

# MODES OF COMMUNITY CINEMA OPERATION

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## ★ Where to start?

There are a number of considerations to be made in deciding how your film society/community cinema is to operate. For example, do you want to:

- operate a membership subscription scheme which pays for entry to all titles in a year or a season?
- operate a membership subscription scheme which gives members hefty discounts on entry to individual titles?
- screen to members only?
- allow members to bring paying guests?
- have a membership scheme but also sell tickets to the public either before or on the night?
- operate no membership subscription scheme as such and simply sell tickets to the public in advance or on the night?
- advertise to the public?
- programme ahead for an annual season, for 2 or 3 seasons per year, or only 2 months ahead etc?
- issue season tickets?

Combinations of the above are possible and there are pros and cons to each aspect. There are three main factors that will influence your decision:

- i) Certainty of financial income
- ii) Attracting an audience
- iii) The legal and licensing requirements of screening films to an audience

## ★ Things to consider

The income from an annual or seasonal membership subscription fee will give you the financial security of receiving most of your income at the start of the year or season, with a built-in audience for whichever titles you choose to screen.

Audience members may be more likely to join your film society/community cinema if they can see your programme in advance. If you wish to advertise screenings widely to attract as many new members as possible you may find you are unable to take advantage of some of the cheaper film hire fees (see below).

If you only screen to members and guests, all your audience (the members) must be over the age of 16. Regardless of whether you operate a membership system or not, all screenings must adhere to the BBFC certificate given to the film. For more information go to [www.bbfc.co.uk](http://www.bbfc.co.uk)

Film societies/community cinemas that simply charge on the door may be easier to get going – you don't have to assemble a group of members in the first place, and there are less advertising restrictions than a members-only screening (see below). However being less certain of your turnout, and therefore income, may not be right for your organisation.

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## ★ Obtaining a Screening Licence

To screen any film to an audience outside the home you must obtain – and pay for – permission to do so. This permission is given in the form of what is called a 'screening licence' and is simply obtained by hiring a film from the distributor who handles that film. For more information on sourcing films and finding their distributors go to: <http://bffs.org.uk/services/sourcingfilms.html>

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The conditions attached to the types of screening licence may also influence your operational mode:

**Non commercial screenings:** A film society/ community cinema that operates a membership subscription scheme, screens only to members and guests, and does not sell tickets on the door may be able to take advantage of a flat rate hire fee by purchasing a 'non-commercial licence' from a distributor. Conditions attached to this cheap rate however, limit your ability to advertise outside of your immediate membership, so attracting new members can be tricky.

**Commercial screenings:** A film society/ community cinema that allows entry to members of the public and charges on the door must purchase a licence from a distributor on a 'commercial' basis. Using this licence you pay either a minimum amount (the 'minimum guarantee') or a percentage of takings on the door ('percentage of Box Office'). This type of licence also allows you to advertise your screenings freely. You may still operate a membership scheme using this licence, but you are freer in terms of admitting the public and charging on the door.

Be aware that not all distributors have the same conditions of licensing and it is vital that you read and follow the terms and conditions of each contract.

**"For advice on what mode of operation  
might suit you best, contact BFFS:  
by phone: 0114 2210314  
by email: [info@bffs.org.uk](mailto:info@bffs.org.uk)  
by post: BFFS, Unit 315, The Workstation,  
15 Paternoster Row, Sheffield S1 2BX "**

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#### About Film First

NatWest & RBS Film First are working with the British Federation of Film Societies (BFFS) to support local film societies and community cinemas across England, Wales & Scotland, providing much needed assistance to ensure all communities, in particular those in rural areas, have access to film.

To find out more about the Film First programme visit [www.natwest.com/filmfirst](http://www.natwest.com/filmfirst) or [www.rbs.com/filmfirst](http://www.rbs.com/filmfirst)