

# FILM FESTIVALS AND FILMMAKER SUSTAINABILITY SURVEY REPORT

---

A Survey of 2020 Festivals  
Sept 2021

---



DEAR  
PROD  
UCER,



Data analysis and report design by  
Digestible Content

# About this Survey

Dear Producer and Film Festival Alliance partnered on this first-of-its-kind survey to assess how film festivals contributed to filmmaker sustainability in 2020. We deployed the survey in May 2021 and reached out to festivals of all sizes and genres. We had more than 200 respondents begin the survey, with 38 percent of respondents (75 total) completing most applicable questions. We collected information about what festivals looked like in 2020 (length, location, types of screening, etc.), demographics of paid staff and number of volunteers, and perhaps most importantly, financial information related to operating budgets, revenue, and filmmaker support.

The survey could be completed anonymously, but we did ask respondents to write-in the name of their festival to help avoid duplication. We also offered the respondents a chance to opt into sharing the name of their festival, uncoupled from any specific data points. (*See page 15 for the list of respondents who agreed to have their name shared.*)

The survey responses are reported here, with some context and data interpretation where helpful.

## How this Came About

In January 2021, Dear Producer released a *Producers Sustainability Survey Report* revealing 56% of producers earned only \$25K or less in 2020 – with more than a quarter of producers earning less than \$2,500. The producer sustainability report sparked needed conversations within the filmmaking community about sustainability and left film organizations asking: how can we do more to financially support filmmakers?

Film Festival Alliance (FFA) represents 245 film festivals and freelance festival professionals, predominantly in the United States, with additional members in Canada and the United Kingdom. FFA is a non-profit organization serving film festivals *and* the people who run them. FFA believes the health of the independent film community relies on each sector to be as healthy as it can, and filmmakers are a critical sector in our community.

## What We Hope to Get Out of this Data

The main goal of this survey was to assess how festivals contribute to filmmaker sustainability, particularly in regard to financial compensation. Specifically, we asked about revenue sharing, screening fees, panel stipends, cash awards, and travel and lodging paid out to filmmakers.

We also asked general questions about festivals to cross analyze data points, since the film festival world is wide and variable. For example, some festivals have operating budgets in the millions, while others have budgets under \$10K. The data is segmented by budget categories for most of the data points.

This data additionally establishes a baseline during a pivotal year for the industry. It allows festivals to quantify their financial impact on filmmakers and see how they compare to other organizations. It allows Dear Producer and FFA to identify national trends and patterns in the industry, laying the groundwork for meaningful change. Ideally, we are continuing the conversation and building pathways for positive growth in film and filmmaking.

*Note: All charts made with Datawrapper*

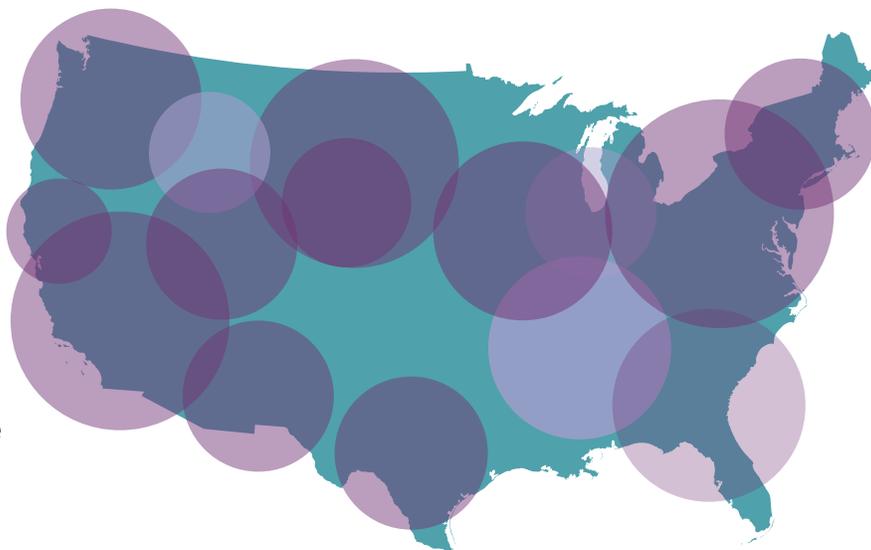
# Survey Respondents - Overview

## Who Provided Responses to the Survey?

More than 200 respondents began the survey, open only to festivals in the U.S. and Canada. About half of all respondents wrote in a festival name (under the agreement that we would decouple their answers from their festival name). About 75 respondents completed the majority of the survey questions, mainly from the U.S. and several from Canadian festivals.

Respondents represented festivals across the U.S. (95%) and Canada (5%) and included different genres and a range of operating budgets.

The map provides an overview of respondents represented in the survey data. The larger the circle, the more festivals reported from that region. **The map is to show the variety of festival respondents, while also maintaining their anonymity.** Hawaii, Alaska, and Canada are not included in the visualization to carry out that anonymity, but note that there were multiple respondents from those geographic areas.



## What Genres did Festivals Focus on in 2020?

Respondents selected from a list of 38 film genres and types to indicate their festival's central themes and identities, with a write-in option too. They could select as many as necessary. The majority of festival respondents indicated they curated a general selection of films. In the word cloud below, the larger the word, the more respondents chose it. Some appear more than once in smaller print, to show unique combinations (i.e., Latin American + Art; Latin American + Undocumented People, etc.)

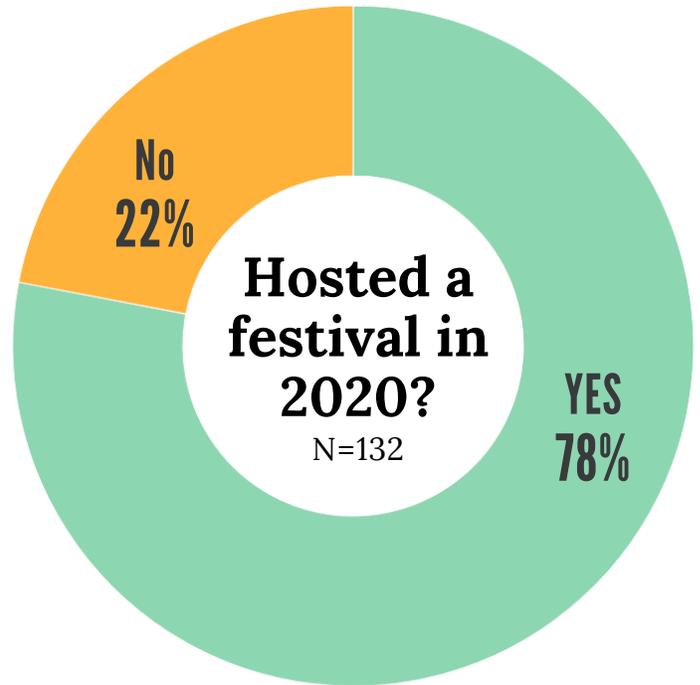


# What did Film Festivals Look Like in 2020?

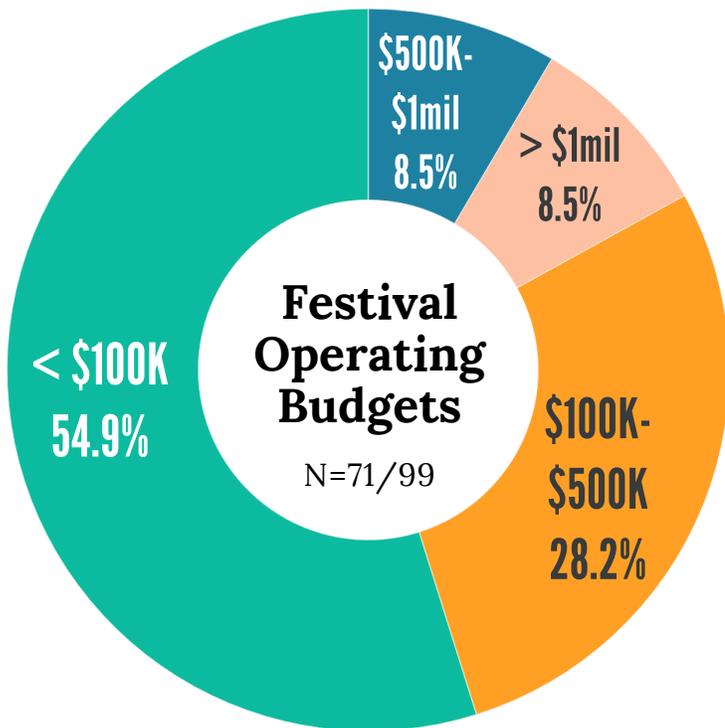
## The Show Must Go On!

Nearly 80% of respondents said they held some kind of festival in 2020, despite the pandemic challenges.

The film festival landscape looked different in 2020 compared with previous years. But the majority of festivals that responded embodied "the show must go on" spirit and held a festival, most likely in a modified format. We had **132 responses** to the question *did you host a festival of any kind in 2020?*



## More than half of the festivals reported operating budgets <\$100K.



We asked respondents to report their festival's annual operating budget, with the option to select one from several options. The budget brackets we offered ranged from under \$100K to more than \$1 million. Overall, 71 reported their operating budget, while 28 did not (but completed other key questions).

Throughout this report, we pulled the data into operating budget ranges to provide context and comparison points. We combined several of the budget ranges offered in the survey to get more contextual data as well as to protect anonymity.

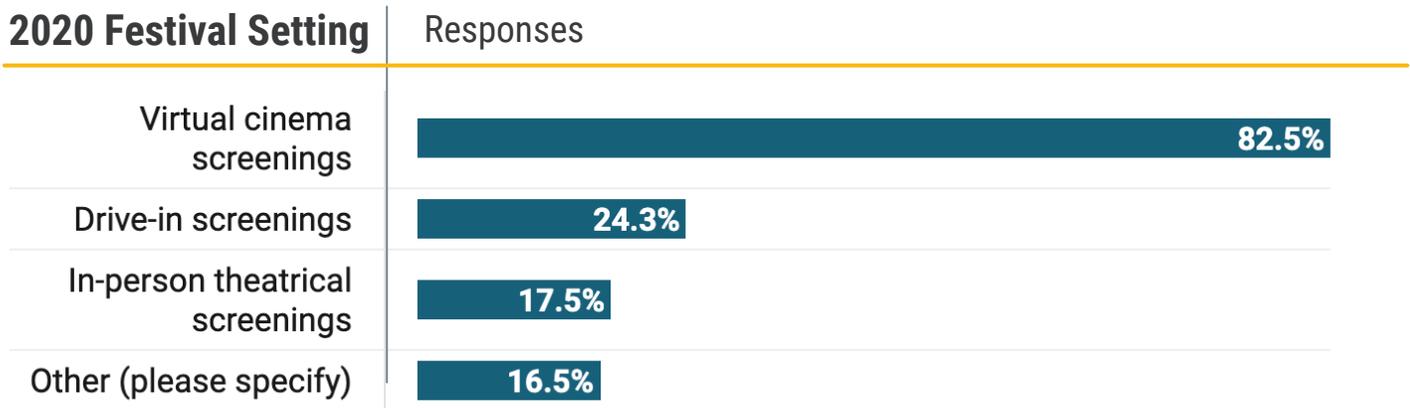
**NOTE:** A list of participating festivals who agreed to have their names published can be found at the end of this report. Not all festivals wished to have their name included, so the list is only a partial representation of the responding festivals.

*Festivals agreed = 58; Remain anonymous = 11; No response = 30*

# What did Film Festivals Look Like in 2020?

**During the pandemic, many turned to virtual screenings, sometimes combining them with drive-in screenings or in-person theatrical.**

Respondents could select all that applied, including a write-in option. The write-ins included virtual panels and workshops; in-person outdoor events (not drive-in); market events; and direct to streaming channels on devices like Roku, AppleTV, and Amazon Fire TV. Responses = 103.



## Film festivals screened more than 13,000 films to audiences in 2020.

Festivals often show overlapping films in their programs, so the number of *unique* films shown at festivals is lower than 13,000. This summarizes the *total* number of films shown, not just premieres and/or exclusive screenings.

3,850  
Features

9,178  
Shorts

"We offered our shorts and feature selections for free on Roku, Apple, and Fire TV so as to promote audiences to stay safe and healthy in their homes and enjoy our selections at any time during our 10-day period. We hope it was enough to help the situation.

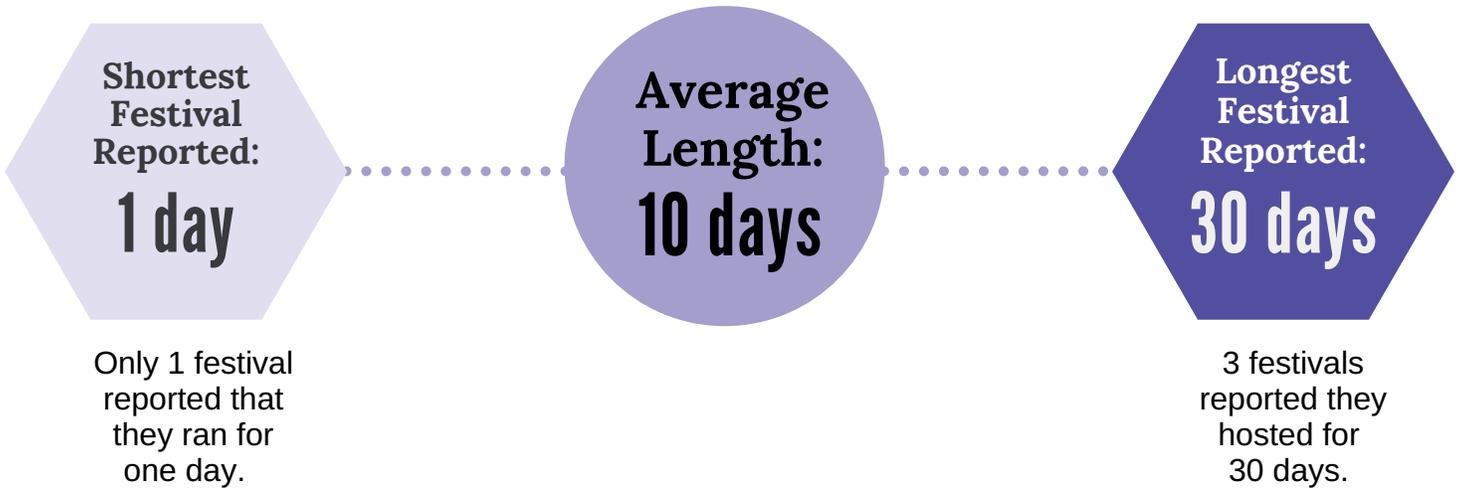
Let's see what 2021 has in store for us."

# What did Film Festivals Look Like in 2020?

## How long did festivals run in 2020?

Length of festival varied widely from 1 to 30 days, but averaged out at 10 days. The most frequently reported length was also 10 days, followed by 7 days. The length of the festival did not correlate to the box office revenue, though it is worth noting that the **top 10 box office earners ran a little longer than average – 13 days on average compared with the 10-day average across all earners.**

Overall, respondents reported they **hosted more than 900 days of film festivals in 2020.** That's nearly 2.5 festivals happening every day during 2020.



## Average Festival Length, by Operating Budget

Operating Budget	Avg. # of Days
Under \$100K	8
\$100K-\$500K	11
\$500K-\$1mil	19
>\$1mil	15

"This year, we shared data from the virtual festival with filmmakers including geo-analytics of viewers, viewer activity, demographics and total festival revenue. I think this was helpful in providing context... about how little the festival makes. The revenue comes nowhere near paying for the event. We depend on other programs to bring grants and other revenue that support our operations."

# Film Festival Revenue and Payout: Box Office Overview

**Festivals reported nearly \$3 million in box office receipts in 2020.**



**Overall Reported Box Office:**

**\$2,743,734**

total reported from 68 unique responses, including 10 who reported \$0.

## **Was Operating Budget correlated to a festival's box office? Maybe.**

Responding festivals with the highest operating budgets (>\$1 million) contributed the most to the overall box office. Festivals in that bracket contributed more than 30% of the total 2020 box office reported. However, about 25% of the reported box office came from respondents who did not answer the operating budgets question.

<b>Operating Budget Range</b>	<b>Box Office Total</b>	<b>% of Overall Box Office</b>
<b>Under \$100K</b>	\$355,067	12.9%
<b>\$100K-\$500K</b>	\$579,262	21.1%
<b>\$500K-\$1mil</b>	\$278,498	10.2%
<b>&gt; \$1mil</b>	\$840,346	30.6%
<b>Unknown</b>	\$690,561	25.2%

"No other arts-presenting form regularly does not compensate the work of the artists it presents. This should become the norm in the U.S. in order to legitimize festivals as a key piece of the film exhibition ecosystem — neither as a tool for studio marketing nor as an amateur open mic night style event, but as a sustainable and sustaining piece of a film/filmmaker's ultimate journey."

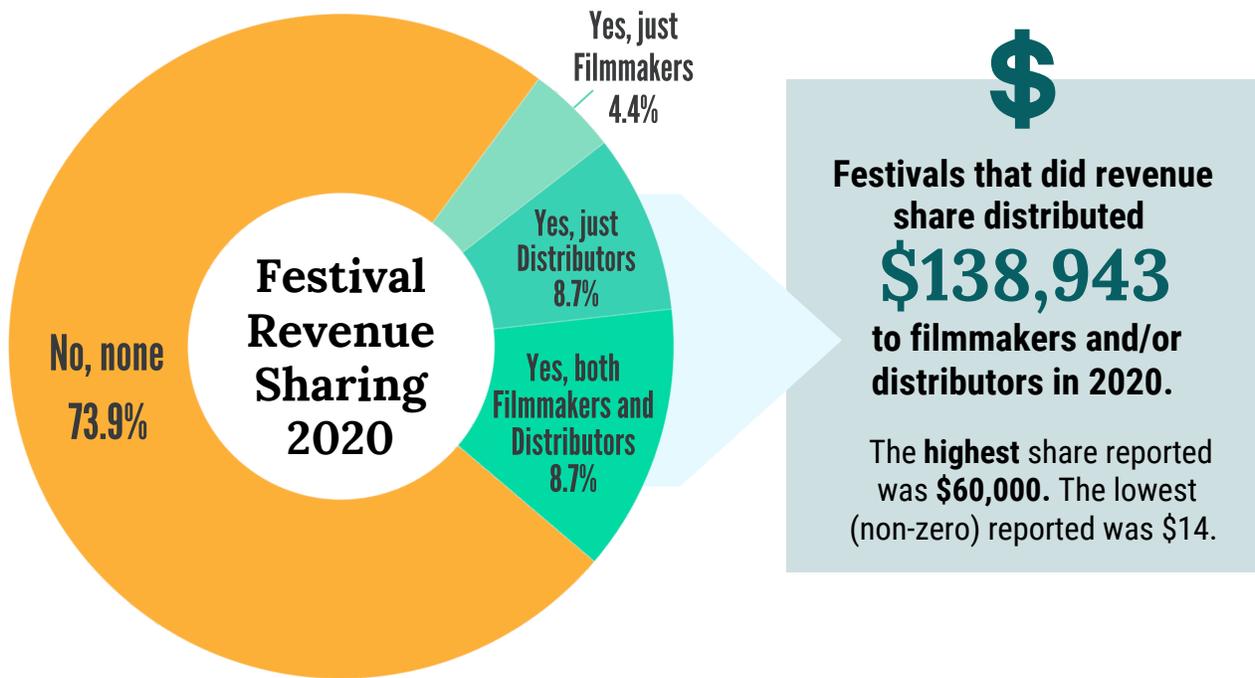
"We cannot survive with virtual festivals. We had over 300 people attend in-person festivals, but dropped to less than 20 via virtual."

# Film Festival Revenue and Payout: Revenue Sharing

## Did festivals share revenue with filmmakers? Mostly no.

The majority of festivals reported that they did not offer revenue sharing.

- **About 17 percent of respondents reported they shared some revenue** — most commonly paid out to both distributors and filmmakers or just distributors.
- Festivals in the two highest tiers of operating budgets were the biggest sharers. Though they represented 17% of survey respondents, they contributed more than 86% of the reported revenue share.
  - 60% of the respondents in the >\$1mil budget group reported they shared revenue in 2020.
  - And while only 25% said they shared revenue in the \$500K-\$1mil bracket, they contributed the most overall via revenue sharing.



## Revenue Shared with Filmmakers in 2020, by Operating Budget

Operating Budget	Yes, Shared	No, Not Shared	Total Revenue Shared
Under \$100K	14%	86%	\$4,738
\$100K-\$500K	33%	67%	\$14,365
\$500K-\$1mil	25%	75%	\$60,000
More than \$1mil	60%	40%	\$59,840

### Portion of box office distributed via revenue sharing: 5%

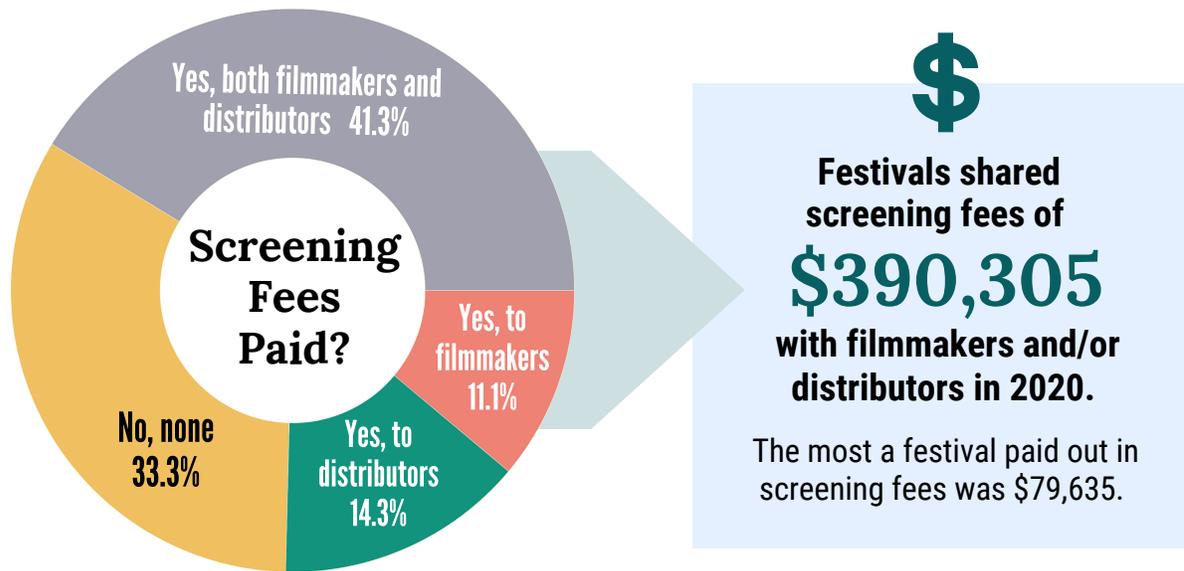


# Film Festival Revenue and Payout: Screening Fees

## Did festivals pay **screening fees** to filmmakers and/or distributors? Mostly yes.

In 2021, the majority of festivals — 68 percent, or well over two-thirds — paid screening fees of some kind. Feature films received the larger share on average, compared to shorts.

- **Feature Film Averages:** The lowest screening fee for features was an average of \$210; highest screening fee was \$517 on average.
- **Short Film Averages:** The low-end screening fee for shorts was \$48 on average, while the highest fee average was \$63, reflecting a difference of only \$15 between the highest and lowest screening fee averages paid to shorts filmmakers and distributors.
- 100% of respondents in the \$500K-\$1mil budget bracket reported paying screening fees.



## Screening Fees Paid to Filmmakers in 2020, by Operating Budget

Operating Budget	Yes Screening Fees	No Screening Fees	Total Paid in 2020
Under \$100K	55%	45%	\$44,629
\$100K-\$500K	83%	17%	\$91,525
\$500K-\$1mil	100%	0%	\$93,114
> \$1mil	40%	60%	\$115,487

### Portion of box office distributed via screening fees: 14%

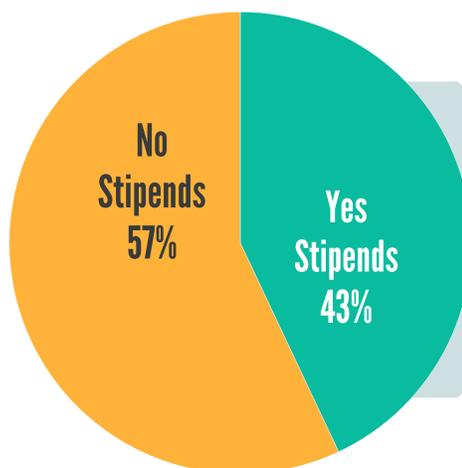


# Film Festival Revenue and Payout: Stipends and Speaker Fees

## Did festivals pay stipends to filmmakers for their work on panels, Q&As or other appearances? Sometimes.

The majority of respondents, nearly 60 percent, said they did not provide stipends to filmmakers for their time on panels, participating in Q&As before or after films, etc. Festivals that reported operating budgets in the middle two brackets were the most likely to pay a stipend.

- The **highest** stipend reported was **\$3,000**.
- The **lowest**, non-zero stipend was **\$50**.
- Festivals with the highest operating budgets paid the least overall per stipend.
- Festivals in the highest range reported they paid a total of \$2,850 in 2020, well below the other budget brackets.



\$

**Festivals that paid stipends distributed:**

**\$98,721**

**to filmmakers in 2020.**

## Stipends Paid to Filmmakers, by Operating Budget Ranges

Operating Budget	Yes, Paid Stipends	No Stipends	Lowest Stipend	Highest Stipend	2020 Total Paid
Under \$100K	34%	66%	\$50	\$1,200	\$21,696
\$100K-\$500K	56%	44%	\$50	\$3,000	\$65,775
\$500K-\$1mil	50%	50%	\$100	\$750	\$8,400
> \$1mil	40%	60%	\$50	\$250	\$2,850

"Artist compensation is part of our core values. We know how many independent filmmakers invest in the creation of their own work and what an issue artist sustainability is for the artists we exist to serve."

### Portion of box office distributed via stipends and speaker fees: 4%



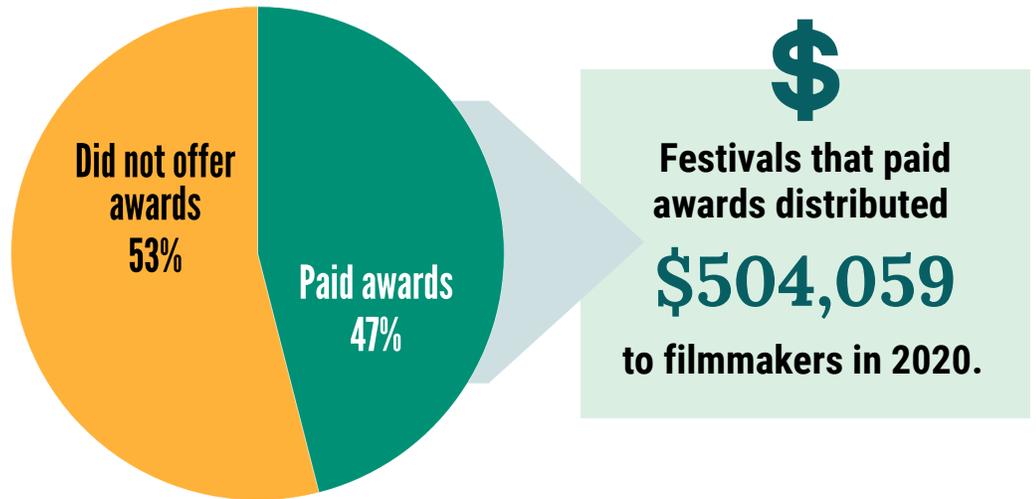
# Film Festival Revenue and Payout: Awards and Cash Prizes

## Festivals gave more than half a million in awards, grants and prizes to filmmakers in 2020.

About half of the festival respondents indicated they provided awards, cash prizes, and grants.

This positively corresponded to operating budget – **the higher the operating budget, the more likely a festival was to pay awards, grants and cash prizes to filmmakers.**

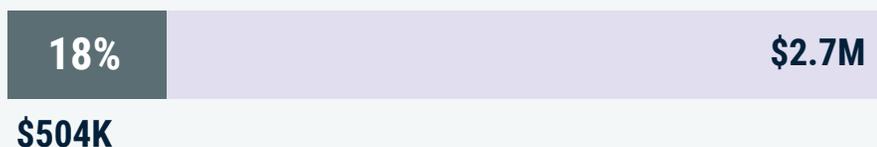
Awards were the largest "giveaway" category for festivals. Overall, the **awards given out in 2020 were equivalent to about 20% of the box office.**



## Cash Awards and Prizes Paid to Filmmakers in 2020, by Operating Budget Ranges

Operating Budget	Yes Awards	No Awards	Lowest Award	Highest Award	Total Awarded
Under \$100K	31%	69%	\$50	\$5,000	\$23,350
\$100K-\$500K	56%	44%	\$100	\$5,000	\$86,671
\$500K-\$1mil	75%	25%	\$500	\$25,000	\$91,500
> \$1mil	80%	20%	\$1,000	\$40,000	\$302,538

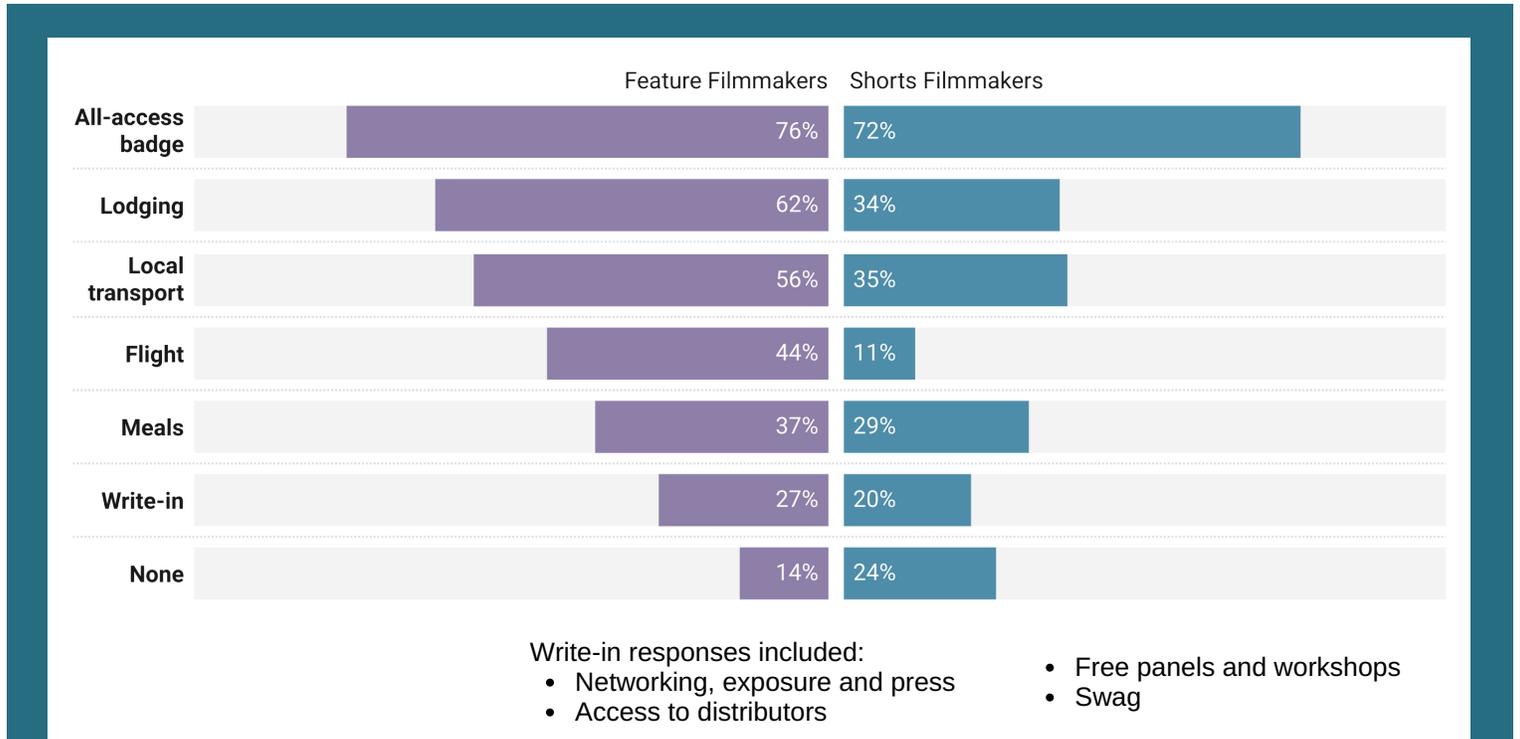
### Portion of box office distributed via cash awards and prizes: 18%



# Film Festival Revenue and Payout: Festival Perks

## What do filmmakers receive when attending the festival?

We asked what perks, comps and other support filmmakers are offered when they are accepted to an in-person event. All-access badges were the number one comp offered, for both shorts and features. Beyond that, it was clear that feature-length filmmakers are provided with more comps and support to attend festivals.



*NOTE: While this information provides a good baseline, in the future, we would ask this question differently to get a better understanding of who receives perks, i.e., director and/or producer, or anyone else on the film team.*

"We design an environment and experience that allows the filmmakers to meet and grow relationships amongst themselves, and know of many successful collaborations that have emerged from this situation.

Also, the filmmaker-audience relationship is very special, and we have various ways to nurture it including our hosting program where the lodging that we offer is mainly provided by our local community, and ground transportation that is supported by a cadre of very enthusiastic volunteer drivers."

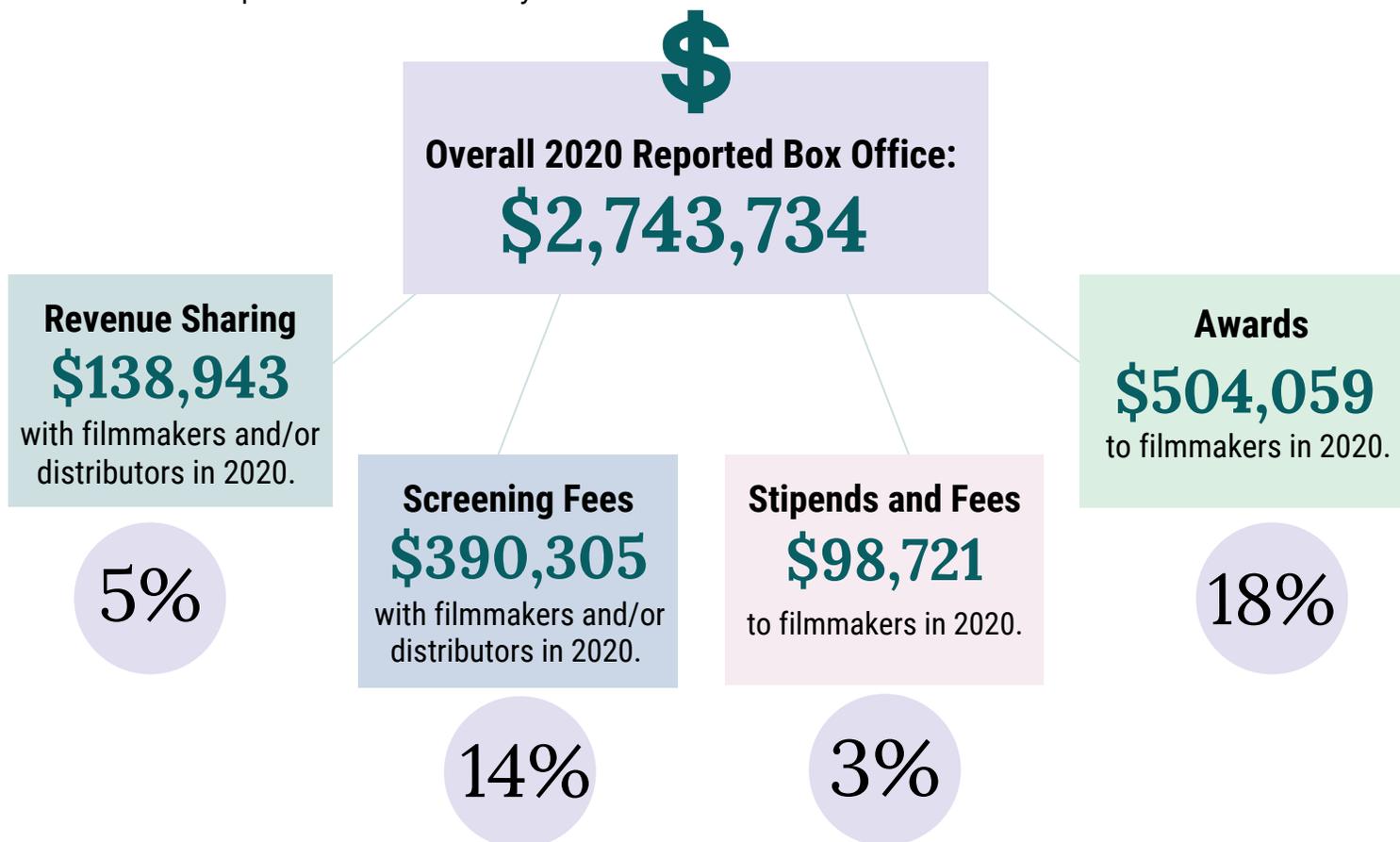
"If we had divided screening fees amongst filmmakers, the payout for each would be below \$20. Instead, we shipped them swag bags filled with local goods for a taste of our area. This provided income to local businesses and still made the filmmakers feel connected to our area."

"We try to treat them like rockstars for a few days... and celebrate their essential contribution to the festival"

# Film Festival Revenue and Payout: Summary

## What Portion of Box Office was Paid Out in 2020?

It's not necessarily a one-to-one comparison since budgets and money in vs. money out are rarely that simple, but we thought it was a helpful metric to show the portion of money festivals took in during 2020 and compare it with the money that was paid out directly to filmmakers. Respondents reported \$2.7 million in box office during 2020 (from 68 respondents, including 10 who reported \$0). This visualization demonstrates the ratio of box office paid out in various ways in 2020.



Operating Budget	Revenue Share	Screening Fees	Stipends	Awards	Total Paid Out
Under \$100K	\$4,738	\$44,629	\$21,696	\$23,350	\$94,413
\$100K-\$500K	\$14,365	\$91,525	\$65,775	\$86,671	\$258,336
\$500K-\$1mil	\$60,000	\$93,114	\$8,400	\$91,500	\$253,014
>\$1mil	\$59,840	\$115,487	\$2,850	\$302,538	\$480,715

**Total reported paid out in 2020 directly to filmmakers: \$1,132,028 or 41% of the Reported Box Office**

# Offscreen Operations: Culture, Curation and Diversity

## How Many Full-Time Staff and Volunteers did Festivals Report?

In 2020, a different kind of year for festivals and likely reflected in these numbers, 74 festivals reported they employed more than 280 people in full time positions, and more than 1,900 unpaid volunteers.

- That reflects a **6.75 to 1 volunteer-to-full-time staff ratio** (i.e., there are 6.75 times more volunteers than staff who come together to make a festival happen).

Budget Range	# of FT Employee - TOTAL FOR ALL FESTIVALS	# of Unpaid Volunteers - TOTAL FOR ALL FESTIVALS	Average # FT Employees Per Festival	Average # Volunteers Per Festival
Under \$100K	27	495	< 1	13
\$100K-\$500K	64	574	3	29
\$500K-\$1mil	30	408	5	68
>\$1mil	162	455	27	76
Overall	283	1,932	4	27

## Is Diversity Represented in Festival Full-Time Staff?

When examining the reported diversity of full-time staff, it was somewhat difficult to draw accurate numbers. This was partly due to how we asked the question, but also because of how it was answered. We averaged out the answers to come up with the best possible interpretation of the data.

- What is clear is the **lack of representation at nearly every level with each group, with the exception of women at organizations with budgets over \$100K.**
- Festivals in the middle operating budget brackets (between \$100K and \$1mil) were the most likely to report having diversity among their full-time staff.

Operating Budget	AVG. % People of Color	AVG. % Women	AVG. % Disabled	AVG. % LGBTQIA+	AVG. % Military Veterans
Under \$100K	6%	20%	4%	4%	0%
\$100K-\$500K	23%	79%	7%	24%	0%
\$500K-\$1mil	12%	61%	17%	30%	0%
> \$1mil	15%	54%	6%	14%	0%

# Offscreen Operations: Culture, Curation and Diversity

## Is Diversity Represented in Festival Leadership?

We asked festival respondents about diverse representation in their leadership, which was designated as paid and unpaid positions at director level or above.

- The chances of having a person of color leading a film festival dropped as the operating budget increased.
- Women were fairly represented in the leadership responses, but were particularly seen in the lower levels of operating budgets.
- Overall, a lack of representation persists in festival leadership, particularly as budgets rise.

Operating Budget	Average % People of Color	Average % Women	Average % Disabled People	Average % LGBTQIA+ People	Average % Military Vets
Under \$100K	25%	49%	5%	17%	1%
\$100K-\$500K	26%	71%	16%	8%	0%
\$500K-\$1mil	14%	37%	0%	11%	0%
> \$1mil	18%	48%	3%	20%	0%

## Is Diversity Represented in Programming and Curation Staff (Paid and Unpaid)?

Curation and programming have an inherent power that comes with their roles: what they decide to put on-screen matters. Their programming can bring different perspectives to light, showcase stores that aren't being seen elsewhere – or they can instead reflect the homogeneity of the community in which they are situated. We asked festivals to report several key diversity measures in their paid and unpaid programming and curation staff.

- Unlike in festival leadership, curation and programming staff reflected wider diversity and representation in general.
- However, people with disabilities and military veterans were extremely underrepresented, if visible at all, in the responses.

Operating Budget	Average % People of Color	Average % Women	Average % Disabled People	Average % LGBTQIA+ People	Average % Military Veterans
Under \$100K	29%	48%	6%	22%	2%
\$100K-\$500K	33%	61%	9%	21%	4%
\$500K-\$1mil	25%	50%	9%	28%	0%
> \$1mil	41%	65%	3%	28%	0%

## Responding festivals who agreed to have their names published in relation to this survey are as follows:

Many additional festivals participated in survey, providing key data as well as their names, but asked not to be publicly listed.

- ACT Human Rights Film Festival
- African Diaspora International Film Festival
- Alexander Valley Film Festival
- Ann Arbor Film Festival
- Ashland Independent Film Festival
- Athena Film Festival At Barnard College
- Big Sky Documentary Film Festival
- Charlotte Black Film Festival
- Chicago Feminist Film Festival
- Chicago Irish Film Festival
- Chicago Southland International Film Festival
- Chicago Underground Film Festival
- CineKink
- Cucalorus Film Festival
- Doc5 Film Festival
- Doc10 Film Festival
- Double Exposure Investigative Film Festival and Symposium
- Durango Independent Film Festival
- El Paso Film Festival
- Essence of Embodiment
- Festival Angaelica
- Film Pittsburgh
- Freep Film Festival
- Giant Incandescent Resonating Animation Festival
- Global Peace Film Festival
- Greater Cleveland Urban Film Festival
- Hell's Half Mile Film & Music Festival
- Hot Docs
- Indigo Moon Film Festival
- International Wildlife Film Festival
- Knoxville Film Festival
- LA OLA
- Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival
- MicroMania Film Festival
- Mill Valley Film Festival - California Film Institute
- Milwaukee Film Festival
- Nevada City Film Festival
- New Orleans Film Festival
- New Voices in Black Cinema
- Oak Cliff Film Festival
- Other Worlds Film Festival
- Portland International Film Festival
- Prismatic Ground
- ReelAbilities Film Festival
- RiverRun International Film Festival
- Rocky Mountain Women's Film Festival
- Salute Your Shorts Film Festival
- San Luis Obispo International Film Festival
- Scottsdale International Film Festival
- Scout Film Festival
- Seattle International Film Festival
- Tallgrass Film Festival
- The Film Collective - Indie Showcase
- The Fargo-Moorhead LGBT Film Festival
- The Martha's Vineyard Film Festival
- The Port Townsend Film Festival
- Washington West Film Fest
- Whistler Film Festival
- Winter Film Awards International Film Festival

**Dear Producer and Film Festival Alliance would like to thank all of the festivals who participated in this survey. Your transparency demonstrates your undeniable commitment to the film community.**

## **Contacts:**

**Dear Producer / Rebecca Green  
Hello@DearProducer.com**

**Film Festival Alliance / Barbara Twist  
Barbara@FilmFestivalAlliance.org**

**Digestible Content / Stephanie Ariganello  
Stephanie.Arg@gmail.com**