



BEST PRACTICE

UNDERSTANDING & ESTABLISHING A FILM COMMISSION

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This Guide is designed to explain the function of a film commission/film office - their structure, the common functions they perform, and their critical role in economic development.

It is as much a blueprint for territories looking to set up a commission as it is an overview of AFCI's Film Commission Member eligibility.

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WHAT IS A FILM COMMISSION?

At its core, a commission is a specialized screen sector organization focused on economic development. Commissions may sit at the local city, state, regional or national level within a country. They are established under the authority of a government department (commonly Arts/Culture, Tourism and Economic Development), or administrative office and on occasion, may be a non-profit organization outside government itself.

Many countries have commissions at all levels of government. City, state, regional and national commissions work hand in hand to collaboratively promote their territory.

The commission's role may be two-fold:

- to develop the local screen industry by providing:
 - training
 - development and production funding
 - running the local film festival
 - promoting locally made films at international markets
- to promote the region's capabilities (including locations, infrastructure, cast, crew and any incentive/rebate/credit offered) in order to attract production, post-production and VFX work and other investment to the region.

In some situations, commissions are focused only on the latter of these two functions, leaving funding and support of local industry to a sister agency such as a film fund. In some cases commissions even sit within a fund.

As noted in AFCI's Report, **Best Practice in Screen Sector Development**, written by Olsberg•SPI,

Screen production intersects with a unique range of stakeholders, from central and local governments, to emergency services, and public and private organisations across sectors including transport, tourism, economic development, finance, skills development, and culture. For a jurisdiction to build film-friendliness it is important that all stakeholders across these areas are engaged. This is achieved through ensuring that they all have a broad understanding of the value of the creative industries landscape – and the unique value of the Screen sector within this.

Commissions may have a Board and Advisory Board consisting of business owners and executives from local, interstate or international industry. However there must be no commercial advantage to those serving on the Board or Advisory Board - meaning they cannot have access to production leads or be given preferential treatment with respect to a commission's services or funding.

As noted in AFCI's Report, **Best Practice in Screen Sector Development**, written by Olsberg•SPI,

The presence of a commission/office, its level of development and resources offered can be a determining factor in whether production selects a particular region. In today's highly competitive environment, film commissions/offices are an economic necessity – an integral ingredient in attracting the industry and its ensuing revenue to a region.

SERVICES OFFERED

Commissions offer complimentary services to the screen sector including:

- electronic location image 'pitches' or bids to productions based on a production's specific needs
- information on local infrastructure, facilities, crew depth
- location scouting assistance
- scheduling of meetings with local facilities and key crew
- detailed advice on accessing any available incentives/rebates/credits available
- online databases for locations, crew and resources
- information on diversity initiatives and guidelines as well as contacts within the local community
- information on sustainability such as 'green' production guidelines, contacts for sustainability consultants and recycling facilities
- local regulations and guidelines such as working with children and animals and
- other practical information on working locally such as lists of reputable accounting and law firms who have a track record working on incentive/rebate/credit reports and can provide advice on banking and taxation issues

AFCI members have access to **Best Practice: Know Your Territory**, developed in conjunction with **Warner Bros. Entertainment**, which provides a detailed overview of the information film commissions should have readily available..

REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL COMMISSIONS

BE IMPARTIAL

There can be no conflict of interest between the official duties and services of the commission and the private financial interests of the commission's employees. Commission staff are prohibited from engaging in any commission actions for the purpose of personal gain or gain to any of their colleagues, family, employees, or associates. A film commissioner or their staff members should not be working producers actively engaged on any screen sector project, nor operate or otherwise be directly connected to a production studio while employed by the commission - this is considered a conflict of interest. Similarly, the commission must not be controlled by a labor union, private for-profit business organization or proprietary commercial entity, in such that the autonomous performance of duties is affected by political or personal/corporate gains.

HAVE OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT ENDORSEMENT

Every commission should publicly state and display its connection to a legitimate government body within its region on its website and marketing materials. This government body should certify that the applicant is the designated screen sector representative for the region and that the commission will offer free services, advice and guidance to potential production companies, filmmakers and digital content creators.

WORK COLLABORATIVELY WITH INTERSECTING ORGANIZATIONS

Commissions should have strong working relationships with key organizations such as local, state and national police, parks and other government environmental departments/agencies, other commissions in-country and the local industry it represents.

Commissions should be empowered by the government to facilitate a production's access to areas such as national parks and other public spaces, and be involved in consultation on regulation and legislative issues that impact the industry.

As noted in AFCI's Report, **Best Practice in Screen Sector Development**, written by Olsberg•SPI,

Within this landscape, a well-resourced and connected film commission is essential – both in building stakeholder consensus – along with other industry bodies – and assisting producers in navigating stakeholders and services. Specialist responsibility and/or dedicated units within key service institutions such as the authorities controlling traffic, fire, police, and parks can also contribute greatly to the film friendliness of an environment. One example of this is the London Filming Partnership. Launched in 2005 and developed by Film London in association with the Mayor of London and the London Development Agency, this includes over 560 organisations and agencies, with the partnership agreement stating: 'The partnership is designed to demonstrate that London is a film-friendly city.'

REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL COMMISSIONS, *continued*

This means ensuring that London is a place where location filming can be conducted efficiently and successfully thereby delivering the significant economic benefits associated with filming (including local employment and tourism) while also being sensitive to the needs of those who live and work in London.'

ENGAGE AND EDUCATE THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The film commission needs strong connections with the production community including studio, post and VFX facilities, casting agents, production companies, local unions, Universities/Colleges, film festivals and other industry organizations. Creating internship programs, networking events, message boards and other activities to engage the community will help foster and grow the production community, provide valuable education and new resources.

HOW COMMISSIONS MAY DIFFER

GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTAL REPORTING LINE

Commissions may sit under different government authorities, for example: Tourism, Economic Development, Arts and Culture. They may also exist as a department within a Governor's or Mayor's office, Chamber of Commerce or as a non-profit government owned company.

INCENTIVE/REBATE/CREDIT OVERSIGHT

While all commissions need to understand the details of any incentive/rebate/credit program in their territory, not all commissions are responsible for approving and contracting with productions for these financial programs.

FUNDING

Commissions can be funded in different ways. Although many are fully funded by government, others rely on a combination of government and private sector funding or even membership fees and sponsorships. Regardless of its funding source, a commission must remain impartial. A major private sector company sponsoring the commission must not have access to information that could give it a commercial advantage.

PRODUCTIONS SUPPORTED

Commissions may have different areas of focus. Some provide support only to long-form productions (film and television) whereas others support gaming, commercials, short films, music videos etc.

PERMITTING

Not all commissions are responsible for issuing film permits. If not responsible, they must know which agencies are to be approached for approvals for different locations and different types of activity such as pyrotechnics and special effects. Commissions should be involved in the creation or re-evaluation of permitting systems.

OTHER ROLES IN THE COMMUNITY

Commissions can also have other mandates, for example, management of the local film festival and provision of development and production funding for local productions. Some commissions have different departments focusing on domestic/local production and international production attraction.

COMMUNICATING TO STAKEHOLDERS

Commissions play a leading role in advocating for the screen sector. They report both internally (to Government) and outwardly (to the industry and general public). It is critical that commissions have access to economic impact data such as production employee figures, and spend figures, so as to communicate the benefits of production, otherwise known as the screen sector. The more effectively a film commission is able to communicate the positive impacts of the screen sector, the greater the likelihood the commission will retain support from stakeholders and ensure the continuation/creation of policy measures.

It is extremely valuable to identify and develop a rapport with your stakeholders that promotes an inclusive “film friendly” approach to the

screen sector business. In addition to central and local government offices, stakeholders may include a wide range of public and private organisations across sectors. This may include but is not limited to:

- transportation
- tourism
- economic development
- skills development
- finance and culture.

Ensuring your stakeholders have an understanding of the creative industries landscape and the value it provides to their core practices initiates enthusiasm and engagement.

ESTABLISHING A FILM COMMISSION

Before establishing a film commission, it's important to understand if any similar body or function already exists in the local territory. Remember, just because a state, province or national commission/office exists, does not preclude a city-level commission from establishing and successfully operating, and vice versa.

Once the need for a commission is established it must be determined which government body will endorse the organization and how it will obtain its funding.

If the film commission is a non-profit or does not receive funding from government, it is important to establish how funding will be sourced. A few typical options include:

- Chamber of Commerce
- Conventions & Visitors Bureau
- Corporate Sponsorship
- Private Donations
- Advertising Fees
- Membership Fees
- Service Fees
- Permit Fees
- Merchandise Sales

If you are interested in setting up a film commission, please contact AFCI for more guidance.

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