

Starting a Film Society

Despite the various cinema, television and DVD /Video outlets available for films today, film societies continue to thrive. This is due to the atmosphere, flexibility of the programming, the informative nature of the meetings and the fact that it is surprisingly simple to organise a society.

Below are the routine points to consider when forming a society.

Members

In order to attract members to the society, you should have a clear idea of the type of films you intend to show. Once a sample programme has been decided, you can begin promoting the society to potential members. A recruiting group of five people can easily get five members each, who can then ten another five, etc, etc, and so the membership grows.

Venue

It is important to find an appropriate venue. Ideally, raked seating with a projection box should be sought - although this is not always possible. Local theatres, community halls and schools are typical venues but you must always consider the facilities: comfort, capacity and cost.

Equipment

Crucial to the facilities is the technical equipment.

Committee

In order to operate the film society a committee is required to run its affairs on behalf of the members. It helps to organise the screenings, film bookings, publicity, money management, and so forth. Society members at an Annual General Meeting elect the committee.

When first starting out it is useful to have a committee from a broad background who can draw on experience and expertise in their own area (e.g. someone in local government who knows procedures for grant applications and resources). A large committee will of course mean that the workload is spread wider.

The Film Society Book offers a standard constitution and as a guideline the following posts (under whatever title you choose) are recommended.

Chairperson :

The person who guides meetings, allocates tasks and ensures that all are doing their specified work.

Secretary :

This is the person who handles correspondence for the society. Some societies split this post and appoint someone to be responsible for membership and another for booking films.

Treasurer :

This person is responsible for all the financial transactions of the society.

Publicity Officer :

This post is often overlooked but if the society isn't publicised how else will people know about it? This person can also be delegated to produce the season's brochure and/or programme notes.

Various other members of the Committee should be appointed in order to help the above officers. It is always useful to ensure that new members are brought on to the Committee at each AGM as this means that people won't be over-stretched and that new ideas are being put forward.

Membership

The main limit on membership is that the individuals are over the age of 16 (for schools a different category of membership is provided). In some cases, such as college/university unions and companies, where a support grant is given, there may be some confines as to who is allowed to join. Clearly, the more members a society has, the more financially viable it will be. One should also remember that there will be more people to call upon when it comes to spreading the workload.

It is always the key fact to remember - the members are the society. In this respect it is worth giving consideration towards those you are targeting as potential members of the society when you start to gather support and before going ahead and booking the films for a season.

The Films

The selection of titles must be given great consideration. A mixture of the classic, the new, the commercial and the specialist will keep most people happy. However, it is important to let the members have a say in what will be screened during the next season. It is also important to get the balance of the programme right in the first season in order to attract members and build support for the society.

Advertising and Publicity

Most societies will want to produce a brochure listing the films, as well as a synopsis and image from the film. The times and dates of screenings will also need to be included.

Finance

The main source of finance is the membership subscription. This allows the committee to plan ahead for the season. Various other ways of raising money are sponsorship, advertising in the society Programme booklet and running a cafe/bar before and after the film. The latter, as well as raising money, also helps to create a relaxed atmosphere and helps to generate discussion on the films.

Grants are available from various sources and enquiries should be made. Applications should contain as much information as possible stating clearly how much is being requested, what the money will enable you to do and what the overall benefit will be. Most successful applications concentrate on money to support a programme brochure, a group of films during the season and special one-day events.

The Treasurer is the person responsible for paying the bills and it is important that the financial position is monitored closely. If the outlook is positive there is no reason why fund raising should not be pursued. Societies should always be seeking to improve their programme of films and presentation. The more money they have at their disposal the easier it will be.

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