



2026.7.17-7.25

**The 20<sup>th</sup> FIRST International Film Festival General  
Guidelines for Competition Submission and  
Participation**



## 1. About FIRST International Film Festival

Since its inception in 2006, FIRST International Film Festival (abbr. FIRST IFF) has been a film festival-style service platform in China, focusing on discovering and promoting young filmmakers and their early works. FIRST IFF advocates youth film culture, enriches artistic creation, intervenes in the ecological cycle of the film industry, and preserves the memory of contemporary film history.

As an independent market-based platform with public responsibility, FIRST consistently injects fresh energy into the Chinese film industry, contributing to the sustainable development of the film ecosystem.

The 20<sup>th</sup> FIRST International Film Festival will take place from July 17, 2026, to July 25, 2026, in Xining, Qinghai Province, People's Republic of China.

## 2. Competition Sections

FIRST IFF presents three competition sections:

- **Main Competition**

FIRST IFF highlights emerging Chinese-language filmmakers, celebrating a commitment to free and independent cinematic expression. Films selected for the Main Competition, both feature-length and short, will compete for ten awards, including Best Narrative Feature, Best Documentary Feature, and Best Short Film. For detailed information on the Main Competition awards, please refer to Article 3 of these regulations.

- **FIRST FRAME**

The FIRST FRAME invites both feature and short films that examine gender and identity through the life experiences of women and diverse individuals onscreen, encouraging cinematic practices that move beyond fixed gender narratives. The section awards Best Feature Film and Best Short Film determined by an independent jury.

- **FIRST PIONEER**

The FIRST PIONEER focuses on short films that challenge formal conventions and expand cinematic language, foregrounding international perspective, humanistic engagement, and critical reflection on modernity, while inviting viewers to participate in the making of new audiovisual forms. The section awards the Best Short Film, determined by an independent jury.



### 3. Awards

MAIN COMPETITION	Best Narrative Feature	
	Best Documentary	The award is presented with a prize bonus of RMB 50,000 for the director.
	Grand Jury Prize	
	Best Short Film	
	Best Animated Short Film	
	Best Director	
	Best Screenplay	
	Best Performance	
	Best Artistic Originality	Honoring the filmmaker of a narrative feature who has made a significant contribution or breakthrough in the fields of cinematography, editing, sound, or production design.
FIRST FRAME	Spirit of Freedom	Honoring the filmmaker who defy conventional cinematic definitions, critically confront the realities of the present, and demonstrate a strong sense of independence and avant-garde intent.
	Best Feature Film	The award is presented with a prize bonus of RMB 100,000.
FIRST PIONEER	Best Short Film	The award is presented with a prize bonus of RMB 10,000.
	Best Short Film	The award is presented with a prize bonus of RMB 50,000.
Other Awards	Audience Award	The winner is decided by the votes cast after screenings during the festival and is endowed with prize bonus.
	Outstanding Filmmaker of the Year	Presented to a backstage industry practitioner who actively transforms, leads, or advances the filmmaking and industry landscape for emerging filmmakers, independent, and arthouse cinema.



## 4. Submission Guidelines

### 4.1 General Regulations

- Only films that have been submitted and registered can be considered for selection.
- Film submission and registration are exclusively accepted online at <https://www.firstfilm.org.cn/portal/form/submission/info>.
- Submissions to FIRST IFF are open to features (min. 60 minutes) and short films (max. 30 minutes incl. credits).
- Submitted film should be completed after January 1, 2025.
- World premieres are prioritized across all sections; however, there is no minimum premiere status required for submission.
- For narrative features, the film should be among the director's first three independently directed narrative features. In the case of co-directed work, each of the directors must fulfill the condition.
- Films that have already been theatrical/online released in mainland China or have scheduled the release before the FIRST IFF festival dates are not eligible.
- Films, including any updated versions, which have been submitted to or publicly screened at previous FIRST IFF may not be accepted again.

### 4.2 Eligibility

To be considered for participation, a film must meet one of the following conditions:

- The director must be a citizen of the People's Republic of China (including Hong Kong SAR, Macau SAR, and Taiwan). In the case of co-directed work, one director's qualification is sufficient.
- The majority of the film's dialogues must be in the Chinese language (including Mandarin, Cantonese, and other dialects). Dubbed foreign-language films are not eligible.
- A minimum of 50% of the filming locations must be situated within the borders of the People's Republic of China (including Hong Kong SAR, Macau SAR, and Taiwan).
- A minimum of 50% of the cast and crew, including the director, screenwriter, cinematographer, production designer, composer, editor, sound effects, main cast, and producer, must be citizens of the People's Republic of China (including Hong Kong SAR, Macau SAR, and Taiwan).



### 4.3 Submission Deadline and Fee

The 20<sup>th</sup> FIRST IFF calls for entries from January 1, 2026. All submissions are closed before midnight of April 28, 2026, UTC+8.

Films will only be considered for selection after the processing fee is received. The processing fee varies according to the chosen deadline and film type.

	Early Bird (January 1 to February 13)	Standard (February 14 to April 14)	Delayed (April 15 to April 28)
Feature	RMB 300	RMB 580	RMB 980
Short Film	RMB 200	RMB 380	RMB 780

- The submission time is based on the arrival of all submission materials, including preview screeners. Failure to meet the chosen deadline will incur an additional fee.
- No submission fee will be refunded if a film fails to complete submission or is withdrawn from the competition.
- Once the submission deadline has passed, withdrawal of submitted films from the competition is not permitted.

### 4.4 Materials to Upload

#### 4.4.1 Preview Screener

FIRST IFF mandates a preview screener in the following format:

- MOV or MP4 in H.264 encoded video file.
- File size limited to 5G.
- Chinese and English subtitles must be embedded.
- The only acceptable watermark is "FIRST Preview" in the upper right corner of the frame. Kindly refrain from adding any other watermarks to ensure a proper film review by the jury.

The festival accepts work-in-progress preview copies with a minimum requirement of being picture-locked (no editing adjustments). The preview copy of the work-in-progress film must explicitly indicate incomplete parts at the beginning (e.g., pending music replacement, no color grading) using subtitles or intertitles. If selected, a screening version is required before July 1, 2026.



#### **4.4.2 Still Photos and Director's Portrait**

Three to five still photos of the submission and one director's portrait are required for submission.

If you encounter technical problems that cannot be resolved during the uploading process, you may choose to send your materials to the festival programme team by other means, please contact [submission@firstfilm.org.cn](mailto:submission@firstfilm.org.cn) for details.

#### **4.5 Material Replacement**

If replacement of information or material is needed after the submission, please contact [submission@firstfilm.org.cn](mailto:submission@firstfilm.org.cn). At the discretion of the festival, submission materials can be replaced **ONLY ONCE** before the submission deadline. Please note, once the review process initiates, no replacements will be accepted.

#### **4.6 Declaration of Copyrights**

Applicants must ensure the film's originality, affirming legal licensing for music, sound, archival footage, and texts from right holders. Permission for documentary footages from filmed individuals is essential. The applicant is solely responsible for any legal disputes related to copyright or filming permission. FIRST IFF reserves the right to reject films from competition in case of copyright infringement.

### **5. Review Process**

The Selection Committee and the Shortlist Committee will decide the Official Selection films. The ultimate winners will be awarded by the respective section juries.

#### **5.1 Selection Committee**

The Selection Committee comprises the Narrative Feature, Documentary and Short Film committees, each responsible for reviewing submissions in its respective category.

The film will be informed via email of the pre-selection results no later than late May 2026. The pre-selection results will not be publicly announced.



## **5.2 Shortlist Committee**

The Shortlist Committee will determine the finalist line-up for the Official Selection of Main Competition, FIRST FRAME and FIRST PIONEER. All the Official Selection will be announced before late June 2026 and screened during the festival. Submitters will receive a notification email and must promptly acknowledge it.

## **5.3 Jury**

The Jury will decide the award winners among Official Selection films in different competition sections, and the award results will be revealed during the film festival.

# **6. Guidelines for Official Selected Films**

## **6.1 Screening Copy**

A screening copy (standard DCP) of the selected film is mandatory. Except for sound mixing, color tuning, and subtitles adjustment, the screening copy must match the submitted screener. No replacements are allowed during the review process. FIRST IFF, as a platform promoting new films and filmmakers, does not provide screening fees for selected films.

## **6.2 Participants' Obligations**

No film may be withdrawn from the festival program after its participation has been publicly announced. During the festival, no participating film may be screened outside the festival venues prior to its official presentation at the festival.

Participation in the festival necessitates unconditional adherence to all regulations outlined in these guidelines. Producers, distributors, and other individuals or organizations submitting a film must ensure that any third parties associated with the production agree to its participation in the festival.

FIRST IFF reserves the right to rule on any cases not provided for in these guidelines.

## **6.3 Screening Schedule**

Each selected film can be screened up to three times during the FIRST IFF in Xining, with scheduling at the discretion of the festival. The schedule is subject to written notice from the festival team.



#### **6.4 Presence in Xining**

The key cast and crew of shortlisted films should attend film presentations, Q&As, the awards ceremony, red carpet, and other related events during the festival. FIRST IFF provides subsidies for travel expenses and accommodation.

#### **6.5 Required Publicity Materials**

Information and materials from selected films will be utilized on online media (websites, apps, and social media channels) and print products (festival publications), as well as by third parties for editorial coverage of FIRST IFF. The festival team has the right to edit and publicly use this information. Participants are obligated to submit any incomplete information or materials upon selection.

#### **6.6 Festival Laurels and Logo**

The filmmakers, producers and distributors of all films selected undertake to make mention in their publicity and advertising materials of the selection of the film for FIRST IFF, by featuring the official laurels and logo which will be supplied by the festival after the film is selected or awarded. The laurels and logo must not under any circumstances be modified or altered without the prior permission of the festival.

\*Participation in FIRST International Film Festival by submitting the work and/or accepting FIRST's invitation implies acceptance of the rules and regulations by the filmmaker, producers, and rights holders. The festival team reserves the right to amend the rules and regulations and will announce them in due course. The Chinese text of these rules and regulations is the authentic and binding version.