

Getting Your Film Onto the Big Screen



The Back Door to Hollywood
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Star Power

If you want to see your film on the big screen, you need to make an outstanding film with good cinematography, good acting, good sound quality and a captivating story. You can increase your chances of getting distribution and seeing it on the big screen in theaters across the country dramatically if you include celebrity star power in it. Although celebrities can be expensive, many will work for a minimum payment upfront (so long as it meets SAG-AFTRA requirements) with a deferred payment once the film gets distribution and starts making money. It is a very common practice in the industry. Even if you can only afford a cameo appearance or small role for a well known actor/actress, particularly an award winning actor/actress, you will attract the attention of distributors if their name is in the cast. You'll be pleasantly surprised at how many older award winning actors you may be able to cast at an affordable rate, particularly those that are in the mode of (i) "giving back" to independent filmmakers and/or (ii) jumpstarting their careers again.

One way to get distribution is to get your films into film festivals and network with distributors and industry folk who can put you in touch with distributors. You can also partner with a production company that has access to celebrities and distributors. Meet as many people as you can at a festival. You never know where another filmmaker is in their own journey. They may have already secured distribution for their film and be more than happy to help you and give you tips on how to get a distributor. You may even work with some of those people on future projects and if you are brought into a blockbuster film that receives massive media attention, then you can leverage that for your own films.



Film Festivals

So to which film festivals should you submit your film? You should always submit to local film festivals because home grown films usually have their own category and that increases your opportunity to win an award. You should also apply to top 25 film festivals that pull in star power and publicity. Do your research on Google to see which festivals are most appealing to you. If you like to travel, then apply to festivals around the world which receive press in Hollywood and attract celebrities. Get on the Withoutabox mailing list for film festival deadline alerts so you do not miss them. Try to submit early so that you pay a reduced fee.

Top Film Festivals

Set forth below are some of the top film festivals in the United States and around the globe with clickable links so that you can do further research to see if you want to apply. They attract celebrities and a great deal of media attention.

Sundance Film Festival

Park City, Utah, United States

<http://www.sundance.org/festival/>

Tribeca Film Festival

New York, New York, United States

<http://www.tribecafilm.com/festival/>

Hoboken International Film Festival

New Jersey/New York, United States

<http://www.hobokeninternationalfilmfestival.com/>

Nantucket Film Festival

Nantucket, United States

<http://www.nantucketfilmfestival.org/>

International Film Festival Rotterdam

the Netherlands

<https://www.filmfestivalrotterdam.com/en/>

Cannes International Film Festival

Cannes, France

<http://www.festival-cannes.com/en.html/>

Guadalajara Film Festival

Guadalajara, Mexico

<https://ficg.mx/35/public/>

Rooftop Films

New York, New York, United States

<https://rooftopfilms.com/>

Toronto International Film Festival

Toronto, Canada

<http://tiff.net/>

Venice International Film Festival

Venice, Italy

<http://www.labiennale.org/en/cinema/>

Hong Kong International Film Festival

Hong Kong, China

<https://www.hkiff.org.hk/>

Berlin International Film festival

Berlin - Germany

<http://www.berlinale.de/en/HomePage.html>

East End Film Festival

East London, United Kingdom

<http://www.eastendfilmfestival.com/>

South by Southwest

Austin, Texas, United States

<http://www.sxsw.com/>

Telluride Film Festival

Telluride, Colorado

<http://telluridefilmfestival.org/>

Sao Paulo International Film Festival

Sao Paulo, Brazil

<http://36.mostra.org/>

Austin Film Festival

Austin, Texas, United States

<http://www.austinfilmfestival.com/>

Niche Film Festivals

You can also apply to different film festivals in your particular genre or niche market. Do a google search for relevant festivals. Don't limit yourself to top 25 film festivals. If you find interesting festivals that attract film industry folk and cater to your niche market, apply to those festivals as well. Set forth below are some niche festivals that you can check out.

Slamdance Film Festival

<http://www.slamdance.com/>

Marfa Film Festival (on hiatus)

<https://www.marfafilmfestival.com/>

Just for Laughs Eat My Shorts

<https://comedypro.hahaha.com/>

San Francisco International LGBT Film Festival

<http://www.frameline.org/>

Screamfest Horror Film Festival

<http://www.screamfestla.com/>

Terror Film Festival

<https://matterstone.wixsite.com/terrorfilmfestival>

Eerie Horror Fest

<http://www.eeriehorrorfest.com/>

American Black Film Festival

<http://www.abff.com/festival/>

San Diego Asian Film Festival

<https://pacarts.org/sdaff/>

Full Frame Documentary Film Festival

<http://www.fullframefest.org/>

LA Film Fest

<https://www.dtlaff.com/>

Hot Docs

<http://www.hotdocs.ca/>

AFI Silver Docs

<https://docs.afi.com/>

Latino International Film Institute

<https://latinofilm.org/>

Oscar Qualifying Film Festivals

Some festivals are Oscar qualifying so if you want to be nominated for an Oscar and win an award, you should apply to those film festivals. You can Google festivals to see if they are\ Oscar qualifying. They will usually have a note in the festival description if it is an Oscar qualifying festival because it is a badge of honor.

Film Festival Circuit

If you want to increase your exposure and the chances of getting distribution, you should apply to as many film festivals as possible. If you find that you want to apply to more festivals than your budget allows for, you do not have to resign yourself to bowing out of the festival circuit and missing out on great networking opportunities. Instead, you can raise more funds through Kickstarter campaigns, friends, family and/or investors. Alternatively you can ask a film festival that you would really like to attend if they will grant you a full or partial waiver, particularly if your film has won awards or is packed with celebrity star power. Most people do not know this but some festivals will grant partial or full waivers so don't take yourself out of the game. Just send them an email or call them to find out if they grant waivers based on your circumstances.



SAG-AFTRA

When you are deciding how to cast your film, you will need to decide if you will be making a SAG-AFTRA film. SAG-AFTRA is the Screen Actors Guild and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. It is the union for actors and it has minimum work requirements that you must abide by if you plan on hiring SAG-AFTRA members. If you want to use experienced actors, they will most likely be members of the union so you will need to become a SAG-AFTRA signatory, which entails signing various agreements, keeping track of hours worked for each union member on set, setting up a payroll account and putting up a deposit to meet minimum SAG-AFTRA requirements. The downside of producing a SAG-AFTRA film is that it will increase the cost of your film and the amount of work you need to do but if you want celebrities or seasoned actors to bring your creative vision to life and increase the likelihood of getting distribution, it is something you will need to get up to speed on in the pre-production stage and work into your budget.

You can find out more about SAG-AFTRA requirements and download the necessary signatory documents, forms, actors' agreements, cast lists, rate sheets, digests and other production forms at the following website: <http://www.sagaftra.org/>. The different contracts can be found here: <http://www.sagaftra.org/production-center/theatrical/signatory-information> or <http://www.sagindie.org/resources/contracts>.

SAG-AFTRA Film Categories

- Short Film Agreement
- Low Budget Theatrical
- Moderate Low Budget Project
- Ultra Low Budget Project
- Short Project
- Student Film

If you plan to do a SAG-AFTRA Film, you can find out more about the procedures, requirements and documents here (they change so keep up to date) <https://www.sagaftra.org/production-center>

Ultra-Low Budget Project Agreement

- \$300,000 maximum budget
- Day rate set at 20% of basic agreement scale and increase annually with scale
- Filmed entirely in U.S.
- Non-episodic content only
- Producers no longer have to declare their intended exhibition market and residuals all be based on the initial release of the project.

Modified Low Budget Project Agreement

- Total budget between \$300,000 - \$700,000
- Non-episodic content only
- Filmed entire in the U.S.
- Diversity in casting and background actor incentives are available
- Rates for daily and weekly principal performers are set at 35% of basic agreement scale and will increase annually with scale.
- Producers no longer have to declare their intended exhibition market and residuals all be based on the initial release of the project.

Low Budget Theatrical Agreement

- Total budget of greater than \$700,000 but no more than \$2,000,000
- Initial theatrical release
- Daily and weekly principal performers will be set at 65% of the basic agreement scale (and will increase annually with scale)
- Diversity casting incentive available

Special New Media Agreement

- Limited to projects with an initial new media release in 4 categories
- Category A will have day performer rates set at 20% of basic agreement scale and background actor rates at 75% of background actor scale. (rates increase annually with scale).
- Category B will have daily and weekly performer rates set at 35% of scale and background actor rates set at 75% of background actor scale (rates will increase annually with scale)
- Category C will have daily and weekly principal performer rates set at 65% of scale and background actor rates set at basic agreement scale. (rates increase annually with scale).
- Category D will have principal performer and background actor rates set at basic agreement scale. (Rates increase annually with scale.)

Learn more about Theatrical Contracts here:

<https://www.sagaftra.org/production-center/contract/813/getting-started>

Learn more about Television Contracts here:

<https://www.sagaftra.org/production-center/contract/807/getting-started>

You can expedite the SAG-AFTRA signatory process by submitting your basic information online. Once you start the process of becoming a SAG-AFTRA signatory, you will be assigned a SAG-AFTRA representative who will work with you and answer all your questions. You will be required to give them a security deposit depending on the budget for your SAG-AFTRA actors so be sure to work that into the production budget so the funds will be available.

When hiring your producer, if you are making a SAG-AFTRA film, make sure that he/she has produced a SAG-AFTRA film in the past and is completely familiar with the process so that they can easily complete all the signatory documents and set up payroll without you getting too involved. You will need to open a payroll account with a payroll company that can properly withhold taxes as required by SAG-AFTRA. Your producer should know how to do all of this but of course you will need to be integrally involved in the negotiation of contractual terms with your actors since that is a business decision and necessarily depends on your budget. Make sure your producer is on top of getting actors to sign the appropriate SAG-AFTRA production documents each day they are on set.

Whether or not you make a SAG-AFTRA film, you will need to set up a limited liability company to run your film production through. If you're not doing a SAG-AFTRA film,

then you can just issue checks to your crew and cast. If you are making a SAG-AFTRA film, you will need to supply AFTRA and the payroll company with formation agreements, including an Operating Agreement, your state and federal ID numbers, Articles of Incorporation and Corporate Resolutions approving the film production if not in the Articles of Incorporation. You can download samples from the internet but it is wise to have a lawyer look over all legal documents and revise them for your situation and any changes that are made in the law from time to time. Make sure to issue the appropriate tax forms to your cast and crew when tax season arises.



Pitching Your Ideas

When you pitch your ideas, make sure you have your logline polished and you can talk succinctly and clearly about the plot of your film - a few sentences to capture their attention. If you're looking for financiers, producers, stars, a famous director and/or distribution, you should have accomplished celebrity power attached to your film already, either as writers, actors, directors, producers, or executive producers. Leverage what you have and all your connections to make this happen. This is an art form unto itself and it helps if you have someone onboard with a record for success and who knows how to package films to get investors, star talent and distribution.

Networking with people at film festivals will put you in touch with the right people and even if you make a non-SAG-AFTRA film, if it demonstrates your talent, your film will become your calling card and you will be able to leverage that and your film's acceptance into film festivals to break into the industry even further. Stay positive and keep pushing your dreams forward.

The film industry is like a family. Once you forge relationships, don't burn those bridges. Remember, Hollywood is also a business. Invite people who have helped you build your film career in to your own projects. Always have something in it for the person you are asking to help you. When you do that, you will find doors open faster and more easily plus you will continue to be integrally involved in many projects going forward, including theirs.