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Credit: Jessica Monroy for Drew Altizer Photography

The purpose of our annual list of 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee is simple: to save you time and money.

All moviemakers want to get into a big festival that will land them press coverage, an agent, and a multimillion-dollar distribution deal. But in reality, the festival circuit is like a ladder: The people you meet at one festival may become your collaborators on another film that gets you into a more prestigious festival where you meet a mentor who guides you into yet another festival where your dreams finally come true.

Since you're potentially investing days and hundreds if not thousands of dollars on every festival trip, we're trying to help you avoid the worst feeling you can have at a festival: The feeling of *What am I doing here?*

It's the feeling you get when your film screens in a near-empty theater, and you then take the stage for a 10-minute Q&A with six other filmmakers onstage before attending a cash-bar party where everyone is very nice but no one can help you or your film. (You'll obviously get more help if you help other people, too.)

As we do every year, we compile this list based on data provided by festivals, independent research, and, whenever possible, attending the festivals in person. We take into account factors like how many films are submitted to a festival vs. how many it accepts, how much a festival helps with travel costs, whether there's potential prize money, and the presence of distributors, other insiders, and press.

We also like learning opportunities: Does a festival promote yet another hourlong "master class" (which used to just be known as "a short talk"), or are there real opportunities to learn from people you want to emulate?

We also tend to prefer smaller festivals where you can get quality time with potential collaborators and friends to bigger festivals where you spend a lot of time sweating in line. And we don't bother listing highly selective festivals you're probably already familiar with if you're reading this, like Berlinale, Cannes, [Sundance](#), [SXSW](#), Toronto, Tribeca and Venice. If you get into one, obviously, you should go.

Like we say every year, festivals that are Academy Awards qualifying have an "A" next to their name, and those with screenwriting competitions have an "S." And like we also always say, not all of these festivals will be perfect for everyone, but we're sure at least one will be perfect for you. And finally, we went slightly over 50, due to ties.

Here's our 2026 list of 50 Film Festivals Worth the Entry Fee.



NEWFILMMAKERS LOS ANGELES

Los Angeles, California / Monthly / newfilmmakersla.com

NFMLA is all about discovery and support — you can read a few success stories on [page 58](#), where several veterans of the fest describe their journeys to Sundance and detail how NFMLA helped their careers. Executive director Larry Laboe and his ultra-friendly team host a festival every month, also with an emphasis on underrepresented groups like Indigenous, veteran or older filmmakers. Many connections are made, since the events draw industry representatives from distributors including Neon, A24, Warner Bros., New Line Cinema, Searchlight, Gravitas Ventures, Focus Features, Netflix, Amazon MGM Studios, Paramount, XYZ Films, Universal, Lionsgate, Vertical Entertainment, FilmNation, Apple TV+, Mubi, Sony Pictures, and Tubi, as well as representatives of CAA, UTA, and many more. This is also a festival where we can absolutely guarantee you'll get press coverage, because we're among the outlets that provide it. We feature interviews with NFMLA filmmakers every month on moviemaker.com.