

Film Society of the Year Awards – How to Get Your Application Noticed

Do you want to apply for an award but are unsure where to start? Perhaps you have applied for an award in the past but have found yourself on the shortlist just shy of the winning post? These guidance notes are designed to help you understand how the judges will review your application and to maximise your chance of success. Let's begin by going over some general points before moving on to explain what the judges will look for in each individual award category.

Some General Points

Take your time and decide where your application is best placed. Have you had a great year in terms of marketing and publicity or press releases resulting in increased media coverage? Have you recently revamped your website? Have you pioneered a new community outreach project? Perhaps you have had a great year across the board? Some time and thought on where your application is best placed can pay off with positive results.

Accessibility is key so make sure your application is well structured and easy to read. This may sound obvious but it's worth taking the time to do well. If you are including lots of supporting documents be sure to add an index, contents page and appendix making sure you don't forget to number the pages. Clean and clear presentation will help to ensure you get your message across but be wary of spending too much time on this ultimately the judges will be looking at content.

Tips for good practice:

- use a separate application form for each award entry
- provide good quality copies of supporting docs
- where possible please send your application in electronic form

Your Supporting Statement

Your supporting statement is the most important part of your application. Take care to make sure that it represents your organisation and includes information to support your application. Key points that the judges will consider are:

- Does your supporting statement explain why you believe your application is be worthy of an award?
- What challenges or obstacles has your organisation overcome in the last 12 months?
- Have you drawn attention to any new activities undertaken by your organisation?

Other uses for your application

Consider other practical applications of your award entry. By applying for a Film Society of the Year Award you're pulling together a well presented summary of your organisation's achievements. You can repurpose this information to support future funding applications and/or as an annual record of achievement that keeps your members and audience informed about the activities of the organisation. This will help to remind them what is special about your organisation and why it is worth their continued support.

Guidelines for each Award Category

Having covered the basics let's look at the individual awards in more detail. This information is designed to give you a feel for the criteria by which your application will be assessed. It is based on an *ideal* application so please don't be put off if you can't show evidence against each individual point.

Best Film Programming

The judges will be looking for evidence of:

- a strategy to develop audiences' taste
- use of a feedback system for example measuring the audiences' reaction to films
- diversity in your programming strategy
- an inclusive programming strategy – where programming is a democratic process that involves input from your members and audience
- a balanced programme including a variety of feature films, documentaries, animations, shorts and foreign language titles
- thought-provoking and challenging films
- innovation and individuality – for example, inclusion of unusual or hard to obtain titles
- introduced screenings/Q&As with special guest speakers
- special events, seasons and festivals
- programming that addresses the demographic in your area

Don't forget to include a copy of your latest programme and examples of any supporting material that you have produced, such as promotional leaflet for a special screenings, seasons or festivals.

Best Programme Notes

When applying for Best Programme Notes be sure to include as many supporting materials as you can. The judges will want to see a good variety of notes from over the last year. This helps them to get a fair and consistent account of your work. In particular, the judges will be pleased to see well-written and engaging notes that are accurate, pertinent (avoiding waffle) and beautifully presented. In addition they will be looking for evidence of:

- a varied approach eg. notes that have been made specific to meet the needs of different audiences
- well written film synopsis (that don't give away the plot!) as well as extra background information on the film eg. critical reviews, interviews, credits
- involvement of the audience – eg. direct invitations for audience feedback and publication of audience reactions from previous screenings
- originality – have you written your own copy rather than simply copying and pasting from the internet?
- an innovative approach to distribution. For example, using web/email to distribute notes in advance of a screening
- general educational value

Best Marketing and Publicity

When putting together your application for best marketing and publicity, it's important to include as many examples of publicity material and press coverage over the past 12 months as you can gather. In this category the judges will be looking for evidence of:

- originality and innovation
- resourceful budget management
- stimulating and attractive materials
- strong use of branding and identity
- cross media approach eg local radio as well as local newspaper
- effective use of email, website and social networking sites
- wide distribution of publicly materials to appropriate outlets
- effective use of press contacts and distribution lists/press releases

Best Website

A well presented and informative website is often the primary point of contact for your audience. Where possible, include screen shots, traffic data and information on resources available. The judges will be looking for evidence that this is a useful and relevant resource for your members and audience. The site will be assessed according to its:

- Accessibility
- Search functions
- Browser support
- Navigation capabilities
- Design
- Relevance of information
- Readability
- Interactivity – is there a members' area or discussion forum?
- Modern features

Best New Society

In this category the judges will be looking at how your organisation has grown from an idea into a fully fledged operation. They will be looking for evidence of:

- strategic planning - do you have a first year strategy? Have you achieved your targets?
- financial and organisational sustainability
- forward planning - future direction and plans for you organisation
- a clear sense of identity and purpose
- examples of effective publicity and marketing material.
- audience/membership numbers
- acknowledgement of start up help from BFFS (where applicable)
- audience feedback
- programme notes, speakers, special events, social activity
- reflection - challenges faced and overcome

Make sure you include supporting documents, such as member and audience testimonials, marketing and publicity material, film programmes, programme notes and any other relevant information.

Best Student Society

When preparing your application, be sure to include as much publicity, audience reaction and programming materials as you can in order to give the judges a well rounded view of your organisation. The judges will be looking to assess:

- breadth of programming designed to both entertain and challenge your audience
- quality and relevance of marketing materials
- level of audience feedback – is this taken into account when programming?
- standard of website/social networking equivalent
- social activities for members/volunteers
- how challenges of running a venue with a fluctuating audience are met
- audience retention after graduation – keeping in touch with alumni

Community Award

In judging this award, BFFS will be seeking to find the organisation that demonstrates the best community interaction and involvement. This means looking beyond the existing loyal audience and embracing the potential of interacting with other community groups in your area. The judge will be looking in these areas:

- service to the community – special events/screenings, activities, training and workshops
- celebration of diversity and consideration of the community make-up demonstrated in your programming
- outreach strategy to different/specific communities (it's fine to have focused on just one)
- planned community-based projects
- activity outside of your own community

The Engholm Prize for Film Society of the Year

The Engholm Prize is awarded each year to the film society/community cinema that has demonstrated excellence and innovation in all areas of operation. The prize is the highest honour that BFFS can bestow upon an organisation. When assessing this award the judges will take into account a holistic overview of your organisation's programming, programme notes, marketing and publicity, community activity and website. In addition the judges will likely be looking for evidence of:

- an exceptional level of quality across all award categories (you will have evidenced this with individual applications to each category)
- member/audience-orientation
- community-minded strategy
- deliberate pursuit of excellence
- triumph over adversity/ challenging circumstances

The Ceremony

The process culminates in a awards ceremony where you are invited to share and celebrate the significant work that volunteers do in cultural and community cinema. You will also be given the opportunity to review the work of the award winners spurring you forward to greater successes in the future.

For more information and to read a history of the awards go to: www.bffs.org.uk/awards