

The Hampshire County Youth Film Festival

A proposal requesting \$10,000 from the Mass Cultural Center for the creation of a youth-focused film festival in Hampshire County, Massachusetts



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Submitted by Matthew Catalano

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Jen Lawless
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Dear Ms. Lawless,

I am honored to submit to you this grant proposal with the purpose of obtaining funding for the first ever Hampshire County Youth Film Festival (HCYFF). This proposal will highlight the need for arts engagement among the youth and lack of meaningful participation in the arts that many young people today are facing. It will also draw attention to the myriad of benefits that such involvement with the arts can bring to young people. Such benefits include improved academic performance, increased compassion for the world around them, improvements to problem-solving and critical thinking skills, and more. In order to bring this proposed film festival into fruition, we will need a grant of \$10,000 from the Mass Cultural Council.

I am extremely passionate about film, and believe it to be an excellent medium to inspire a love of the arts in younger people. Nowadays, film is all around us, by way of TikTok, Instagram, and other social media platforms with a focus on video content. Young people today are especially in tune with this fact, and I believe are particularly well equipped to make the transition from making and consuming short-form video content to creating more thoughtful, longer-form narrative films.

Unfortunately, film is often seen as an inaccessible or prohibitively expensive art form, with many believing that expensive cameras, extensive knowledge of complex video editing programs, and massive budgets are required to make a project worthwhile. Part of the HCYFF's goal is to make filmmaking accessible to anyone, and in this proposal I will show how this will be possible, and precisely how the money from this requested grant would be distributed to make filmmaking as equitable as possible to everyone who would like to participate in the HCYFF.

Please don't hesitate to contact me at mcatalano@umass.edu or 781-856-6505 to arrange a meeting or with any questions.

Warm regards,

Matthew Catalano

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1. Statement of Need

Across both Massachusetts and the United States, the need and urgency for arts education and participation among young people persist as essential components of a holistic and enriching educational experience. While funding for such programs may face challenges and declines, the importance of fostering creativity, critical thinking, and cultural awareness through arts education cannot be overstated. Participating in the arts goes beyond merely fostering creativity, it cultivates skills that are integral to a well-rounded education and crucial for the future success of individuals and society at large.

Unfortunately, a great many children in the United States are no longer receiving adequate arts education or are participating in the arts to the extent that they should, with many receiving no opportunities for engagement with the arts whatsoever.¹ Arts programs are often cut from schools' budgets, typically (and wrongly) due to them being seen as an unnecessary indulgence as compared to science, math, English, and social studies related education.² Furthermore, private arts programs and instruction are often prohibitively costly, meaning only wealthier families will have access to them. Rural areas of the United States have been hit particularly hard by slashed arts budgets in schools,³ with Massachusetts' Hampshire County

¹ American Academy of Arts & Sciences. Art For Life's Sake: The Case For Arts Education. *American Academy of Arts & Sciences*. 2021. <https://www.amacad.org/sites/default/files/publication/downloads/2021-Art-for-Lifes-Sake.pdf>.

² Rabkin N, Hedberg EC, NORC at the University of Chicago. Arts education in America: What the declines mean for arts participation. National Endowment for the Arts. February 2011. <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/2008- SPPA-ArtsLearning.pdf>.

³ Donovan L, Brown M. Leveraging Change: Increasing Access to Arts Education in Rural Areas. Educational Theater Association. <https://schooltheatre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/leveraging-change-increasing-access-arts-education-rural-areas.pdf>.

being no exception.⁴ Based off of census data for Hampshire County⁵ and a study conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts, it can be estimated that roughly 43% of children in Hampshire County receive no arts education in school, and 73% receive no arts education outside of school. Additionally, the National Endowment for the Arts found that merely 9% of U.S. adults had ever taken a class or lesson in filmmaking, either in school or out.⁶

Yet despite dwindling budgets and ever-decreasing access to the arts for young people, experts and educators have continued to extoll the virtues of arts education and engagement, citing innumerable benefits to those who engage with the arts from a young age. The Brookings Institution found that students who received significant engagement in the arts, both in and out of school, were far less likely to receive disciplinary infractions, had higher standardized testing scores, and were found to be more compassionate than students who did not receive the same opportunities.⁷ Arts engagement and education have additionally been found to increase understanding and appreciation for other cultures, improve one's engagement with their community, and build important career skills such as problem-solving and critical thinking.⁸ A study performed by the National Endowment for the Arts even showed that the positive impacts of youth art education and engagement carry well into adulthood, with those who had received

⁴ The Republican Newsroom. "Fine Arts Programs Being Cut at Schools Across Western Mass." *Masslive*. https://www.masslive.com/news/2009/08/fine_arts_programs_being_cut_a.html. Published August 1, 2009.

⁵ United States Census Bureau QuickFacts. "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Hampshire County, Massachusetts." *Census Bureau QuickFacts*, www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/hampshirecountymassachusetts/PST045222.

⁶ National Endowment for the Arts. "How a Nation Engages With Art: Highlights From the 2012 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts." *National Endowment for the Arts*, Sept. 2013. <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/highlights-from-2012-sppa-revised-oct-2015.pdf>

⁷ "New Evidence of the Benefits of Arts Education | Brookings." *Brookings*, 27 June 2023, www.brookings.edu/articles/new-evidence-of-the-benefits-of-arts-education.

⁸ American Academy of Arts & Sciences. Art For Life's Sake: The Case For Arts Education. American Academy of Arts & Sciences. 2021. <https://www.amacad.org/sites/default/files/publication/downloads/2021-Art-for-Lifes-Sake.pdf>.

arts education in their childhood being more likely to earn a college degree and “significantly less likely to be involved with the criminal justice system.”⁹ A film festival in particular will encourage and teach participants skills that could either transform into a future career path, or be used throughout the rest of their lives. Acquiring proficiency in video editing software provides access to countless industries that consistently require adept video editors. Enhancing screenwriting skills not only refines one's abilities in writing but also extends its benefits to other forms of expression. Furthermore, engaging in filmmaking, known for its collaborative nature, imparts valuable interpersonal skills that are applicable across various aspects of one's life.

It is for these reasons that I believe a youth film festival open to submissions from all young people ages 18 and under living in Hampshire County would be of great benefit to the region and its people. Clearly, the need to encourage young people to engage with the arts (especially filmmaking) is needed, and although this is a nationwide issue and not at all exclusive to Hampshire County or Massachusetts, no progress will be made at all without a starting place.



Figure 1

⁹ Elpus K. Arts Education and Positive Youth Development: Cognitive, Behavioral, and Social Outcomes of Adolescents who Study the Arts. National Endowment for the Arts. 12BC. <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Research-Art-Works-Maryland.pdf>.

2. Statement of Request

We are seeking \$10,000 from the Mass Cultural Council to create the Hampshire County Youth Film Festival (HCYFF), a local film festival aimed to promote creativity and arts engagement among youth up to age 18 in Massachusetts' Hampshire County. We are requesting the grant from the Mass Cultural Council due to their mission statement of advancing "the Commonwealth's creative and cultural sector by celebrating traditions and talents, championing its collective needs, and equitably investing public resources"¹⁰ firmly aligning with the proposed festival's goals.

The HCYFF would provide a chance for local youth to engage and experiment with their creative side to create a short film, culminating in a screening of all submitted films at local independent theater Amherst Cinema, along with a mock awards ceremony celebrating the best submitted films. The aim of the festival is to provide an all-inclusive space for participants to make a film. This is achieved financially by providing editing software and film equipment to participants in need, and creatively, by accepting and screening all submissions (with a few exceptions) without curating or handpicking favorites.



Figure 2

¹⁰ Who we are – Mass Cultural Council. Mass Cultural Council. <https://massculturalcouncil.org/about/who-we-are/>. Published August 29, 2023.

3. Description of Proposed Work

a. Objectives

The main objectives of the proposed festival are as follows:

- To ensure, to the best of our abilities, that all participants are on a “level playing field” when making their films. This means that participants in need will have access to the same or similar editing software and filmmaking equipment as their peers, and ensures that no film will have a clear edge over any others due to monetary reasons.
- To accept any and all submissions that fit within the guidelines. We want the festival to encourage any and all young filmmakers to submit their work to be as inclusive and encouraging as possible, and do not want to selectively screen films or require a submission fee.
- To adequately reward participants for their efforts, so as to attract participants and to positively reinforce participants’ engagement with the arts. This will be achieved via screening all films in a real movie theater, alongside hosting an awards ceremony for the best films.

b. Area of Accepted Film Submissions

The HCYFF will only accept film submissions from youth up to age 18 currently living in Hampshire County, Massachusetts. There are a variety of reasons for this decision. The first is to keep the festival local and the budget as low as possible. As stated before, the need for arts engagement among children is desperately needed all across the United States, but in order to feasibly gain funding from the Mass Cultural Council, it is much better to keep the festival local.

Additionally, expanding the scope of the festival would likely mean that we could no longer screen every film due to sheer number of submissions that would be received if we accepted submissions from a wider area. Lowering the scope of the festival to only encompass a few towns would likely result in not nearly enough participation and thus render the festival much less impactful.

Therefore, Hampshire County has been determined as the sweet spot from which to accept submissions from. As of 2022, the census found that out of an estimated 162,588 inhabitants of Hampshire County, 16.9%, or 27,477 are under 18, and thus are eligible to submit for the HCYFF. This may seem like too high of a number to still allow for the screening of each submission, but looking at data for other film festivals shows that 27,477 should be a manageable number. The National Film Festival for Talented Youth (NFFTY), which accepts submissions from those aged 24 and under nationwide, typically only receives 1,200-1,500 submissions total each year.¹¹ The New Hampshire Film Festival, another small festival that allows submissions from anyone, anywhere, receives only roughly 700 submissions per year.¹² Looking at these festival's submission numbers instead raises questions about if the HCYFF will gain enough submissions. To combat this, a marketing strategy will be employed to make as many people knowledgeable about the HCYFF as possible, a distinct difference between the HCYFF and the NFFTY or New Hampshire Film Festival, which do not initiate widespread marketing campaigns due to the sheer amount of submissions that could be received.

¹¹ “Our Organization — NFFTY.” *NFFTY*, www.nffty.org/our-organization.

¹² Savych, Olha. “New Hampshire Film Festival 2023 - Dates.” *Rove*, 18 Mar. 2023, rove.me/to/new-hampshire/new-hampshire-film-festival#:~:text=The%20annual%20New%20Hampshire%20Film,receives%20about%20700%20film%20submissions.

Combining a strong marketing campaign with the knowledge that only a fraction of our target audience will submit a film, we can likely estimate roughly 50 submissions that will be shown for our first festival. Due to our desire to screen every submission and our need to keep budgets low, another requirement for participants is to keep their film under 10 minutes long.

c. Marketing Strategy

The main marketing strategy for the HCYFF to draw participants will be to employ two approaches: advertise via flyers and stickers around towns and in local schools, and run advertisements on Instagram. I and other personnel will, with the permission of local high school and middle school administrators, post flyers on school bulletin boards, especially within art departments if the schools have them. The most important towns and schools to advertise in are Amherst, Northampton, Hadley/South Hadley, Easthampton, and Belchertown, as these are the most populous towns within Hampshire County. Additionally, stickers advertising the HCYFF will be placed around towns on light poles, bus stops, and other obvious public places as a fun and youthful way to gain attention. 1000 color flyers and 400 small vinyl stickers printed at local Hadley print shop Amherst Copy and Designworks total to \$412.

Instagram is another excellent place to advertise due to the concentration of young people using the platform, as well as its focus on visual media which is conducive to short film and those who may wish to participate in the festival. At an estimated rate of .50 cents per click due to advertising locally and not being in a competitive marketing field, we can invest \$500 to be seen by 1000 people, most of whom will likely be our target audience.

d. Film Equipment & Editing Software

As previously mentioned, a main goal of the HCYFF is to ensure that participants have as much access as possible to basic film equipment and editing software so as to not let participants who have access to superior equipment get an edge over those who don't. The single most important factor in this goal is the following: **All submitted films must be entirely shot on a mobile device.** The most prohibitively expensive piece of filmmaking equipment is cameras and lenses, often costing thousands upon thousands of dollars for only midrange equipment, making it impossible for us to provide cameras to participants at any reasonable budget. Nowadays though, 95% of teens have a smartphone in their pocket¹³ with a camera that is more than capable of filming high-quality video. This one limitation immediately eliminates the largest equipment cost that participants would face in making their films. Therefore, the festival's budget can be redirected towards other equipment, notably tripods and dollies. These are two pieces of equipment that are inexpensive yet can increase the quality of a film's production immeasurably. Average quality smartphone tripods can be found online for \$15 each, and dollies for \$40 each. At these reasonable prices, we can comfortably manage to purchase 50 of each piece of equipment to meet potential demand, totaling \$2,750.

Video editing software is yet another requirement needed to create a film, and although professionals use expensive and complex programs, making a short film absolutely does not necessitate the need of one of these programs. Plenty of powerful software is free, most notably iMovie which can be installed on any iPhone, meaning that participants with an iPhone could shoot and edit their film all on the same device. iMovie is also free for Mac laptops and desktop computers. Additionally, many school computer labs will have some sort of basic (or better)

¹³ Atske, Sara. "Teens, Social Media and Technology 2022 | Pew Research Center." *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech*, 11 Dec. 2023, www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/08/10/teens-social-media-and-technology-2022/.

editing software available to use for students, another invaluable resource for participants who otherwise won't have access to editing software. These resources and tips will be available on the HCYFF's website, so as to help direct participants towards an option to allow them to edit their film. In the event that a participant has zero access to a device with editing software, a personnel member will communicate with that participant's local library and school to see if the installation of software could be arranged on a public computer. With these considerations in mind, the budget for editing equipment can be kept low, and be factored in along with general other costs.

e. Festival Website and Resources

In order to communicate various information to participants, a website for the festival will be created. This site will be advertised throughout the marketing campaign, with a QR code printed on every flyer and sticker, and a link on every Instagram ad. The website will feature:

- A “resources” section. This will be a collection of links to various helpful resources and tutorials from around the web on how to use tripods, dollies, common editing software, basic film techniques, and more. While we would not create these resources ourselves, they would all be carefully selected to be easily understandable by all and family-friendly.
- Sections outlining basic and vital information to participants. This includes important dates, submission guidelines, the location of Amherst Cinema, personnel information, and more.
- A registration form. All participants will be required to fill out a form stating their name, age, address, contact info, if they will need equipment, how many others will be

assisting them in the creation of their film, and an agreement to follow all festival and submission guidelines. This is to help us keep track of all participants and their needs and ensure that, to the best of our abilities, they are from Hampshire County and following our guidelines. We can also use this list to send mass emails updating all participants on any changes that may have occurred. This will also likely be how we will request all final film submissions.

- A general contact form for anyone who wishes to reach out with any inquiry.

If the festival is successful and continues to be a yearly event, this website can be updated with pictures, award winners, posting of past films, and more.

f. Festival Schedule

Assuming this proposal takes an average time of 3-6 months from submission to funding, the festival's schedule will be as follows:

HCYFF Schedule

Date	Action
From funding-August 2024	Festival gains funding. Purchase marketing materials and create festival website.
September-December 2024	Distribute marketing materials and begin Instagram campaign to coincide with school schedules.
January-May 22nd, 2025	Assist participants where needed, finalize festival dates with Amherst Cinema, purchase awards trophies.
May 23rd-June 6th, 2025	Final date for submissions. Ensure they are all in on time and meet requirements, final touches for screening event. Watch all films and decide on awards.

June 7th and 8th, 2025

Final date for submissions. Ensure they are all in on time and meet requirements, final touches for screening event. Watch all films and decide on awards.



Figure 3

4. Description of Facilities

The screening of films and awards ceremonies will take place over a Saturday and Sunday evening at local independent theater Amherst Cinema. Amherst Cinema is a small theater but at 300 total seats, has robust enough seating capacity to comfortably seat all participants and parents. Seats are not unlimited however, and will be available on a first-come, first-serve basis, with parents of participants and participants themselves being the only ones guaranteed seats. Each screening day will feature films from differing age groups, with 3 hours on Saturday evening being dedicated to screening films from participants aged 12 and younger, and 5 hours on Sunday evening for participants aged 13 and over. This is because all 50 participants, with roughly 10 minutes of film to be shown each, screened in one day would become 8-hour long marathon screening session that would likely cause many viewers to balk and lose interest. Additionally, this is done to have two separate awards ceremonies, and so that much younger children's films are not competing against much older children's films.



Figure 4 - Amherst Cinema Exterior

Most importantly, we will have to pay Amherst Cinema to rent out their theater for the amount of time needed for screenings. For 8 hours of total rented time during weekend evening hours, it will cost us \$1,600.

Each age-grouped screening will have its own awards ceremony. Amherst Cinema's theaters double quite nicely as a stage for presenting awards, and after all screenings for the day are finished, winners in each category will be announced and asked to come up to the stage to receive their award, which will be in the form of small trophies. Categories for films will be similar to the Academy Awards categories, and include Best Picture, Best Animated Feature (if applicable), Best Actor/Actress, Best Screenplay (only for 13 and up age group), and Best Costume/Makeup Design. Awards will be determined by a panel of judges.



Figure 5 - Amherst Cinema Theater

5. Personnel

Five total people will be involved in organizing and planning the festival. There are three main personnel who will work to plan, market, and organize the event, with another two personnel to be hired and serve as judges during the awards ceremony. These figures do not include the employees of Amherst Cinema who will be working and being paid by their own employer for staffing the theater during screenings and awards ceremonies. Myself, Thomas Machacz, and Isabel Guilmette will perform all duties relating to website creation, marketing, organizing, viewing submitted films, communicating with participants, and serving as judges for awards. We are all massive fans of film in all its forms, and have each written thorough critiques and analyses of various films. We also all appreciate the impact that film has had on our lives—and a drive to share it with others and inspire young people in the same way we were inspired.

We all also have experience with film equipment and editing software, and the knowhow to teach others how to use such equipment and software when needed. Thomas has studied filmmaking at Ithaca University, Isabel has created numerous short films of her own, and I have done paid work in the past extensively editing video content for a marketing firm. Additionally, Isabel and I have the requisite experience with HTML and CSS needed to create the festival's website. We will all help one another with the workload of this project, instead of having rigid roles for each team member. We all have responsibilities and work outside of this festival, and as such it is imperative that we can take over the work of another team member in a pinch if need be.

Additionally, we will hire two additional people to assist with judging during the festival. These two extra personnel will be interviewed and vetted by myself, Thomas, and Isabel to ensure that they are a good fit for the role and most importantly, have a love of film that they

want to share with others. Potential candidates for this role could include film critics for local papers, or local teachers and professors of film, editing, or other related classes/courses. These judges will watch all the films beforehand, and confer with myself, Thomas, and Isabel ahead of the screenings to determine winners for each category and age group. These judges will also be present at the screenings to assist in presenting awards.

As for payment, Thomas and Isabel, and I will all be paid simply a lump sum of compensation of \$1000 each rather than calculating an hourly wage. We believe that this is a fair amount of compensation for the amount of work put into the project, which would take place on and off over the course of a year. As for the two hired judges, we feel that paying them \$25 an hour for their time is a fair system. Considering the judges will spend roughly 8 hours for an initial viewing of the films, 8 hours at the screenings, and some additional extra time to speak with us and stay at the screenings, they will be working around 20 hours total. This comes out to \$500 total for the judges, and \$3000 total for myself, Thomas, and Isabel.

6. Budget

A table with a complete overview of the festival's budget can be found below.

Complete Budget Breakdown

Description	Quantity	Cost Per Item	Total
Color flyers	1000	\$0.30	\$300
Small vinyl stickers	400	\$0.28	\$112
Instagram marketing campaign	1000 clicks	\$0.50/click	\$500
		Marketing Total:	
Tripods	50	\$15	\$750
Dollies	50	\$40	\$2000
		Equipment Total:	
Main personnel payment	3 people	\$1000	\$3000
Additional Judge payment	2 people	\$25/hour, 20 hours each	\$500
		Personnel Total:	
Amherst Cinema rental	8 hours	\$200/ hour	\$1600
Additional costs (unforeseen costs, software, trophies, additional payment, decorations for screenings, etc.)	N/A	N/A	\$1238
		Grand Total:	
			\$10000

7. Summary

Should the Mass Cultural Council choose to provide a grant of \$10,000 to this project, they would be fostering an environment where young people can have a chance to freely explore their creative side without worrying about prohibitive costs or school programs being cut. Those who participate in this festival, and engage with the arts at large will gain innumerable benefits that will carry on throughout the rest of their life, like increased cultural sensitivity and compassion, improved critical thinking and performance in school, learn teamwork, problem-solving, and other invaluable career skills, and strengthen their connection to their community.

The HCYFF is different than other similar arts programs in that it appeals to an art form that many young people are already quite familiar with in many ways. Social media platforms with a focus on short-form video content have skyrocketed in popularity in recent years to become the most dominant form of social media, with 67% of teens using TikTok, 95% using YouTube, and 62% using Instagram.¹⁴ The ability to be a filmmaker has been given to nearly all of us—the encouragement to become one has not, however. The proposed film festival would act as such encouragement: a tangible, exciting reason for aspiring future filmmakers in the area to follow through on their ideas and be rewarded for doing so. Other art forms don't quite have the mass appeal that video does these days, and for that, I think a film festival would capitalize on the trend and draw the attention, engagement, and effort of young people.

¹⁴ Atske, Sara. "Teens, Social Media and Technology 2022 | Pew Research Center." *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech*, 11 Dec. 2023, www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/08/10/teens-social-media-and-technology-2022/.

8. End Matter

a. Bibliography

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Who we are – Mass Cultural Council. Mass Cultural Council. <https://massculturalcouncil.org/about/who-we-are/>. Published August 29, 2023.

b. Image Credits

Cover Image:

“Children in Movie Theater.” *Parent Map*, 9 June 2023, www.parentmap.com/article/cheap-family-movies-around-puget-sound.

Figure 1:

“Children Eating Popcorn in a Theater.” *Michele Borba*, 11 Jan. 2021, micheleborba.com/building-moral-intelligence-and-character/100-movies-for-kids-5-to-17-that-teach-9-crucial-empathy-habits.

Figure 2:

“Young Adults With Script and Camera.” *Sparks Arts*, sparksarts.co.uk/nurturing-young-filmmakers-why-does-it-matter.

Figure 3:

Wesleyan University. “Isaiah and Violet Practice Using the Canon Videocameras.” *The Wesleyan Connection*, 25 Oct. 2017, newsletter.blogs.wesleyan.edu/2017/10/25/wesleyan-film-outreach-volunteers-teach-local-youth-about-filmmaking.

Figure 4:

Amherst Cinema. “Amherst Cinema Exterior.” *Amherst Cinema*, amherstcinema.org.

Figure 5:

Stansbury, David. “Amherst Cinema Main Screen.” *Trip Advisor*, www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g29510-d729395-Reviews-Amherst_Cinema_Arts_Center-Amherst_Hampshire_County_Massachusetts.html.