

Guidelines for Best Practices in Film Regulations and Policies

Encouraging film production is an economic development tool that can provide temporary jobs for local residents, generate local revenue and bolster local businesses. One of California’s signature industries, motion picture production is an essential source of economic activity, tax revenue, jobs and tourism in California. It contributes \$30 billion dollars annually to our state’s economy while supporting over 190,000 well-paying entertainment industry jobs.

It is always important to balance the needs of a production company with the concerns of local government and the local community. Once a city or county has created a film ordinance (see [model filming ordinance](#)), they should consider establishing permit policies and regulations that are “film friendly” with the intent to increase or retain filming.

A. Consider the Following “Best Practices” When Creating Film Policies:

1. Rapid film permit issuance: 2 – 5 business days from permit application submission to permit issuance.
2. Establish standard hours for film activities: typically 7:00 a.m. – 10:00 p.m. for residential zones (with the option to extend hours with the approval of affected residents and business owners).
3. Establish reasonable permit fees. Compare fees charged by similar surrounding cities and stay within or below those limits. Some cities/counties reduce or waive permit fees for accredited student or charitable productions (while still requiring a permit) to encourage more filming.
4. Establish and post cost recovery fees for the reimbursement of city or county personnel (i.e., application review, monitors, police, fire, traffic control).
5. Establish a film permit requirement but waive any requirement for a business license, as most film activities are temporary.

6. The California Film Commission discourages the requirement of a bond. (Productions must pay additional fees to secure a bond, and the city/county must then rely on the bond company to collect damages from the production company). Instead, a refundable security deposit against damages is preferred.
7. Appoint a key liaison for coordinating permits. Be sure to appoint a back-up liaison. The liaison will be required to make decisions as the community representative prior to and during filming, and should therefore have full endorsement and authority of the local jurisdiction. The liaison should be aware of any previous film production within the community and remain sensitive to local citizens' concerns.
8. Create a centralized filming section on your city/county website clearly listing all film regulations, permit and insurance requirements, fees and liaison contact information.
9. Consider adopting an ordinance that protects the orderly conduct of a permitted film event from persons who interfere.

B. Specific Guidelines for Filming Regulations:

1. Timely issuance of film permits: An applicant will be required to submit a permit request at least two business days prior to the date of the requested production activity. If such activity interferes with traffic or involves potential public safety hazards, an application may be required at least four business days in advance.
2. Notification: All residents and merchants within a 200 feet radius of the film location must receive notice of filming dates, times, location address and production company contact at least 24 hours prior to the first film activity. It is most effective to notify affected residents and business owners in person or via flyer, unless a property is inaccessible.
3. Parking: When parking production vehicles on a public street, residents and merchants impacted by the parking must receive notice at least 24 hours prior to the arrival of the vehicles. All those impacted should also be notified of the city/county's procedures for towing vehicles parked in areas where "no parking" signs have been posted.

4. Surveys: Require a survey of affected residents and/or businesses within a 200 ft. radius when the filming includes extraordinary activities such as a street closure, pyrotechnics, excessive noise, low flying helicopters or drones, requests to film beyond the standard hours and requests to film for extended periods of time. Note: the California Film Commission recommends a policy requiring no more than 80% signature approval.
5. Clean up: The permittee shall conduct operations in an orderly fashion with continuous attention to the storage of equipment not in use and the cleanup of trash and debris. The area used shall be cleaned of trash and debris upon completion of filming at the scene and restored to the original condition before leaving the site.
6. Filming on Private Property: An applicant is required to obtain the property owner's permission, consent and signed location agreement, in addition to a permit, for use of the property not owned or controlled by the city/county.
7. Flood Control (if applicable): When filming in a flood control channel, an applicant must vacate channel when water is released. Please note that when filming in or on flood control properties, the agency must be named as an additional insured.
8. Public Works Department (Road and Streets): If the applicant must park equipment, trucks, and/or cars in zones that will not permit it, temporary "No Parking" signs must be posted with approval of the local authority. The applicant must also obtain permission to lay and safely mat cable across sidewalks or from generator to service point.
9. Traffic Control: For filming that would impair traffic flow, an applicant must use California Highway Patrol (CHP), County Sheriff or local law enforcement personnel and comply with all traffic control requirements deemed necessary.
 - a. An applicant shall furnish and install advance warning signs and any other traffic control devices in conformance with the [Manual of Traffic Controls, State of California Department of Transportation](#). All appropriate safety precautions must be taken.

- b. For any lane closure or intermittent traffic control (ITC), the period of time that traffic may be restricted will be determined by the city/county, based on traffic volumes for location and time of day. For state-owned freeways and roads, lane closures and ITC will be determined by Caltrans.
 - c. Traffic shall not be detoured across a double line without prior approval of the appropriate department representative.
 - d. Unless authorized by the city/county, camera cars must be driven in the direction of traffic and must observe all traffic laws.
 - e. Any emergency roadwork or construction by city or county crews and/or private contractors, under permit or contract to the appropriate department, shall have priority over filming activities.
10. Municipal Parking Lots: When parking in a municipal parking lot, an applicant may be billed according to the current rate schedule established by the city/county. In order to assure the safety of citizens in the surrounding community, access roads to beaches, which serve as emergency service roads, must never be blocked. No relocation, alteration, or moving of beach structures will be permitted without prior approval.

C. Other Considerations to Encourage Filming:

A city or county that wishes to actively recruit filming as part of its economic development plan should also consider providing the following services or incentives to encourage filming.

1. Provide service and support to each production company from the initial contact to the close of the production, including problem solving on film related matters. Support should include coordination between the production company, local residents and businesses and the city/county.
2. Offer fee-free city/county-owned properties for use as filming locations. Charge applicants for cost recovery only – review time, police, fire or security monitors.
3. Waive permit fees.
4. Provide free vacant office space and / or free parking lots.

5. Create an online database of location photos.
6. Upload location photos to the California Film Commission website to market a local region.

Final Note:

Being film-friendly includes reasonable guidelines and fees and a city/county's ability to assist productions with their location needs. Overly-restrictive regulations (i.e., requiring a building permit in order to temporarily attach anything to a building/structure or having to obtain 100% written consent of all affected residents and business owners) will only serve to discourage filming in your community.

While there are jurisdictions that believe filming activities should cause no disruption to the community, and the California Film Commission clearly understands the desire for filming to have as little impact on residents and businesses as possible – the nature of a film shoot is that it can sometimes be intrusive, even though the impact may be minimal and all good faith efforts are made to mitigate the impact from filming activities. However, there are few concerns that can't be successfully resolved when cities/counties work with production companies to make filming a positive experience for all involved.

Additional resources for jurisdictions interested in recruiting film production can be found on our [Community Filming page](#).