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## BFI FILM AUDIENCE NETWORK

### Film Exhibition Fund (FEF): Support for Independent Film Exhibition

#### Funding Guidelines 2026 – 2027

##### AT A GLANCE:

- Aim: To develop and diversify audiences for UK and Irish independent and international film and the wider moving image across Northern Ireland.
- **Two strands of funding available**, Tier 1 for larger scale or multi-year projects and Tier 2 for time limited projects
- Total amount available per annum: approx. £105,000 (subject to change)
- Funding levels: Up to £15,000 p.a. for **Tier 1** Proposals and up to £4000 p.a. for **Tier 2** Proposals
- FEF Tier 2 opens: Friday 28th August 2026
- Deadline for Tier 1 and first phase Tier 2 proposals: Friday 25th September 2026

(NB: Applications for Tier 1 proposals are now closed)

- Activity window:

**Tier 1:** Multi Year proposals for activity taking place up to December 2028

**Tier 2:** September 2026 – March 2027

The BFI Film Audience Network (FAN) reaches across the UK to ensure people have opportunities to watch and enjoy a diverse range of films and moving image, regardless of geography or circumstance.

As part of FAN, Queen's Film Theatre, Belfast (Film Hub Lead Organisation for NI) has been awarded funding from the BFI National Lottery to support member organisations across NI to deliver activity to realise this ambition against the priorities set out in the [BFI's Screen Culture 2033 strategy](#).

Learn more about the work we do on our [website](#).

#### WHAT IS THE FILM EXHIBITION FUND?

The Film Exhibition Fund is open to NI based organisations that are [Film Audience Network member organisations](#)

It is designed to support our membership to deliver screenings and audience development activity that meets the objectives of FAN and the BFI.



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## OUR PRIORITIES

The primary focus of the Film Exhibition Fund is in-person events that bring audiences together for a communal viewing experience.

- Projects which support audiences to experience broader screen activity such as television, digital media and extended reality (VR, AR) will be considered where this represents a valuable opportunity for audience development in line with our priorities.
- Online activities are not a priority but will be considered where they add value and create meaningful engagement (for example, by removing barriers and improving access for disabled audiences)
- We are unable to support core activity; proposals will need to target specific audience groups and show how our funds are necessary to reach those identified audiences.
- Your activity should respond to at least one of the FAN and BFI Screen Culture 2033 outcomes set out below. The more funding you are seeking, the more outcomes we would expect you to address.

**We are particularly interested in supporting proposals that focus on reaching one or more of our priority audiences including working class audiences, disabled audiences, LGBTQAI+ audiences and Black & Global Majority audiences. We are also keen to support programmes that are led by, and for, communities that prioritise and represent lived experiences, broadening representation on screen and where relevant, in the exhibition workforce. If you have such a project in mind, you are welcome to get in touch with us for further guidance and advice.**

We can offer funding towards projects that meet one or more of the following outcomes, which reflect the [BFI Screen Culture 2033 strategy](#):

- **Young Audiences: Children and young people are empowered to develop their own relationships with a wider range of screen culture:**

We recognise the important role early cinema visits have on the health of the exhibition sector both now and in the future. By engaging with children, families and young people, organisations can introduce new audiences to their work and foster future generations of cinemagoers. Activity focused on young audiences may target a segment of those aged 25 and under or the demographic as a whole. Organisations will need to demonstrate that they have safeguarding policies in place.

- **Public Engagement: People across the UK can access a wider choice of film and the moving image, including stories that reflect their lives:**



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One of our key aims is to support public access to a wide range of film and the moving image including classic and international cinema, documentaries, TV and screen heritage, games and work that creates risks. We are also interested in exploring the opportunities for audience engagement within immersive and interactive technologies.

- **Funding helps tackle social, economic, physical and geographic barriers for screen audiences in new effective ways:**

We want to improve access to screen culture for people across NI by lowering barriers such as prohibitive costs, lack of cultural provision, limited on-screen representation, lack of accessible screenings and threshold anxiety. We are particularly keen to support projects that engage working-class audiences, disabled audiences, LGBTQIA+ audiences, and Black and Global Majority audiences

- **More people can engage with heritage collections that better reflect the diversity of the UK:**

Providing audience access to screen heritage (including archives) is a key component of a diverse and rich screen culture and deepens our understanding of both the past and present. The fund can support activities that showcase various types of screen heritage material. If your proposal includes archival material, please ensure you have contacted the relevant [collection](#) before applying.



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## OUR COMMITMENT TO INCLUSION

### BFI Diversity Standards

All Film Exhibition Fund proposals will be asked to demonstrate how their activity promotes inclusivity among audiences, on screen and – where relevant - in the workforce. We ask that all proposals embrace the BFI Diversity Standards, and priority will be given to proposals that do this in a clear and convincing way. Members should particularly focus on Standard D and how their proposal provides inclusive audience development opportunities.

The Hub team is on hand to help you interpret the Standards, please get in touch for more information. Larger projects will be expected to engage with the Standards to a fuller extent

The Standards focus on under-representation in relation to age, disability, ethnicity, gender, LGBTQ+, religion and belief (as they pertain to [Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998](#)) as well as socio-economic background and geographical location.

### Responding to the Standards:

**Please note, larger proposals will be expected to engage thoroughly with the BFI Standards in their application. Please do contact the Hub to discuss.**

- Standard A - On screen representation: Tell us about your film programme; does it feature meaningful representations of lead characters and supporting characters from under-represented groups? Do the films feature themes, stories or locations not often seen in cinema?
- Standard B - Project team: Tell us about your team; are key personnel representative of your local area and/or the project's intentions? If your project involves recruitment or partnership working, are processes in place to ensure these opportunities are inclusive? Smaller project teams may wish to discuss volunteer/community participants and/or the filmmaking teams represented in their programme.
- Standard C - Industry Access: Tell us about any professional or informal development opportunities; will the project team take part in training or mentoring programmes? Will your activity provide new employment opportunities or career progression for team members from under-represented groups? Will you be engaging community groups or participants?
- Standard D - Audience Development: Tell us about your audiences; are you planning to engage under- represented groups? How will you do this - do you have a community engagement strategy or appropriate partnerships in place?
- Standard E – Accessibility: Tell us about your accessibility plans. Is your website / venue accessible? Do you programme new release captioned films?



What steps are you taking to make your events accessible and welcoming to disabled audiences?

## ADDITIONAL AREAS OF FOCUS

### 1. Environmental Sustainability

We are committed to minimising the environmental impact of the work we support and ask all funding recipients to contribute to this aim. In your proposal, please summarise steps you are taking to minimise the environmental impact of your activity.

The BFI has a number of [recommended resources](#) that may be useful when planning around sustainability.

### 2. Prevention of Bullying, Harassment and Racism

**Bullying, harassment and racism have no place in our industry and we expect all organisations we fund to share our commitment to this principle. The BFI and BAFTA have developed a set of principles and zero-tolerance guidance in consultation with organisations, unions and industry bodies across the film, television and games industry in response to urgent and systemic issues. You can read these documents [here](#).**

We ask all Hub members to engage with these principles by, as a minimum, reading them and sharing them within your organisation. You will also be asked to confirm that you have, or intend to put in place, an anti-bullying and harassment policy for your organisation. If you do not currently have a policy in place, please get in touch and we can support you in this.

For initiatives involving children, young people or vulnerable adults, we expect applicants to have/put in place safeguarding and child protection policies. If you do not currently have a policy in place, please get in touch and we can signpost you to additional resources to help you to develop your policy.

Environmental sustainability, safeguarding and Bullying and Harassment policies are **not** formal assessment criteria, but the information you provide will be used to gauge how we may support you further in this area and ensure best practice across the Film Audience Network. If a proposed action will incur modest additional costs, you can include these in your budget for consideration.

The BFI and Julie's Bicycle have several recommended [resources](#) that may be useful when planning around sustainability, including the BFI Sustainable Screen Hub and the Creative Climate Tool.

Additional advice and support may be available to projects with strong inclusion aims, that specifically address:

- Economic barriers and / or engagement of working-class audiences;



- Engaging children, families and young audiences aged 25 and under;
- Inclusion of Black and Global Majority Audiences;
- Access for Deaf and Disabled Audiences;

Proposals that focus on one or more of these areas may be shared with specialist freelancers, who may be in touch to discuss what, if any, support might be of use.

### **Who can seek support?**

You must be a member of Film Hub NI to access our National Lottery funding opportunities. Our membership includes organisations of various sizes and shapes — from community cinemas to festivals to multi-arts centres. To become a member, fill in our [Membership Form](#).

Please email us if you are unsure whether you are a current Member.

Film Hub Lead Organisations are not eligible to receive funding for their own activity even if they meet the above criteria.

### **1. Which Tier is right for me?**

- Tier 1 is open to organisations who have full-time staff capacity to deliver and have a primary focus on film and exhibition in their outputs. These organisations will have the capacity to target specific audiences at a larger scope.
- Tier 2 is open to the wider membership, including community cinemas, film societies and/or organisations to whom film and film exhibition is an addition to their core work, not their primary focus.



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## **2. How much funding can I request?**

| <b>26-29 FEF Tier</b> | <b>Aimed At</b>                                                                                       | <b>Funding Ceiling</b>                                                      | <b>Duration of Delivery Period Available</b>            |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Tier 1</b>         | Higher-capacity members able to deliver at scale                                                      | Up to £15,000 per annum<br><br>(Total funding available per annum: £75,000) | Up to three years                                       |
| <b>Tier 2</b>         | Smaller scale members looking to try new innovations, or receive support for developing existing work | Up to £4000<br><br>(Total funding available per annum: £30,000)             | One year with two funding windows - April and September |

Please note that we cannot fund 100% of activity costs. While we do not have a set percentage requirement for match funding, we expect to see box office income and other partnership support - whether in cash, volunteer time or other in-kind contributions - included in the budget.

## **4. When is the deadline?**

Tier 2 proposals can be submitted at any time from **Friday 28th August 2026** to **Friday 25th September 2026**

It is **strongly** advised that you contact the Film Hub NI team before you submit a proposal, to discuss your ideas

Members should submit their proposals at least 3 weeks in advance of their project start date to allow time for assessment, project development and marketing lead-in.

Members currently in receipt of funding from the April 2026 Tier 2 are not eligible to submit a proposal.

## **5. When will I hear back?**

When you submit your proposal, you will be informed of your assessment date and when you will receive feedback.



## **Use of Awards**

Each organisation will have its individual needs — however, broadly speaking, the Film Exhibition Fund can support the following costs.

### **Eligible expenses:**

- Film rights and print transport
- Activity-specific staffing costs (e.g. curation, marketing, project management)
- Venue hire and activity-specific equipment costs
- Marketing, Advertising and PR campaigns
- Event costs for enhanced screenings — e.g. speaker, talent or artists fees
- Volunteer and evaluation expenses
- Accessibility costs — e.g. creating accessible supporting materials, subtitling fees
- Outreach and community inclusion costs — e.g. providing transport for isolated audiences,
- Audience development expenses — e.g. young programmers' workshops
- Rights clearances and curation fees for screen heritage materials
- Costs related to online activity such as web platform or hosting fees

This list is not exhaustive and other items may be considered.

### **Ineligible Expenses:**

All proposed spend should contribute to the activity proposed. Beyond this, there are some areas not suitable for support from the Film Exhibition Fund. These include:

- Filmmaking costs (including workshops), support for filmmakers to develop or distribute their own work, or support for programmes that exclusively engage filmmaker audiences
- Capital costs
- Programmes *entirely* comprised of free events, un-ticketed events or screenings where audience numbers cannot be reported
- General running costs of organisations not specifically related to the activity
- Activity that should be covered by statutory education, including events taking place on school grounds/in school hours
- Events not primarily focused on film exhibition
- Activity covered by existing funding arrangements
- Events taking place outside NI
- Programmes that duplicate provision in the same area
- Activity taking place in a venue not open to the public — e.g. members only venues
- UK applicants based in other Hub regions.
- Fundraising events/screenings

## **6. How to request funding**



**Members seeking support under Tier 1** will be asked to submit a proposal covering the period that the project will deliver across and to describe the activity and how it will meet BFI FAN priorities. Additionally, they will be asked to provide:

- A budget for the proposal, including detailed KPIs
- A marketing plan separate to the detail in the proposal form
- A timeline for the project

**Those seeking support under Tier 2** will be asked to submit a proposal form and budget. The proposal form will give you the opportunity to describe your activity and how it delivers against BFI FAN's priorities. If you have any questions about the fund, the submission process or would like to discuss your proposal before applying please get in touch.

If you have any particular access requirements, such as needing easy-read documents or wanting to submit your proposal in an alternative format, please contact our team to discuss how we can help. Additionally, if you require practical assistance during the application process, you may be eligible for support through the BFI Access Support Scheme; you can find more information [here](#).

You can download the **Tier 1** proposal form [here](#), including a **template budget and KPI document**.

You can download the **Tier 2** proposal form [here](#), with a **template budget**.

Please email your completed proposal and budget to [h.odling-smee@qub.ac.uk](mailto:h.odling-smee@qub.ac.uk)

## **7. Assessment criteria:**

Your proposal will be assessed by the Film Hub NI team. We will specifically look at:

- Activity eligibility: does the proposed activity meet the priorities and timescale of the fund?
- Audience reach: what are the audience targets, and will the planned activity deliver them? Subsidy per head will be a consideration. Whilst we appreciate estimating admissions can be difficult, please provide a breakdown of how you've reached your figures.
- Impact: what is the cultural ambition of the proposed programme? Are relevant partnerships in place to effectively deliver the activity?
- Organisational experience: is the organisation able to carry out the proposed activity, including delivering marketing, audience development and evaluation plans?
- If you have previously had a project supported by Film Hub NI, the outcomes and effectiveness of that project will be taken into consideration when considering any new proposal.
- Budget: are all reasonable costs considered? Does the budget balance and are all costs eligible? Have access costs been included?
- Legacy: what are the longer-term plans to continue to reach audiences?



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- Diversity & Inclusion: will the proposal reach under-represented audiences? Does it clearly address the BFI Diversity Standards?
- Will Tier 1 proposals be expected to address the criteria more thoroughly than those for Tier 2? Worth including this if so

We expect this fund to be oversubscribed and may not be able to fund your activity even if it meets the criteria.

**Please note:** when appropriate, previous project performance may be considered when making a funding decision on proposals by organisations who have already received Film Hub NI funding

Proposals will be scored using the [Film Exhibition Fund Assessment Form](#). We strongly encourage you to refer to this form when writing your proposal to ensure that you're providing all the information the assessment panel will be looking for.

## **8. Decisions and Feedback**

### **Unsuccessful proposals:**

If you are unsuccessful in your proposal, you will be contacted by email. Being unsuccessful does not prevent you from accessing future Hub opportunities, however **you will not be able to resubmit a declined proposal to the Film Exhibition Fund** in the 2026-2027 financial year.

You may seek funding for a **new and different** proposal in 2027 - 2028 but you should contact the Hub team in advance to discuss this. You may also submit proposals for FHNI bursary support.

**Successful proposals:** If your proposal is successful, the assessment panel may discuss any required amendments and wish to see a revised plan before confirming funding. This process can take additional time. Activity timelines will need to accommodate this.

If there are no recommendations or amendments to be made, you will be sent a confirmation email setting out the terms and conditions attached to the funding. These will cover financial due diligence checks, payment information, crediting guidelines and monitoring and reporting requirements.

**Please note that final confirmation will be subject to availability of Lottery funding.**

All funded activity will require organisations to survey their audiences using our **online system** - please bear this in mind when planning your evaluation strategies.



## **9. Complaints and Appeals**

The funding decision is final. Inevitably some proposals will be declined, and we understand this may be disappointing. Formal appeals against the final decision will not be considered unless there is good cause to believe that the procedures for processing the proposal were not adhered to, or applied in such a way as to prejudice the outcome of the request for support

The FHNI Complaints Procedure can be found [here](#).

*Film Hub NI is a sector development organisation supporting film culture in Northern Ireland. The Hub works with a range of organisations and individuals to help great films get screened and seen in the region. The Hub is supported by, and proud to award, National Lottery funding as part of the BFI Film Audience Network (FAN) and BFI NETWORK.*

Email: [h.odling-smee@qub.ac.uk](mailto:h.odling-smee@qub.ac.uk)

*Supported by National Lottery funding, the BFI Film Audience Network (FAN) is central to the BFI's aim to ensure the greatest choice of film is available for everyone. Established in 2012 to build wider and more diverse UK cinema audiences for British, Irish, Northern Irish and international film, FAN is a unique, UK-wide collaboration made up of eight Hubs managed by leading film organisations.*