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# NewFilmmakers Los Angeles (NFMLA) Opens Doors for Independent Filmmakers and Creators

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**Learn how Larry Laboe and the team at NFMLA are helping filmmakers and creators of all backgrounds succeed in the challenging world of Hollywood.**



Question marks linger for filmmakers following the months-long Hollywood labor disputes of 2023. Despite resolutions across the board, including successful negotiations in 2024 for IATSE and Teamsters labor agreements, the film and TV industry remains slow for both above and below-the-line talent, leaving emerging filmmakers to wonder, “Is there really a future in Hollywood for me?”

The answer to that question is a resounding ‘YES,’ thanks to the work of non-profit organizations like [NewFilmmakers LA \(NFMLA\)](#). A champion of emerging and diverse filmmakers and storytellers from around the world, NFMLA provides a forum where filmmakers can be recognized for their contributions, have open audience discussions about their work and connect with industry professionals on subjects like distribution, production and representation.

## A new kind of film festival

Two decades ago, while working in New York, NFMLA Executive Director and Co-Founder, Larry Laboe, attended an unconventional film festival called NewFilmmakers New York. The festival featured emerging filmmakers, and rather than showing 200 films in the span of a few days, like at Sundance, Cannes or TIFF, the NewFilmmakers Festival ran a smaller slate of roughly 15 films every week for 52 weeks. Laboe thought it was a brilliant format; when he moved to Los Angeles in 2007, he co-founded what is today the thriving NewFilmmakers LA.

“I thought, ‘what a cool concept!’ To give visibility to, and amplify work by, emerging filmmakers all throughout the year,” Laboe recalls. “One of the first things that independent filmmakers are looking to do when they finish an independent project is to get eyeballs on it—by audiences and by industry professionals.”

Today, NFMLA screens films monthly at the 500-seat theater in South Park Center in Downtown Los Angeles and at Sunset Gower Studios in Hollywood. During these events, NFMLA presents red carpet screenings of documentary, short and feature films that have been selected from submissions from all over the world, followed by a Q&A with each film’s director.

With their film festivals flourishing after 17 years, NFMLA has expanded into nearly ten other initiatives, including writing intensive sessions and educational talks to equip their alumni to continue honing their craft. NFMLA runs [CineSessions](#), a High School Mentorship Program serving over 220 students annually in partnership with the California State Senate, Bridges/Larson Foundation, Snap Foundation, and NBCU Academy. Comcast NBCUniversal has joined forces as well, hosting 144 of these students on the NBCUniversal lot each year.

Together with his ever-expanding team, Laboe seeks out talented independent filmmakers and content creators from around the world, providing them a platform to show their work and access resources that aren’t always readily available when hustling up the Hollywood ladder. Many of the stories screened at NFMLA festivals receive critical acclaim, which speaks volumes about what audiences want to see on screen.

This success has the power to shift the narrative of Hollywood for the better, as Laboe explains: “We don’t lean into any one group of filmmakers. We have filmmakers in our programs who are historically underrepresented within the entertainment industry ecosystem, and I would say the same is reflective of the characters we see in their stories. We have a lot of international content. We have representation from everybody and characters and stories that are reflective of all communities.” He continues, “I think people are more cognizant of who has historically been left out of storytelling. Many filmmakers today are trying to be more inclusive with their stories and trying to incorporate, if not centered around, at least featuring characters that have been traditionally excluded from film and TV.”

## What happens at the NFMLA Film Festivals?

NFMLA hosts 12 film festivals a year, focused on different themes and communities all around Los Angeles. On average, 20 new films are shown each month, totaling 240 new films a year!

In the 60 days leading up to a screening, Laboe and his team, led by NFMLA’s programming director Bojana Sandic, select a cohort of approximately 20 filmmakers from the pool of applicants to be showcased at the festival. Currently they are preparing for the [Latinx and Hispanic Cinema Festival on September 21](#).

During the two months ahead of each filmmaker’s festival screening, NFMLA hosts Zoom meetings to help them prepare. “We give [the filmmakers] an orientation for how the festival is going to work, what is expected of them, and tips and tools for how to best navigate being part of the festival,” explains Laboe. He continues, “We also support the filmmakers on how to reach out to press, and most importantly, we solicit who they need access to for networking.”

To effectively support the filmmakers, NFMLA consults with the cohort, gathering details on what types of professionals would be most beneficial for the group to meet with during the festival. While the festival itself is a two-day event for the public, it’s a seven-day festival for the filmmakers, beginning on the Monday before the screening. Based on each cohort’s recommendations, Laboe and his team, led by NFMLA’s educational and special programs manager Emma Hughes, book at least eight industry meetings that the filmmakers will have throughout the week of their screening. These meetings typically include an agent, manager, distribution executive, development executive, and a film or TV finance executive.

When the public portion of the festival arrives, the two days are broken out into panels, screenings and networking, followed by a day of press coverage for the filmmakers:

- Friday consists of two virtual panels, each lasting 90 minutes
- Saturday is the big exhibition day featuring screenings, Q&A’s, a networking mixer, open bar, and other social activities

Upon finishing the festival, filmmakers receive an on-camera interview for [MovieMaker](#) magazine, along with a written section about their film so they can walk away with published press coverage to promote their film and even their next upcoming project. These efforts are also supported by NFMLA staff members Francesca Escarraga, George Gomez, and Lauren Muniz.

Laboe is passionate about not just giving these creators a platform to share their work, but he also equips them with a toolkit and connections to propel their career forward—long after the festival has ended. “I think the festival offers them a way forward in their career by gaining access to industry professionals throughout the week, building those relationships, and seeing an audience react to their screening.”

This kind of assurance and support is the foundation of NFMLA’s mission. “When filmmakers leave feeling inspired and confident in themselves, they continue doing what they’re doing,” Laboe says.

## How NFMLA supports their alumni

Over its 17-year history, NFMLA has grown to a network of over 3,500+ alumni who have screened films at their festivals, and there is no shortage of success stories!

One such success story is that of [filmmaker Elaine Del Valle](#). In the Spring of 2023, a development executive at Marvista Films met Del Valle, while screening her film ‘All Is Well’ at the InFocus: Female Cinema festival. As a result of that meeting, this development executive connected Elaine with directing the feature film, ‘Midnight Hustle’ for Tubi.

“There are many instances where our alumni are getting agents, managers or development deals after screening, and even getting paid and brought on board to direct or write,” Laboe says.

Another stand out alum is writer and director, [Gabriela Ortega, who was hired as a writer by Sony](#) and has pitched to [Eva Longoria’s UnbeliEVABLE Entertainment](#), thanks to her NFMLA meeting with Sandra Conditto, former senior vice president of international production and development at Sony, and current president of film and television at UnbeliEVABLE.

To see more media coverage and read up on the success of NFMLA Alumni, explore the stories [here](#).

Whether filmmakers have gone to film school or not, NFMLA provides ongoing education to help creatives stay on top of their game. “We’re in an industry where we never stop learning, because things are always evolving,” says Laboe, adding “You may have learned something in film school a year or two ago, but the industry – whether it be the business or creative side of it – is not functioning that way anymore. People are always innovating. Companies are always doing things differently based on new mandates, and that impacts the kind of content they’re looking for. I think whether you’ve been to film school or not, NFMLA educational initiatives are important for all independent content creators to further their career and craft.”

For [NFMLA members](#), there are two different professional development programs:

1. **New Narratives** is a \$20,000 grant funding program supporting four different projects with a \$5,000 cash grant to be applied toward any phase of a filmmaker’s project—from the concept stage all the way to traveling and submitting to film festivals. Awards for this year’s program will be announced on September 25th.
2. The STARZ TV Writers Program is a TV writer staff program hosted in partnership with STARZ and The National Association of Latino Independent Producers (NALIP). This program supports education, small grants or honorariums of \$5,000 each for early career staff writers looking to get staffed on television shows.

## How to get involved with NFMLA

If you’re an indie filmmaker and ready to get involved with NFMLA, here’s how:

### Submit your film.

NFMLA screens films year-round, but you’ll be involved a couple of months before the screening if your film gets selected. NFMLA accepts projects from creators of all backgrounds in addition to their InFocus programming, which places a special emphasis on diversity, inclusion and region. Ready to submit your film? [Here’s where to do it](#). Just be sure to read up on their [terms and conditions](#) to ensure your project qualifies.

### Stay in touch.

Sign up for the email list on the [NFMLA website](#) and subscribe to their social channels on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), [X](#), or [LinkedIn](#). They have many different types of film festivals to get involved in that might be the right fit for your project. By staying in the loop, you’ll be first to know when applications open for their next festival.

### Become a member.

Members have access to exclusive NFMLA events that include networking opportunities, film screenings, educational panels, and even a film submission discount. Whether you’re seasoned in the film and TV industry or just getting started, [there are great opportunities to meet filmmakers and industry business professionals while growing in your craft. Learn more about NFMLA memberships.](#)

NFMLA thrives today because of loyal partnerships and generous volunteers who want to see talented content creators from everywhere soar in their careers. Because when they succeed, it expands the types of stories and characters we see on our screens and pushes the industry forward toward a more honest Hollywood.

There are three ways to support NFMLA today:

1. **Teaching:** Accomplished working film professionals (Line Producers, Composers, Costume Designers, etc.) can reach out to NFMLA if they are interested in teaching an educational session to share their insight with emerging filmmakers.
2. **Connecting:** Decision Makers at studios, networks, and production companies are always invited to give of their time and meet with cohorts to advise and connect them with opportunities. Disney, NBCUniversal, Amazon, Sony, Netflix, CAA, UTA, Warner Bros. Discovery, Paramount, and Skydance are among a few of the many companies NFMLA currently works with to line up meetings for their content creators.
3. **Funding:** 85% of NFMLA’s revenue comes from a blend of corporate sponsors and grants (private and government) to help them grow. If someone is interested in sponsoring, reach out at [info@nfmla.org](mailto:info@nfmla.org) and learn more about giving [here](#).

Hollywood may have a long path ahead toward rebuilding a vibrant industry, but thanks to NFMLA, filmmakers don’t need to wait to create. Rather, they can walk confidently forward in growing their craft and communities. The more we continue sharing our stories on screen, the future of filmmaking will not only survive, but it will also thrive.

Film and TV play a monumental part in expanding our perspectives and bringing audiences together over shared experiences. We need these stories. Stories that inspire, change, and entertain us. It’s up to persistent creatives and organizations like NFMLA, who are keeping the flame alive, helping our industry move toward a brighter and impactful future.

Tagged: [Film Festivals](#), [Los Angeles](#), [Independent Film](#), [NFMLA](#), [NewFilmmakers](#)