

Festival programmer take 2



Festival Programmer

2027 deadCenter Film Festival

(June 11-20, 2027 OKC/Tulsa, Oklahoma)

Contract Type: Independent Contractor

Open Positions: 5

Contract Term: Approximately August 2026–June 2027

Compensation: Flat project fee paid in two installments based on agreed-upon milestones

Location: Primarily remote, with limited participation during the annual festival in Oklahoma City

Reports To: Director of Programming

Collaborates With: Executive Director, fellow programmers, Festival Operations, Communications, Education, Industry, and Guest Services teams

About deadCenter Film

deadCenter Film inspires, promotes, and celebrates creativity and community through film.

Based in Oklahoma City, deadCenter Film produces Oklahoma's largest and only Oscar®-qualifying film festival. The festival presents independent narrative, documentary, animated, experimental, episodic, and Oklahoma-made films while creating meaningful opportunities for filmmakers, audiences, students, and industry professionals to connect.

deadCenter currently presents Academy Award®-qualifying awards for Best Animated Short, Best Documentary Short, and Best Live Action Short.

Position Summary

deadCenter Film is seeking five thoughtful, curious, and highly collaborative Festival Programmers to help shape the artistic identity and audience experience of its annual Oscar®-qualifying film festival.

Festival Programmers participate in the complete programming process. This includes reviewing submissions, identifying emerging talent, advocating for films/scripts/pitches, creating cohesive screening programs, contributing to festival themes and conversations, preparing editorial and awards materials, and helping the Festival Operations team successfully present each selected film and filmmaker.



Programmers serve as curators, writers, filmmaker advocates, collaborators, and representatives of deadCenter Film.

Programmers will work as a unified team under the project leadership of the Director of Programming and in close partnership with the Executive Director. The Director of Programming will guide the curatorial process and maintain consistency across programming categories. The Executive Director will help ensure the program supports deadCenter Film's mission, organizational priorities, audience experience, operational capacity, and overall vision for the festival.

Each programmer will bring an informed point of view while remaining open to discussion, thoughtful disagreement, and collective decision-making. No programmer works in isolation, and no individual programmer may independently promise a selection, screening position, award consideration, invitation, travel support, fee waiver, or other commitment to a filmmaker.

Primary Responsibilities

Film Review and Evaluation

- Watch or read every assigned submission in full and complete evaluations by established deadlines.
- Evaluate films/scripts/pitches using deadCenter Film's approved programming rubric, considering originality, storytelling, direction, performance, craft, emotional and cultural resonance, audience experience, and overall festival fit.
- Provide clear, specific, and professionally written notes explaining the reasoning behind each evaluation.
- Distinguish personal preference from curatorial judgment and consider how a film may serve audiences beyond the programmer's own experiences.
- Identify exceptional emerging filmmakers, distinctive artistic voices, Oklahoma stories, and work from communities historically underrepresented within the film industry.
- Evaluate each film/script/pitch on its individual merit while helping create a program that reflects a meaningful range of perspectives, genres, styles, subjects, and lived experiences.
- Promptly report broken links, missing subtitles, incomplete submissions, eligibility questions, or other technical concerns.
- Flag content advisories, accessibility considerations, sensitive subject matter, and potential filmmaker or audience support needs.



- Maintain accurate and current evaluation records in deadCenter Film's designated submission and tracking systems.

Collaborative Festival Curation

- Participate actively in monthly programming meetings with the Director of Programming, Executive Director, and fellow programmers.
- Attend additional shortlist and final-selection meetings during the peak programming period in February, March and April.
- Present thoughtful recommendations and advocate for films/scripts/pitches using specific observations rather than general impressions.
- Listen respectfully to different interpretations and participate constructively when the team disagrees.
- Help develop shortlists, finalist lists, alternate selections, and the final festival slate.
- Consider the strength and balance of the entire festival rather than advocating only for individual films or assigned categories.
- Collaborate on cohesive screening blocks with attention to theme, tone, genre, pacing, runtime, audience, and emotional experience.
- Help identify potential opening-night, closing-night, centerpiece, special presentation, Oklahoma, educational, family, late-night, and community-focused programs.
- Contribute ideas for festival themes, panels, filmmaker conversations, workshops, Q&As, community partnerships, and industry programming connected to selected films/scripts/pitches.
- Research and recommend solicited films/scripts/pitches or filmmakers when requested and within the agreed programming scope.
- Support a final program that is artistically ambitious, operationally realistic, welcoming to audiences, and aligned with deadCenter Film's mission.
- Limit fee waivers to the allocation provided by the Executive Director: up to 15 full fee waivers and 20 waivers offering a 75% discount per programming season. Additional waivers must be submitted individually to the ED for approval.

Programming and Operations Collaboration

Programming does not end when a film is selected. Programmers are expected to help translate curatorial decisions into a festival that can be successfully produced.

- Communicate proactively with Festival Operations throughout the selection and scheduling process.



- Provide accurate and timely information regarding runtimes, programming categories, premiere status, award eligibility, screening formats, accessibility information, filmmaker attendance, Q&A opportunities, content advisories, and special presentation needs.
- Identify operational concerns early rather than waiting until the final schedule is being built.
- Participate in scheduling conversations and help identify conflicts involving runtime, venue suitability, guest availability, audience flow, technical needs, or competing programs.
- Complete programming handoffs by the deadlines established in the project schedule.
- Respond promptly when Operations, Communications, Guest Services, Education, or Industry staff need programming context or clarification.
- Respect departmental responsibilities and coordinate filmmaker invitations, requests, schedule changes, and commitments through the Director of Programming.
- Help ensure programming decisions are clearly communicated and do not create avoidable challenges for other festival departments.

Festival and Awards Copy

- Write or edit concise, engaging, and accurate film descriptions for the festival website, schedule, printed materials, press materials, filmmaker communications, and internal documents.
- Develop language that communicates why a film/script/pitch matters and how it fits within the larger festival program.
- Contribute to screening-block descriptions, program introductions, filmmaker biographies, Q&A preparation, panel descriptions, and other editorial materials.
- Assist with awards-show copy so each nominated and winning film is represented accurately, respectfully, and enthusiastically.
- Verify film/script/pitch titles, filmmaker names, pronouns, credits, award categories, countries of origin, Oklahoma connections, and pronunciations.
- Avoid spoilers, exaggerated claims, unsupported statements, or language that misrepresents a film or filmmaker.
- Meet all editorial and fact-checking deadlines established by the Communications and Awards teams.
- Work with the Director of Programming to encourage award recipients to attend the festival.

Filmmaker and Audience Engagement



- Represent deadCenter Film professionally in interactions with filmmakers, distributors, sales representatives, community partners, audiences, board members, sponsors, and industry guests.
- Treat every submission and filmmaker with care, regardless of selection outcome, professional profile, budget, representation, or personal connection.
- Help prepare thoughtful film introductions and filmmaker Q&As when assigned.
- Moderate or participate in screenings, conversations, panels, or other festival programs when included in the final contract scope.
- Be prepared to discuss selected films with staff, moderators, jurors, press, sponsors, and community partners when appropriate.
- Help create an environment in which filmmakers feel welcomed, informed, and respected.

Selection Integrity and Professional Conduct

- Maintain strict confidentiality regarding submissions, evaluation notes, internal discussions, preliminary decisions, filmmaker information, award results, and unpublished festival plans.
- View screeners only through authorized platforms and in a secure, private environment.
- Do not copy, download, share, record, publicly review, or distribute submitted material.
- Disclose personal, professional, financial, or creative relationships with submitted films or filmmakers.
- Recuse from evaluating or voting on films when a conflict of interest exists or could reasonably be perceived.
- Do not accept gifts, payments, favors, or other consideration connected to a programming decision.
- Do not contact filmmakers about their submission status outside deadCenter Film's approved communication process.
- Participate in programming discussions with professionalism, curiosity, discretion, and respect.
- Raise concerns directly with the Director of Programming and Executive Director.
- Follow deadCenter Film's programming policies, code of conduct, confidentiality requirements, conflict-of-interest procedures, and anti-harassment standards.

Anticipated Annual Workflow

August–September: Orientation and Early Submissions



- Complete contractor onboarding and programming orientation.
- Review the festival's mission, programming philosophy, submission categories, eligibility requirements, scoring rubric, conflict-of-interest policy, and communication procedures.
- Become familiar with submission and tracking platforms.
- Participate in an initial calibration exercise to support consistent evaluation standards.
- Begin reviewing early submissions and identifying possible outreach opportunities.

October–mid February: Ongoing Review

- Review assigned submissions as they arrive.
- Keep evaluation records current.
- Attend approximately one programming meeting each month.
- Share emerging themes, standout films, concerns, trends, and potential programming opportunities.
- Identify categories or perspectives that may require additional outreach.

Mid February–April: Peak Programming Period

- Complete all outstanding evaluations.
- Participate in shortlist, finalist, and final-selection discussions.
- Revisit films/scripts/pitches when additional review is needed.
- Complete final festival selections by April 10.
- Build screening blocks and identify alternate selections.
- Coordinate closely with the Director of Programming, Executive Director, and Festival Operations team.
- Complete preliminary descriptions and programming handoff materials.
- Finalize screening/table read/ pitch blocks, scheduling recommendations, copy assignments, and programming handoffs by May 1.

May–Festival: Program Completion and Presentation

- Fact-check film/script/pitch and filmmaker information.
- Complete website, screening-block, festival, and awards-show copy.
- Assist with introductions, Q&A preparation, panel development, content advisories, and operational questions.
- Participate in limited pre-festival meetings as needed.
- Support agreed-upon festival screenings or programs.
- Participate in a post-festival programming debrief.



Required Qualifications

- A deep and demonstrated love of film, independent storytelling, and discovering emerging voices.
- Strong critical thinking and the ability to evaluate films/scripts/pitches beyond personal taste.
- Excellent writing skills, including the ability to prepare clear evaluations, engaging descriptions, and concise editorial copy.
- Strong listening, collaboration, and interpersonal skills.
- The ability to advocate confidently for a film while remaining open to changing one's position.
- Excellent organization, attention to detail, follow-through, and deadline management.
- The ability to manage an assigned body of films/scripts/pitches without repeated reminders.
- Comfort participating in candid, respectful conversations involving artistic judgment and competing priorities.
- Reliable access to high-speed internet and a private environment for viewing confidential submissions.
- Availability for monthly virtual meetings from August through February and additional meetings during March and April.
- Availability to complete final selections by April 10 and remaining programming responsibilities by May 1.
- Willingness to disclose conflicts of interest and recuse when appropriate.
- The ability to work independently while contributing consistently to a highly collaborative team.

Preferred Experience

Professional festival-programming experience is valued but is not the only path into this role. Relevant experience may include:

- Film festival programming or screening committees.
- Film exhibition, distribution, acquisitions, criticism, journalism, education, production, development, or curation.
- Writing film synopses, reviews, program notes, press materials, or awards copy.
- Creating or moderating filmmaker Q&As, panels, workshops, or community conversations.



- Working with independent filmmakers, emerging artists, film schools, cultural organizations, or community partners.
- Familiarity with FilmFreeway, Eventive, Airtable, Google Workspace, spreadsheets, databases, or similar festival systems.
- Knowledge of Oklahoma filmmaking and the regional, national, or international independent-film landscape.
- Experience programming narrative, documentary, animated, experimental, episodic, table reads, pitch fests, student, Indigenous, LGBTQ+, international, or other specialized work.

What Success Looks Like

A successful Festival Programmer will:

- Complete every assigned evaluation fully, thoughtfully, and on time.
- Provide notes that support meaningful selection decisions.
- Contribute actively without dominating or withdrawing from the collaborative process.
- Help create a distinctive, balanced, and audience-ready festival program.
- Identify and champion outstanding filmmakers and emerging voices.
- Communicate programming information before it becomes an operational problem.
- Deliver accurate and compelling films/script/pitch, festival, and awards copy.
- Maintain filmmaker confidentiality and public trust in the selection process.
- Support the Director of Programming, Executive Director, and fellow team members with professionalism and consistency.
- Help deadCenter Film deliver a festival in which artistic vision, filmmaker care, audience experience, and operational excellence reinforce one another.

Compensation and Contract Structure

This is a project-based independent-contractor engagement with a flat fee paid in two installments tied to agreed-upon programming milestones.

The contractor will determine their own work schedule and methods, subject to submission deadlines, required project meetings, confidentiality requirements, and final deliverables.



The contractor will generally provide their own computer, internet access, workspace, and other ordinary tools needed to complete the engagement. Reimbursable travel or extraordinary project expenses must be approved in writing in advance.

Festival participation in Oklahoma City is strongly preferred. Required on-site responsibilities, travel expectations, lodging arrangements, and any additional compensation will be defined in the final contractor agreement.

Responsibilities outside the written programming scope will be undertaken only by mutual agreement.

To Apply

Please submit:

- A current résumé or professional biography.
- A brief statement describing your relationship to films/scripts/pitches and the perspectives you would bring to the deadCenter Film programming team.
- A response of no more than 250 words describing a film you believe deserves a larger audience and why.
- A sample film description of no more than 125 words for a film of your choice.
- A brief example of how you have handled—or would handle—a strong creative disagreement within a collaborative team.
- Confirmation of your availability from August through May, including monthly meetings and the March–April peak programming period.
- Disclosure of current employment or professional relationships that could regularly create conflicts with festival submissions.

Prior festival-programming experience is welcomed but not required. deadCenter Film is interested in applicants with strong judgment, distinctive perspectives, intellectual curiosity, excellent communication, and a genuine commitment to filmmakers and audiences.

deadCenter Film welcomes applicants with a wide range of professional, cultural, geographic, and lived experiences. We especially encourage applications from individuals and communities that have historically had limited access to positions of influence within film exhibition and festival programming.