LEF Foundation Announces $220,000 in Production and Post-production Grants to New England Documentary Filmmakers

The LEF Foundation has awarded 12 Moving Image Fund grants totaling $220,000 in support of feature-length documentary works by New England-based filmmakers.

The LEF Moving Image Fund invests in feature-length documentary films that demonstrate excellence in technique, strong storytelling ability, and originality of artistic vision and voice. The most recent round of awards includes eight grants of $15,000 to projects at the Production stage and four grants of $25,000 to projects at the Post-production stage.

Drawing on approaches that are lyrical, investigative, participatory, and often deeply personal, this year’s selected projects delve into memories and archives to reconcile past events and imagine different futures, while others rooted in the contemporary moment consider actions both individual and collective that have the potential to shape tomorrow.

Ultimately, the funded projects represent just a small portion of the exciting work being pursued by New England-based nonfiction filmmakers.

The formal grant review process began in early winter when LEF received 68 eligible letters of inquiry at its January 2023 deadline for Production and Post-production. These proposals were evaluated by a group of three New England-based filmmakers serving as peer readers, in addition to LEF staff.

“In facilitating this initial evaluation by local peer readers, one of our aims is to connect New England filmmakers to the varied ideas, people, and places inspiring their peers,” said Lyda Kuth, Executive Director. “We hope this results in a deepening sense of commitment and belonging to the dynamic documentary landscape in the region.”

Of these initial inquiries, 30 projects that most aligned with LEF’s funding criteria were invited by LEF staff to submit a full application, including 21 finalists in Production and 9 finalists in Post-production. All 30 full applications were then evaluated by a peer review panel made up of filmmakers and professionals from across the U.S. who represent a diversity of perspectives on documentary. Peer reviewers remain anonymous and change at every round.

“We are grateful to all of the filmmakers who shared their projects with LEF, and all of the peer reviewers at the letter of inquiry and panel stages who evaluated these applications with careful consideration for each project’s creative intentions,” said LEF Program Director Gen Carmel. “All of the reviewers approached this process with first-hand knowledge of the
complex challenges and unknowns that only reveal themselves through the process of making a film."

“We know how much effort goes into creating grant applications for LEF’s reviewers to make informed decisions. As a regional funder that seeks to support the New England filmmaking community in ways that go beyond its grant making, LEF is committed to offering peer review feedback by phone to every applicant who requests it. These phone calls are also a way for LEF to improve our process by learning from applicants about their experience.”

In addition to this group of grantees, LEF also awarded $45,000 to 12 projects in Early Development and Pre-production earlier in the fiscal year. In total, LEF will be distributing $265,000 in funding to documentary productions over the course of its 2022–23 fiscal year.

See the attached list of grantees.

For filmmaker bios, see LEF’s Moving Image Fund Grant Directory.

The next Moving Image Fund grant deadline is Monday, August 7, 2023 for New England-based directors and producers seeking Pre-production and Early Development support for feature-length documentaries. Please check lef-foundation.org for details regarding LEF Moving Image Fund guidelines and eligibility. You can subscribe to LEF’s mailing list to receive a monthly newsletter and the latest updates about grantee news, filmmaker opportunities, and calls for Moving Image Fund submissions. For more information on the Foundation or its funded projects, please contact Program Officer Matthew LaPaglia at matthew@lef-foundation.org.
A Body To Live In
Directed by Angelo Madsen Minax (VT)
Produced by Lyle Ravi Kash
A BODY TO LIVE IN is a film about the luminary, enigmatic, and complicated subcultural figure, Fakir Musafar (1930-2018), who is widely known to have brought body modification to North American queer subculture in the 1970s. A photographer, performance artist and ritualist, Musafar’s work to merge body modification with BDSM and spiritual practices, mobilized an entire generation of LGBT activists, artists, and thinkers.

Chelsea (working title)
Directed & Produced by Sabrina Avilés (MA) and Jenny Alexander (MA)
Three community leaders of Chelsea, a Latinx immigrant city that has long been overlooked, have never given up on their community. Despite great odds they are fighting for a better future for their city. What happens when you believe in yourself when no one else does?

Early Mourning, Tarpon Springs
Directed & Produced by Jodie Mack (VT)
An auto-ethnography by way of a personal excavation and study of Floridian car culture. A bereaved sibling unearths the details of her sister’s death in a car accident in the state of Florida uncovering three types of ghosts; individual, collective, and ecological.
From the Land
Directed by John Hulsey (MA)
Produced by John Hulsey and Ahsen Nadeem
In Downeast Maine, Revolutionary War reenactors stalk the forest floor with muskets and cannons. Loggers traverse this same forest with chainsaws and axes to source wood for the last remaining paper mill in the region—one that has survived the industry’s downturn by producing millions of boxes for Amazon each year. The mill is connected to a dam that a group of Indigenous Riverkeepers are fighting to demolish in order to restore the ancestral pathway of the Alewife fish—a keystone species at risk of disappearing. Where the river meets the Atlantic, a small Passamaquoddy fishing vessel sets out before dawn to collect lobster traps, crossing the border into Canada in accordance with ancestral tradition but in violation of international law. These are some of the vignettes captured in From The Land, a film that follows eleven people whose lives are intimately linked to the changing fate of the land, under conditions of economic downturn, climate change, and broken treaties.

The Fuck You Spark
Directed by James Rutenbeck (MA) & Harmon dot aut
Produced by Sabrina Avilés (MA)
Harmon dot aut's autobiographical plays are a deep dive into the feelings and experiences of a childhood on the spectrum. In this hybrid feature documentary, a group of neurodivergent actors tap into dot aut's painful renderings of life in rural Kansas, revealing their own deeply personal stories as autobiography and fiction collide, folding
time in cinematic space with “real time” on the theatrical stage.

**Nine**
Directed & Produced by Rachael DeCruz (MA) and Jeremy S. Levine (MA)
Nine is a cinematic feature documentary about the moving relationship between Gerald Hankerson, a Black 54-year old community leader in Seattle, and his father figure Henry Grisby. Their bond, forged across generations and decades, gives both men the power to push back against an oppressive criminal justice system.

**She Cried That Day**
Directed & Produced by Amanda Erickson (RI)
The crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives refers to the injustice of violence that is devastating Native communities throughout the United States and Canada. She Cried That Day is an investigative documentary chronicling this deadly crisis through the eyes of the women on the frontlines in New Mexico as they fight for justice, battle police and societal apathy laying bare the complex story of America’s treatment of Indigenous Peoples. She Cried That Day shows us first-hand how the MMIWR crisis affects a family, a State, and the Nation, leaving the audience inspired by the strength of Indigenous culture and community.

**Softly in all directions**
Directed by Anna Barsan (MA)
Produced by Shannon Fitzpatrick, Patrick Brăila, + Charlotte Cook
Following a vibrant community of activists and the creation of Romania’s first museum of LGBTQ+ history, Softly in all directions
combines multigenerational stories to reinscribe queer existence into the public record. Forgotten histories entwine with the lives of present-day archivists through a polyphonic saga of political resistance, imagination, and desire in the shadow of the country’s communist past.

**POST-PRODUCTION ($25,000)**

**How to Clean a House in 10 Easy Steps**
Directed by Carolina Gonzalez Valencia (ME)
Produced by Carolina Gonzalez Valencia and Brenda Avila- Hanna
Beatriz Valencia, a domestic worker in the U.S. and Carolina, her daughter-filmmaker, collaborate to create the fictional character of a writer. Together, mother and daughter capture the slippage between truth and fantasy, in a hybrid documentary that tells a story about immigration, labor, dreams and the power of fiction to spark emancipation.

**Kaksori!**
Directed & Produced by Shirley Kim-Ryu (MA) and Eben Portnoy (MA)
Across rural South Korea, a wild punk counterculture promises collective catharsis to the working-class. But as singing beggars get rich, a battle erupts over the fate of an ancient tradition.

**My Disability Roadmap (working title)**
Directed by Dan Habib (NH) and Samuel Habib (NH)
Produced by Dan Habib
Turning 21, Samuel Habib wants to date, leave home, go to college – but he has serious health, communication and mobility
challenges. Can a community of disability activist rebels help him follow his dreams?

**Night Fight**
Directed by Khary Saeed Jones (MA)
Produced by Khary Saeed Jones and Kendra Taira Field (MA)

It’s been five years since I was followed in darkness by a racist vigilante down back roads in rural Ontario. During that time, I have documented—at first, unwittingly—the emergence of the versions of myself that were born on that day and in the weeks, months, and years afterward. As I return to the same town to find answers, I have begun to question whether it is only me who has returned, and if answers are what we want, or something else. Nonfiction wrapped in fiction, "Night Fight" charts my attempt to find answers to these difficult questions.

##