue, as their policies might not cover all of your activity or you might use different venues for each screening. Discounted insurance is available from <a href="#">WRS Insurance</a> for Cinema For All members (find out more about membership <a href="#">here</a>). The cost of the insurance depends on various factors such as size of venue and who you are working with e.g. young people.</p>	
Cinema Licence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Scottish exhibitors will need to take into consideration the Cinemas Act 1985. Under this act any venue showing films will need to apply for an annual Cinema Licence, which you can obtain from your local council. If you are a not for profit group, you can apply to the Scottish Government for an exemption certificate under The Cinemas Act 1985. To find out more and download the exemption form, visit Regional Screen Scotland's website.</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Northern Ireland exhibitors will also need a Cinema Licence from your local council. In some cases you may be exempt, but we recommend speaking to your local licencing officer in all cases. For more information visit Belfast City Council's webpage.</a></li> </ul>	

<p><b>Film Licence</b></p>	<p>You always need a film licence from the distributor in order to screen a film. This licence usually costs between £97 - £140 per film (explained in more detail in Step 5). A distributor is the company or person that owns the copyrights to a film and can give permission for the film to be screened.</p> <p>There are two options of types of film licences for you to choose from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Commercial Single Title Screening Licence</b> – This is the licence we most recommend as it allows you to advertise the film publicly, charge for tickets or accept donations and is the most commonly used licence. These are purchased per screening.</li> <li>• <b>Non-Commercial Single Title Screening Licence</b> – With this licence you are restricted to only advertising the film privately to your members, e.g. a member newsletter. The main benefit of this licence is that you pay a flat-fee for the licence e.g. £100 rather than a percentage of your total ticket takings. This licence mainly works for groups that operate on a membership basis e.g. their members pay £45 a year, so don't need to rely on public advertising to guarantee audience members. This licence does not allow you to charge for tickets.</li> </ul> <p>Please note you still require a licence per film, even if you don't plan on charging for tickets.</p>	
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**'When attending, you get the full cinema experience without the risks and huge expense of going to a commercial cinema in town. As a woman who attends on her own I know that there will always be a warm welcome'**

*Community Cinema Attendee*

**'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*

# Step 1: Form a Team

Whilst you can start screening films with just yourself, forming a team is important for the smooth running of your community cinema. Here are some roles you can consider, some roles can be done by one person and others benefit from having a small group of people working together within one role:



**Programmer** - chooses and books the films.



**Projectionist** - sets up and oversees the projection of the film.



**Marketing Team** - designs graphics, writes copy, social media and print.



**Treasurer** – keeps track of finances and banking.



**Front of House** – greets the audience, sells refreshments, sets up the room and takes tickets.

## Things to consider:

- There are a couple of different ways to operate as a community cinema for example some offer a membership, whereas others are completely open to the public. You can find out more about ways of operating in our guide [here](#) and choose the one that is best for you and your team.
- Communication – decide how you are going to keep in touch as a team e.g. monthly meetings to help share out tasks, reflect on past screenings and plan for the future. You could also have a private Facebook group or use an online workspace such as Slack. Chat together and see what works best for everyone.
- Recruiting volunteers – are there any friends and family that could help you with your screenings? You could do a call out for volunteers for the roles above e.g. at local universities, volunteer centres and community centres.

## Step 2: Come up with a name and logo

A good name and logo is important as it helps people to know who you are and what you do. Here are some tips on creating your cinema name and logo. Have fun in the creation!

- Think of a name for your cinema that is clear in what it is e.g. has the word film or cinema in it.
- Perhaps it can refer to your local area e.g. Blackford Community Cinema.
- Think of a name that you can incorporate into a logo. Your logo can be just text or could include an image e.g. a film reel or a landmark of your local area.

Examples:



## Step 3: Choose a venue

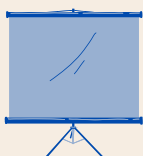
Choosing a venue is an important step as it will be the home for your cinema. There are lots of great spaces out there but here is a handy check list of things to think about when deciding on a suitable venue:

Venue Feature or Consideration	What to check	Done?
Capacity	How many people can you seat inside comfortably? This also informs you how many tickets you can sell which helps for understanding your costs and how much to charge.	
Premises Licence	This is a licence your venue needs so you can show films. Venues get this licence from the council. Does your venue already have one?	

PRS (Performing Rights Society) music licence - also known as a PPL (Phonographic rights licence)	This licence covers the copyright of any music used in your chosen film, plus any additional music you want to play as the audience are entering or leaving. Venues obtain this licence from <a href="#">PRS Music</a> or <a href="#">PPL</a> .	
Price	Is the venue affordable month by month from funding or money that you make from ticket sales?	
Accessibility	Is the venue accessible to people that might be disabled or hard of hearing? Also consider your own accessibility, can you gain access to the building easily as the organisers?	
Sight and sound	Does the venue have black out capabilities on windows so you can see the screen easily? What are the acoustics like? If possible see if you can test a DVD in the venue ahead of your screening.	
Comfort	Does your venue have chairs, are they comfy? Is the space warm or cool enough? See what other facilities it has e.g. toilet facilities, café for serving refreshments, car parking.	

## Step 4: Equipment

To screen films, you will need:



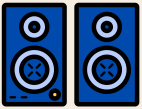
Screen



Projector



Player (this could be a Blu-ray, DVD player or laptop)



PA System (speakers and amplifier)



Film (e.g DVD or Blu-Ray)



Accessibility equipment e.g. a hearing loop, this helps anyone wearing a hearing aid to filter out background noise and focus on the sound coming from the speakers. Check with your venue whether they have this installed. You could also use subtitles for your screening to make your event more accessible.

It is helpful to test and practice setting up the screening equipment ahead of your screening so you can gain confidence and check it is working. For more information about using screening equipment visit our [guide here](#).

Don't have your own equipment?

- Check if your venue already have some equipment that you can use and test it.
- You can hire equipment from Cinema For All – find your nearest equipment hub [here](#).

## Step 5: Choose a film and get the licence

Now you have your venue and equipment sorted you can choose your film!

Getting a licence:

- You will need a Commercial Single Title Screening Licence. This particular licence allows you to charge for tickets and advertise the film publicly. Remember if you have chosen a Non-Commercial Licence this means you cannot advertise your screening publicly or charge for tickets.
- You get the film licence from the film's distributor. E.g. [Cinema For All](#), [Filmbankmedia](#), [BFI](#), [Park Circus](#). If you would like help finding a film licence contact Cinema For All and we can help you. Over time you will build your knowledge and familiarity with different film licences and distributors.



- Always confirm your film licence before advertising your film so that you know it is definitely available for your screening.
- Always check the age certificate of the film you are screening and only admit those of that age and above. It is against the law to screen films to anyone under the age of the **BBFC** (British Board of Film Classification) age certificate.
- A film licence usually costs between £97 and £140, depending on the distributor you get your film licence from. Some distributors charge either a minimum guarantee e.g. £110 or 35% of your box office instead. They will charge whichever is greater. Some distributors will charge more based on the size of your venue.
- You usually pay for the film licence after the screening has taken place and you will be asked how many people attended the screening. Some distributors also ask what you charged and your overall box office takings (the total money from ticket sales).



## Step 6: Marketing your first screening

Now you have built your cinema, it's time to invite people to enjoy it with you! Here are some tips to help raise your cinema's profile, develop your audience and market your screenings:

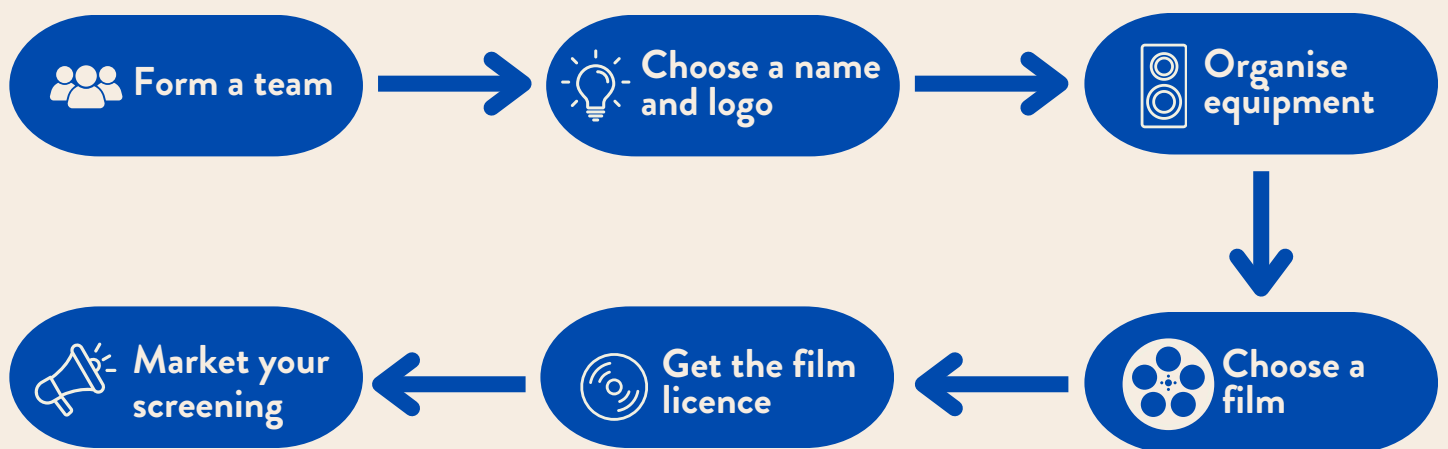
- Design an eye catching poster. This can be used digitally on your social media, newsletters and website. Print versions (such as posters and flyers) can be placed around your local area.
- You could set up a mailing list so you can communicate with your audience about your future screenings. Websites like Mailchimp are good as they comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) i.e People can unsubscribe or update their preferences anytime.
- Set up a social media account that feels right for the audience you're trying to reach and that you feel comfortable using e.g. Facebook or Instagram. This is a free marketing tool and a good way to build a following.

## Step 7: Evaluation

After your screening take some time as a team to evaluate how your first screening went. This helps you think about your next steps. Here are some questions you could use to help evaluate your screening:

- ✓ What went well?
- ✓ What did each team member enjoy?
- ✓ What feedback did you receive from your audience?
- ✓ What could be improved for your next screening?

## Recap



Once you've followed these seven steps to create your community cinema and first screening, the process of running screenings will become easier and you can broaden your ideas should you choose to. Remember, there are lots of resources and organisations out there to help you every step of the way from the beginning and beyond!

# Further Information

For more information or to chat to the Cinema For All team you can:

Visit our website: [www.cinemaforall.org.uk](http://www.cinemaforall.org.uk)

Email us: [info@cinemaforall.org.uk](mailto:info@cinemaforall.org.uk)

Call us: 0114 2210314

Want to see how other groups got started? Take a look at some case studies [here](#).



## Resources:

### UK wide:

- Inclusive Cinema – [www.inclusivecinema.org](http://www.inclusivecinema.org)
- Film Hub South East and Independent Cinema Office - [www.independentcinemaoffice.org.uk](http://www.independentcinemaoffice.org.uk)
- Film North - [www.filmhubnorth.org.uk](http://www.filmhubnorth.org.uk)
- Film Hub South West – [www.watershed.co.uk/filmhub](http://www.watershed.co.uk/filmhub)
- Film Hub Midlands - [www.filmhubmidlands.org](http://www.filmhubmidlands.org)
- Film Hub London - [www.filmlondon.org.uk](http://www.filmlondon.org.uk)
- BFI (British Film Institute) - [www.bfi.org.uk](http://www.bfi.org.uk)
- Into Film – [www.intofilm.org](http://www.intofilm.org)
- Your Local Cinema – [www.yourlocalcinema.com](http://www.yourlocalcinema.com)

### Scotland:

- Film Hub Scotland - [www.filmhubscotland.com](http://www.filmhubscotland.com)
- Regional Screen Scotland – [www.regionalscreenscotland.org](http://www.regionalscreenscotland.org)

### Wales:

- Film Hub Wales – [www.filmhubwales.org](http://www.filmhubwales.org)

### Northern Ireland:

- Film Hub Northern Ireland – [www.filmhubni.org](http://www.filmhubni.org)