

**RULE THIRTEEN
SPECIAL RULES FOR THE
DOCUMENTARY FEATURE FILM AWARD**

I. DEFINITION

An eligible documentary film is defined as a theatrically released nonfiction motion picture dealing creatively with cultural, artistic, historical, social, scientific, economic, or other subjects. It may be photographed in actual occurrence, or may employ partial reenactment, stock footage, stills, animation, stop-motion, or other techniques, as long as the emphasis is on fact and not on fiction.

A feature-length film is defined as an original motion picture that has a running time of more than 40 minutes.

II. ELIGIBILITY

- A. To be eligible for awards consideration for the 99th Awards year, a documentary feature film must fulfill one of the following qualifying criteria. The theatrical eligibility period begins on January 1, 2026, and ends on December 31, 2026. The eligibility period for winning a qualifying festival award begins on October 1, 2025, and ends on September 30, 2026.

1. The picture must have been publicly exhibited for **paid admission** in a commercial motion picture theater in one of the six qualifying U.S. metro areas: Los Angeles County; City of New York [five boroughs]; the Bay Area [counties of San Francisco, Marin, Alameda, San Mateo and Contra Costa]; Chicago [Cook County, Illinois]; Dallas-Fort Worth [Dallas County, Tarrant County, Texas]; and Atlanta [Fulton County, Georgia], for a run of at least seven consecutive days. Screenings during the theatrical release must occur at least three times daily, in the same theater, with at least one screening beginning between 6 p.m. and 10 p.m. daily. The seven consecutive days of the theatrical release are required to occur in one venue. The motion picture must be advertised during its qualifying theatrical release in a manner normal and customary to theatrical feature distribution practices and may receive movie critic reviews.

All motion pictures qualifying under this paragraph shall satisfy the theatrical exhibition format requirements of Rule Two, Paragraph 2.B.

OR

2. The film must have won a qualifying award at a competitive film festival, as specified in the Documentary Feature Film Qualifying Festival List, regardless of any prior public exhibition or distribution by nontheatrical means. Proof of the award must be submitted with the entry. The Documentary Feature Film Qualifying Festival List is available at www.oscars.org or may be obtained from the Academy. The eligibility period for winning a qualifying festival award begins on October 1, 2025, and ends on September 30, 2026.

OR

3. The film must have been submitted and deemed eligible in the International Feature Film category in accordance with the requirements stated in Rule Sixteen.

All films must be submitted in a standard theatrical exhibition aspect ratio and in formats currently accepted by the Academy under Rule Two, Paragraph 2.B, no matter which other formats may have been used during their theatrical run or festival screening. Films must have the necessary clearances for commercial theatrical exhibition. Festival clearances are not sufficient.

- B. Works that are essentially promotional or instructional are not eligible, nor are works that are essentially unfiltered records of performances.

- C. Only individual feature works are eligible. This excludes from consideration such works as:
- A multi-part, ongoing or limited series,
 - Episodes extracted from a larger series,
 - Segments taken from a single “composite” program, or
 - Alternate versions of ineligible works.
- D. **Films that, in any version, receive a nontheatrical public exhibition or distribution before their qualifying theatrical release as defined in Rule Two, Paragraph 2.B will not be eligible for Academy Awards consideration.** Nontheatrical public exhibition or distribution includes but is not limited to:
- Broadcast and cable television
 - Pay Per View/Video on Demand
 - DVD and/or streaming distribution
 - Inflight airline distribution
 - Internet transmission

Up to fifteen percent of the running time of a film is allowed to be shown in a nontheatrical medium prior to the film’s theatrical release.

Films qualifying under Paragraph II.A.2 or II.A.3 above are exempted from this rule.

III. SUBMISSION

- A. For films qualifying between October 1, 2025, and June 30, 2026, entrants must submit all submission materials, including the digital upload of the film and captions for streaming purposes, by 5 p.m. PT on **Thursday, August 13, 2026**. For films qualifying between July 1, 2026, and December 31, 2026, entrants must submit all submission materials, including the digital upload of the film and captions for streaming purposes, by 5 p.m. PT on **Thursday, October 15, 2026**.
- B. The picture must be submitted in the same Awards year in which it first qualifies. Motion pictures submitted for the 99th Academy Awards in any category will not be eligible for consideration in subsequent Awards years in any category.
- C. **Tuesday, December 1, 2026**, is the last day to withdraw a film from Academy Awards consideration. Withdrawing and/or failure to complete the qualifying standards may risk future awards disqualification.
- D. Entrants must complete the online submission form located on the Academy’s Awards Submission site and submit to the Academy the digital upload of the film for streaming purposes, including English captions or subtitles, as well as all required submission materials.
- E. Submission forms must be signed by all credited directors and producers. This is to ensure that all potential awards-eligible parties are properly informed of the submission. The digital upload of the film submitted for Academy Awards consideration must be identical in content and length to the print or DCP that qualified. For films with a planned theatrical release before the end of the calendar year, but which will not have a locked picture by the submission deadline, entrants may request an extension for the digital upload of the film only. For films qualifying after **Thursday, October 15, 2026**, entrants must provide documentation from the qualifying theater by the submission deadline confirming that the film will satisfy the release requirements.
- F. The significant dialogue or narration must be substantially in English, or the film must have English-language subtitles.

- G. The Academy may retain for its archives one ProRes file and one DCP of every film receiving a nomination. By submitting a film, the filmmaker agrees that the Academy has the right to make copies and distribute them for voting purposes only.

IV. NOMINEES AND AWARD RECIPIENTS

- A. An entry form naming the intended award recipient(s) and including the signatures of **all** the credited producer(s) and director(s) is required. This is to ensure that all parties are properly informed, and that agreement on the designated award recipient(s) is settled prior to submission.
- B. The award recipient(s) shall be designated by those responsible for the production of the film. The designated recipient(s) should be **the key creative individual(s) most clearly responsible for the overall achievement**. There is a maximum of FOUR designated nominees, one of whom must be the credited director who exercised directorial control, and the other(s) of whom must have a director or producer credit. In determining the number of producers eligible for nomination, a bona fide team of not more than two people shall be considered to be a single “producer” if the two individuals have had an established producing partnership as determined by the Producers Guild of America’s Partnership Panel.
- C. Producing nominees for each film will be listed in order based on agreed-upon producer position as shown in legal billing submitted by distributor.
 - i. Established producing partnerships will be noted with an ampersand symbol (&).
- D. If a producer is named, that individual must have performed a major portion of the producing functions, in accordance with Academy producer criteria, established in partnership with the Producers Guild of America. Production companies, organized groups, or persons with the screen credit of co-director or any credit other than DIRECTOR or PRODUCER shall not be eligible as nominees for the film. Persons with screen credits of executive producer, co-producer, associate producer, line producer, produced in association with or any other credit shall not receive nominations or Academy statuettes. All individuals with a “producer” or “produced by” credit on films that reach the Nominations round will automatically be vetted by the Producers Guild of America. To qualify as a producer nominee for a nominated picture, the producer must have been determined eligible by the Producers Guild of America’s vetting process or successfully appealed so that a resolution may be reached prior to the Nominations announcement.
- E. Final determination of the qualifying nominees for each nominated film will be made by the Documentary Branch Executive Committee.

V. VOTING

- A. All active and life members of the Documentary Branch will be invited to view the eligible submissions in the category and will be required to see a minimum number as defined by the current procedures. Members will vote by secret ballot in the order of their preference for not more than fifteen motion pictures. The fifteen motion pictures receiving the highest number of votes shall advance to the next round of voting.
- B. To determine nominations, all active and life members of the Documentary Branch will be invited to view the fifteen shortlisted Documentary Feature Films. A nominations ballot shall be made available to all members of the Documentary Branch. A member must see all shortlisted films for the ballot to be counted. Members shall vote in the order of their preference for not more than five motion pictures by secret ballot. The five motion pictures receiving the highest number of votes shall become the nominations for final voting for the Documentary Feature Film award.
- C. Final voting for the Documentary Feature Film award shall be restricted to active and life members of the Academy who have viewed all of the nominated documentary feature films.

VI. OTHER RULES

- A. Documentary feature films submitted in this category may also qualify for awards in other categories if they meet the specified requirements and submission deadlines.
- B. The Documentary Branch Executive Committee shall resolve all questions of eligibility and rules.