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Export date: Sat Oct 31 18:50:19 2026 / +0000 GMT

Dufferin Film Festival invites filmmakers to submit short works

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LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

The Dufferin Film Festival is calling on filmmakers across the country to submit their work for the chance come to Orangeville and show their films to an appreciative audience this summer.

Submissions officially opened online on Jan. 11 at filmfreeway.com/DufferinFilmFestival, and there are several dates to keep in mind for filmmakers looking to submit. The official deadline for early-bird submissions is Jan. 30; regular submissions, March 27; late submissions, April 24; and the extended deadline, May 29. The festival takes place from Aug. 14 to 16.

Orangeville has earned a reputation as an arts town, and for good reason. The renowned Theatre Orangeville, the Orangeville Music Theatre, a beautiful public arts collection and more define the town. But the newest entry, the Dufferin Film Festival (DFF), is making waves in its third year.

Now in its third year, the Dufferin Film Festival has become a cornerstone of Orangeville's arts scene. Kelly McDowell, DFF festival director, said that it fills a long-standing gap in a community already known for its strong support of theatre, music, and visual art.

?We have theatre, we have painting, but we have nothing that represents film,? she said. ?We were having a discussion about Dufferin and this area, and how arts and community focused it was and that creating a film experience ? especially when it's focused around Canadian film in our community ? would be really appropriate based on the fact that we're such an art heavy community.?

Built with a clear focus on Canadian storytelling, the festival was designed to be accessible, welcoming, and deeply rooted in its local surroundings, while still attracting filmmakers from across the country.

Rather than competing with large urban festivals, Dufferin Film Festival has carved out its own identity by centring on short films.

?A lot of independent filmmakers, Canadian independent filmmakers, especially those that are just coming up into the industry, finding their base... don't have the money to do feature films,? McDowell said. ?So short films are very accessible for all types of filmmakers, which has been a focus for us since the start.?

This approach allows more filmmakers to be showcased over a three-day period and provides emerging and student creators with meaningful exposure. Submissions are limited to Canadian works, reinforcing the festival's goal of highlighting domestic talent and giving audiences a broad snapshot of voices and styles from coast to coast.

Behind the scenes, the festival operates through a small but dedicated volunteer-driven team that prioritizes relationships over scale.

McDowell said that she is incredibly proud of the team they have put together and the work that they do. Their sense of community and loyalty is not something she wants to lose if the festival expands.

?I will tell you that I'm speaking highly of the whole team at the Dufferin Film Festival... the whole team has really done such a great job at bringing this event to such a professional level,? she said. ?The sense of care that the team puts into it is really astonishing, especially for volunteers. I want to just keep growing this event, but I do want to keep that warm community feeling.?

This sense of community focus continues even behind the scenes at DFF. Alex Caucean, director of film programming, said filmmakers are not treated as anonymous submissions but as active participants in the event, encouraged to attend screenings,

engage with audiences, and connect with one another.

?We like to put them in the forefront, so they get the spotlight; we're just kind of behind the scenes, and a lot of our planning goes into how we make the experience better for the filmmakers,? he said. ?Beyond just screening their film, we have a Q&A session where I am curating various questions based on each film. It's not a bunch of generic questions. They're all curated for the filmmakers.?

This emphasis on dialogue and accessibility has become one of the festival's defining features, setting it apart in an increasingly crowded festival landscape.

That community-first philosophy has paid off. Word of mouth has driven steady growth, with submission numbers increasing year over year and filmmakers returning with strong recommendations to their peers. Caucean said they also try to offer as many discounts as possible, so money is never a deterrent for filmmakers.

?We don't want the submission cost to be the determining factor as to why a filmmaker can't get their film submitted,? he said. ?We are happy to provide either discount, heavily discounted codes or waiver codes to filmmakers who ask us for it.?

As the festival moves further into its third year, Dufferin Film Festival continues to punch above its weight, proving that meaningful cultural experiences don't need to come from major cities or require large sums of money.

On the contrary, the measures DFF uses to save money have slowly begun to change into traditions, according to McDowell.

?There's a point in the festival called the balloon walk, where they take signage and balloons from one event over to the awards event because we don't have enough to cover everything,? she said. ?So we take it from one event and walk it down Broadway to the other event, and we're going to keep that tradition no matter what.?

By keeping its focus on connection, care, and Canadian film, the festival has established itself as both a creative platform and a point of pride for the broader Dufferin community.

For more information on DFF, visit their website at dufferinfilmfest.com, which includes information for guests and interested filmmakers.