LEF Foundation Announces $45,000 in Pre-production and Early Development Grants to New England Documentary Filmmakers

The LEF Foundation has awarded 12 Moving Image Fund grants totaling $45,000 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, a resonant story or idea, and originality of artistic vision and voice. The most recent round of awards includes six grants of $5,000 to projects at the Pre-production stage and six grants of $2,500 to projects at the Early Development stage.

Early Development grants provide initial seed funding for projects, and Pre-production grants are offered to filmmakers who, while still at an early stage, have been able to shoot and edit sample footage of their current project.

Rooted in New England, as well as places farther afield nationally and internationally, this year’s funded projects trace movements, memories, and possible futures through time and across geographic and psychic boundaries. They consider critical questions about exile, friendship, grief, neurodiversity, queer histories, and structural injustice, among many other intersecting themes. Reflecting intimate and innovative perspectives by New England documentary filmmakers, the projects embody a rich and diverse vision of what documentary cinema can be, traversing animation, archives, auto-ethnography, auto-fiction, poetry, and participatory techniques.

“Some filmmakers are drawn to subject matter that is local and rooted in the particular, whether through verité portraits of housebound elders in Vermont and their caregivers, or personal reflections by a filmmaker growing up multiracial in Maine,” says Lyda Kuth, Executive Director. “Some explore broader themes that involve tackling the bias in library cataloging, others the rising tide of social justice movements through focusing on a Black community leader and activist in Washington State working to get his former cellmate and father-figure out of prison.”

At LEF’s June deadline for Pre-production and Early Development, 28 eligible applications were received by filmmakers working throughout New England. Three peer readers from the local filmmaking community who represent a diversity of perspectives on documentary were invited to review, discuss, and make recommendations on the applications. These peer evaluations informed LEF staff’s final grant decisions.
“We are always grateful to see first-hand the commitment of the local film community to building a network of peer support for the work coming from New England,” said Kuth.

All applicants who applied for LEF funding for either Pre-production or Early Development will have the opportunity to receive review notes from staff to learn how their proposals were evaluated by the peer reviewers and to ask any questions.

“Offering regional support of any kind, especially for projects early in their production, is a responsibility LEF doesn’t take lightly,” said LEF Program Director Gen Carmel. “We want to ensure that each New England filmmaking team who applied at this round, regardless of the grant decision, has the opportunity to receive constructive feedback about their grant proposal as their project continues to take shape. Likewise, our feedback calls with applicants are a chance for the LEF New England team to learn more about how we can continue to improve the Moving Image Fund grant program.”

In addition to this group of grantees, LEF will also award $190,000 to 10 projects in Production and Post-production later in the fiscal year, following the next January 2023 application deadline. In total, LEF will be distributing $235,000 in funding to documentary productions over the course of its 2023 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 will be in January 2023 for New England-based directors and producers seeking Production and Post-production support for feature-length documentaries. Please check lef-foundation.org for details regarding LEF Moving Image Fund guidelines and eligibility. You can subscribe to the LEF New England newsletter for the latest updates on deadlines, grantees, filmmaker opportunities, and more. For further information on the Foundation or its funded projects, please contact Program Officer Matthew LaPaglia at matthew@lef-foundation.org.
PRE-PRODUCTION ($5,000)

A Body To Live In
Directed by Angelo Madsen Minax (VT)
Produced by Lyle Kash
A Body To Live In is a film about the luminary, enigmatic, and complicated subcultural figure, Fakir Musafar (1930-2018). A self-identified shaman and ritualist, Musafar’s work in body modification, performance art, and photography, as sexual and spiritual practices, mobilized an entire generation of artists, punks, and queers.

CAREGIVERS
Directed by Jesse Kreitzer (VT)
Produced by Jesse Kreitzer and Jennifer Latham (VT)
In rural Vermont, homebound elders live in social and geographic isolation. Quietly, with humor and dignity, they struggle through the challenges of daily life and come to rely on a network of caregivers as their lifelines. Told over the course of four seasons and featuring live orchestration, CAREGIVERS is a meditation on companionship and the defiant act of living and dying at home.

Early Morning, Tarpon Springs/Lindsey’s Colour Service [working title/s]
Directed and Produced by Jodie Mack (VT)
Early Morning, Tarpon Springs/Lindsey’s Colour Service, a feature-length film, is an auto-ethnography by way of a study of Floridian car culture. A bereaved sibling unearths the details of her sister’s death in a car accident, uncovering three types of ghosts; familial, historical, and ecological.
**My Skin and I**  
Directed and Produced by Milton Guillén (ME, VT)  
A filmmaker explores his memories from the social uprisings of 2018 in Nicaragua, and the ongoing political tensions that have led his family to exile. Nostalgia mixes with a sense of deep disconnection in a series of letters to his friends and family. Through cinematic and therapeutic exercises, he begins to question his own recollections and when his sense of detachment began.

**Nine**  
Directed and Produced by Rachael DeCruz & Jeremy S. Levine (MA)  
*Nine* tells the story of Gerald Hankerson, the only person in Washington State to receive clemency while serving a sentence of life without the possibility of parole. The film follows the Black 53-year old community leader as he campaigns to get his former cellmate and father-figure out of prison and fights for the men he left behind. Gerald met Henry Grisby—a man he came to lovingly call “Pops”—in Washington State’s most notorious maximum security prison, where both were serving life sentences for crimes they didn’t commit. *Nine* is ultimately about the enduring bonds of friendship forged across generations and decades, and the power it gives both men to push back against an overtly oppressive criminal justice system.
The Quilting Group
Directed by Jenifer McShane (CT)
Produced by Jameka Autry
Quilting has always been a powerful art form that is deeply tied to making emotional connections. In Licking, Missouri, an unexpected quilting group has started to turn heads and warm hearts -- a group of men inside a men's prison are on a mission to make a personalized birthday quilt for every foster child in the largest county in Missouri where the prison is located.

EARLY DEVELOPMENT ($2,500)

Father/Daughter Dance
Directed and Produced by Mae Hoffman (MA)
What happens to the bond between father and daughter when it is severed at the moment that childhood ends? Father/Daughter Dance searches for the guidance that one man never gave by uncovering the lost history of his life, relationships and art, so that he may finally be put to rest.

Las Queremos Vivas (We Want Them Alive)
Directed and Produced by Michelle Falcón Fontánez (MA)
Las Queremos Vivas (We Want Them Alive) tells the story of Puerto Rican women who were murdered at the rising culture of violence and femicides on the island. The documentary questions how colonialism and machismo culture have impacted the rampant epidemic.
Locked Out
Directed by Mike Silva (MA)
Produced by Mike Silva and Monica Cohen (MA)
In a city that struggles to find a balance with escalating economic inequality and rampant evictions, several cultures both clash & coalesce while trying to stay afloat.

Spectrum Theatre Ensemble (working title)
Directed by James Rutenbeck (MA, RI)
Produced by Sabrina Avilés (MA)
In Providence, Rhode Island a company of neurodiverse theatre artists express their interior lives and sensibilities on stage.

Untitled Library Documentary
Directed by Jill Baron (VT) and Sawyer Broadley (MA)
Produced by Melissa Padilla
Libraries today encompass vast print and digital resources networked through cataloging and classification systems. These organizing systems have long played a crucial role in the preservation and growth of knowledge, but who decides how this vital information is described, categorized, and made available? Our film, featuring the voices and stories of library workers who have tackled bias in library cataloging, explores how these systems impact the way we think about the world, and ultimately the future of our societies.

We May Not Be Who We Think We Are
Directed and Produced by Eli Kao (ME)
We May Not Be Who We Think We Are seeks to destabilize racial binaries, problematize “Whiteness,” and imagine non-hierarchical and equitable relations. The film will also describe how the filmmaker, who
grew up multiracial in what is deemed “the whitest state,” wrestles with the discourse on race and the role of science in justifying 20th-century racist policies in Maine and beyond.

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