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AWARDS**

**2026 Rules & Regulations  
Film Submissions**

These are the official rules and regulations for the 2026 Film Independent Spirit Awards.

Please read the rules and regulations in their entirety prior to filling out the submission form.

Final interpretation of all rules, regulations and eligibility of submissions shall be made by the Spirit Awards Nominating Committees and Film Independent.

You may contact the Nominations Office for clarifications and questions via email:

### **NOMINATIONS STAFF**

Drea Clark, Nominations Producer, [dclark@filmIndependent.org](mailto:dclark@filmIndependent.org)

Kate Lemberg, Film Nominations Associate, [klemberg@filmIndependent.org](mailto:klemberg@filmIndependent.org)

### **FILM INDEPENDENT**

5670 Wilshire Blvd, 9th Floor

Los Angeles, CA 90036

### **IMPORTANT DATES**

**Submissions open (Tuesday, August 19, 2025)**

**Early Film deadline (Tuesday, September 2, 2025):**

\$400.00 – Film Independent Member fee | \$450.00 – non Member fee

**Regular Film deadline (Tuesday, September 16, 2025):**

\$500.00 – Film Independent Member fee | \$550.00 – non Member fee

**Final Film deadline (Tuesday, September 30, 2025):**

\$600.00 – Film Independent Member fee | \$650.00 – non Member fee

**Extended Film Arts Circle, Filmmaker Pro and Secret Member deadline  
(Friday, October 3, 2025):**

\$600.00 – Arts Circle, Filmmaker Pro and Secret Member fee

**Nominations Announced (Week of December 1, 2025)**

**2026 Film Independent Spirit Awards (Sunday, February 15, 2026)**

Beginning August 19, you are invited to upload your screener to our submission partner Vision Media before submission form is completed; you **must** upload screener within 48 hours of form submission for title to be in consideration. Contact Drea Clark ([dclark@filmIndependent.org](mailto:dclark@filmIndependent.org)) for screener upload deadline extension. Approved titles must be uploaded by the provided extension date for title to be in consideration.

## RULES FOR ELIGIBILITY

1. All submitted films must be at least 70 minutes long.
2. Cost of completed film after tax incentives, and including post production expenses, should be less than \$30 million. For verification purposes, all films with total budgets exceeding \$25 million, or films with budgets under \$1,000,000 and applying for the Cassavetes Award, are required to submit top sheets from their Final Cost Reports. Absolutely no exceptions to this requirement will be made.
3. Eligible films must have either:
  - a. Been programmed in 2025 at one of the following eight film festivals: Hot Docs, New Directors/New Films, New York Film Festival, Sundance Film Festival, SXSW Film Festival, Telluride Film Festival, Toronto International Film Festival, Tribeca Film Festival OR
  - b. Been shown in a commercial theater in the United States for at least one week (seven consecutive days) between January 1, 2025 – December 31, 2025 OR
  - c. Been available through commercial streaming or VOD service between January 1, 2025 – December 31, 2025. Films must have participated in a fee-based service where a publicly accessible “rental/purchase” or “subscription” was required; virtual film festival screenings at non-qualifying film festivals are ineligible.
4. Although films may be submitted in any year they are eligible, such as the year they screen in a qualifying festival or the year of their theatrical / streaming release, once a film is nominated (in any category minus the Emerging Filmmaker Award categories: Someone to Watch, Producers Award, Truer Than Fiction), it is no longer eligible for submission in subsequent years. Films that qualify through a festival screening and will be released the first quarter of 2026 are encouraged to submit this year. Films that qualify through a festival screening but will not be released until after the first quarter of 2026 are encouraged to submit next year, for the 2027 Awards. For any questions or clarifications, please contact the Nominations office.
5. Except for the category of Best International Film and Best Documentary, all nominations go to American productions. The Spirit Awards defines an “American production” as:
  - a. A film in which U.S. citizens or permanent residents are credited in at least two of the following categories of responsibilities: director, writer or producer. This can be fulfilled by one person with multiple duties or by separate individuals; OR
  - b. The film is set in significant part in the United States and/or has significant American content.

The Spirit Awards Nominating Committees and Film Independent reserve the right to determine if a film qualifies as International or American Narrative.

If requested by Film Independent, the submitter (filmmaker or distributor) must supply proof of citizenship or permanent residence of filmmaker(s). Films that have been asked to but do not submit proof of residence or financing will not be considered.
6. Documentary films are only eligible for Best Documentary; international narrative films are only eligible for Best International Film.
7. Eligibility for all awards shall be determined by credits as they appear on the screen. If a film is determined ineligible for any reason or submitted in the wrong category, the Spirit Awards Nominations Staff will contact the submitter (filmmaker or distributor).

## CATEGORY INFORMATION

The final categories for which a film may be nominated are at the sole discretion of the Spirit Awards Nominating Committees and Film Independent. Films may be eligible in several categories but will be nominated only once in each category type (e.g., a film cannot be nominated for *both* Best Feature and Best First Feature). Except for the category of Best International Film and Best Documentary, only American productions are eligible. For the purposes of this submission form, all fiction films are referred to as "narrative."

**Best Documentary:** Both American and International documentaries are eligible in this category. The award is given to the director(s) and producer(s). Films submitted in this category are not eligible in any other category.

**Best International Film:** International narrative films are eligible in this category. The award is given to the film's director(s). Films submitted in this category are not eligible in any other category.

**All American Narrative films will be considered for the following categories:**

**Best Feature:** All films, including films made by first-time directors, are eligible for Best Feature. Award is given to the producer(s). Co-producers, executive producers, associate producers and line producers are not eligible.

**Best First Feature:** Eligibility determined by the director(s) for whom this is his/her/their narrative feature directorial debut, though awarded to both the director(s) and producer(s) of the film.

**Best First Screenplay:** Writer(s) for whom this is his/her/their first produced feature screenplay are eligible in this category. Screenwriters with "Story By" credit may be submitted.

**Best Screenplay:** All American narrative feature screenplays, including screenplays by first-time writers, are eligible in this category. Screenwriters with "Story By" credit may be submitted.

**John Cassavetes Award:** Awarded to the best American narrative feature with a budget under \$1,000,000 and given to the film's producer(s), director(s), and writer(s). For verification purposes, all films submitted in this category are required to submit the top sheet from the film's Final Cost Report. The winning film in this category will be determined by the American narrative nominating committee.

**Best Director:** Directors of all American narrative features, including first-time directors, are eligible in this category.

**Best Cinematography:** All American narrative features are eligible in this category.

**Best Editor:** All American narrative features are eligible in this category.

**Best Lead/Supporting/Breakthrough Performance:** All American narrative features are eligible in these categories. Only actors in "American Narrative" films are eligible in acting categories.

## NOMINATING GUIDELINES

The Spirit Awards nominations are determined by three (3) committees: American Narrative, Documentary and International. In addition, Film Independent awards three (3) Emerging Filmmaker Awards: Someone to Watch, Truer than Fiction and the Producers Award. These committees, which are assembled by Film Independent, consist of industry professionals including directors, writers, producers, actors, cinematographers, editors, casting directors, film critics, film programmers and members of Film Independent's Board of Directors.

The Spirit Awards seeks to celebrate the year's highest achievements and culturally resonant independent filmmaking. The Spirit Awards Nominating Committees apply the following guidelines in making those selections. Any variations of the rules or guidelines are at the sole discretion of the Nominating Committees and Film Independent:

- Uniqueness of vision, innovation, diversity / Original, provocative subject matter / Economy of means

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

The 2026 Spirit Awards have a submission form site ([submittable.com](http://submittable.com)) and a screener upload site ([submissions.visionmedia.com](http://submissions.visionmedia.com)).

### SUBMISSION FORM SITE

- In addition to contact information, production details, and credits, the submission form site will require:
  - Representative production stills from the film (preferred formats: JPEG, TIFF, PNG)
  - Film Synopsis (100 words or less)
- Final cost report top sheet (required for all films with total budgets exceeding \$25 million, and films with budgets under \$1,000,000 that are applying for the John Cassavetes Award).
- Demographics/diversity information is requested but not required.

### SCREENER UPLOAD SITE

- A screener of your submission will need to be uploaded in its entirety to our partner screening portal, Vision Media. DVDs or third party links will not be accepted. The Vision Media portal will open for screener uploads on August 19, 2025.
- You are invited to upload your screener before your submission form is completed, provided the titles are identically listed in both submission and upload. You **must** upload screener to Vision Media within 48 hours of form submission for title to be in consideration. Contact Drea Clark for screener upload deadline extension. [dclark@filmindependent.org](mailto:dclark@filmindependent.org). You only need to upload screener once even if in consideration for multiple categories (i.e. both Documentary and Truer Than Fiction).
- To upload screener, please login with this email/password, NOT personal Vision Media login:  
URL: [submissions.visionmedia.com](http://submissions.visionmedia.com)  
Email: submissions  
Password: SAScreener2026
- Confirmation text will appear onscreen once your screener has successfully uploaded. Please keep your browser open until the confirmation text appears.

### Tech Specs for Screener:

- Container: MP4
- Video Type: H.264
- Size/Ratio: 1920x1080 (16:9), 1280x720 (16:9) 1280 x 960 (4:3)
- Video Bitrate: 3136kbps (low motion e.g. news desk reporter) or 5928kbps (high motion e.g. sport)
- Key Frame Interval: minimum every 6 seconds
- Audio Type: AAC
- Audio Sample Frequency: 44.1kHz
- Audio Bite Rate: 192kbps

## SUBMISSION PAYMENT

Payment can be accepted via credit card or ACH for the required submission fees. You can pay via credit card per individual submissions on the Submittable submission form platform.

If you have multiple submissions that you'd prefer to pay in bulk via ACH, please select "I Am Submitting Multiple" in the Payment section of Submittable; Film Independent will follow up with an invoice by Sept 30. Spirit Awards invoice numbers **MUST** be included in ACH payment, and all invoiced payments are due by October 30 for titles to remain in consideration.

### Film Independent Members:

Film Early Deadline \$400 Sept 2 / Film Regular Deadline \$500 Sept 16 / Film Final Deadline \$600 Sept 30)

### Non-Members:

Film Early Deadline \$450 Sept 2 / Film Regular Deadline \$550 Sept 16 / Film Final Deadline \$650 Sept 30)

### Arts Circle, Filmmaker Pro and Secret Members:

Film Extended Deadline \$600 Oct 3

## Voting

Film Independent Members are the official voting body that determines the winners for the Spirit Awards. To join Film Independent visit [www.filmindependent.org/join](http://www.filmindependent.org/join)

Should you receive a nomination for the 2026 Spirit Awards, the primary contact for the film is responsible for supplying all required materials (including nominee and representative contact information, trailer, theme song, title cards and clips) to Spirit Awards Production **NO LATER** than January 2, 2026.

A materials request will be sent to all Nominee primary contacts by December 4, 2025 once Nominations are announced. Up to five Spirit Award trophies will be provided per category to winning teams; additional trophies will be available for purchase for winning teams larger than five. Should a nominee win and not appear at 2026 Spirit Awards, trophy will be sent to distribution representative.

## NOMINEE SCREENING PROGRAM

Spirit Award-nominated titles will be required to participate in the Nominee Screener program for a \$4,200 fee, which provides voters with digital screener access to watch nominees in our secure digital screening room, powered by Vision Media. For additional information on the Nominee Screener program, please email us at: [membership@filmindependent.org](mailto:membership@filmindependent.org).

\*PLEASE NOTE: ALL TITLES IN THE NOMINEE SCREENER PROGRAM WILL BE REQUIRED TO PROVIDE A COPY OF THE NOMINATED FILM OR TELEVISION EPISODE THAT INCLUDES CLOSED CAPTIONS. THIS INCLUDES ALL ENGLISH-LANGUAGE FILMS AS WELL AS ALL INTERNATIONAL FILMS. (Closed Caption File Spec: Hour Zero Start, WebVTT Format)