

2025 Annual Report: West Virginia Film Industry Investment Act

Introduction:

Pursuant to WV Code §11-13X-12, the West Virginia Division of Economic Development (WVDED), in consultation and coordination with the appropriate public and private entities, shall promote, foster, encourage, and monitor the development of the film industry in this state as part of its comprehensive economic development strategy for West Virginia and report recommendations for expanding the industry in the state to the Governor and the Joint Committee on Government and Finance annually on or before December 1.

The following information reflects the activity the WVDED has undertaken within the scope of the West Virginia Film Industry Investment Act (WV FIIA) for calendar year 2025.

Mission: The mission of film-related activities within the WVDED is to build, grow, and support a sustainable ecosystem for the film, TV, and creative content production industry within West Virginia. This mission aims to help provide year-round employment opportunities for the state's skilled workforce and, additionally, to build a strong infrastructure of film-related business service providers, ranging from studios and soundstages to rental equipment and post-production services.

Number of staff: There are no full-time dedicated staff to the program within the WVDED. The program is administered by two staff members, both on a part-time basis - one member of the workforce development team and one member of the business attraction team.

Budget: Not specified.

Key Services:

The WVDED has implemented efforts to promote film production in West Virginia by encouraging individuals and companies to do business in West Virginia. These efforts are accomplished through the following key services:

- Administering the WV Film Industry Investment Act, an economic development tool that comes in the form of a tax credit allocation based on a percentage of a company's qualified project spend in West Virginia
- Teaming up with partners to conduct workforce trainings to generate employment opportunities for West Virginia residents
- Maintaining the Film Office web-based database for locations, crew and professional services, as well as logging and monitoring production projects that inquire.
- Connecting business prospects to West Virginia's workforce and business service providers.

- Being an active liaison between business prospects, government agencies, communities and property owners. Additionally, assisting business prospects with mapping research, logistical and technical support
- Teaming up with Film Pittsburgh's Teen Screen program through a Benedum Foundation grant to promote WV made films for free to West Virginia middle and high schools.
- Actively connecting West Virginia filmmakers and filmmaking groups to additional funding opportunities and resources
- Connecting interested entities and economic developers interested in film studio infrastructure investment in West Virginia to build out a film industry ecosystem for long-term success.

Workforce Training Initiatives:

Our WV Film Office has prioritized building and fostering a film industry workforce for projects filmed in West Virginia by teaming up with organizations like the West Virginia Filmmakers Guild and at film fests around the state. Through these partnerships, the WVDED was able to support film industry workshops, camps, panels and networking opportunities around the state.

Networking Events: The year 2025 was a strong one for industry networking as the WVFG and the WV Film Office partnered to host five filmmaker socials across West Virginia—bringing together more than 260 professionals. These events (held in Morgantown, Huntington, Martinsburg, Clarksburg and Charleston) created opportunities for filmmakers to meet, collaborate, share current projects, and build new relationships to build out industry here. The turnout and enthusiasm at each gathering clearly demonstrated the ongoing need for regular, statewide meet-ups to help strengthen and grow West Virginia's film community.

Workforce development

Collaborated to enhance West Virginia film festivals with industry training workshops:

- Topics included : Screenwriting, script to screen production, stunts and creating a safe set, virtual production for young filmmakers, practical effects, funding for filmmakers, music synching and licensing, animation, filmmaking as a career (youth) and others

Results as of December 2025:

- Helped host, promote, and/or sponsor over 20 workshops/presentations that helped educate nearly 400 individuals across the state. *Previous Film Office averaged 3-5 film industry trainings annually.
- Demonstrated WV as a viable location for TV, Film, and creative industry careers.
- The workshops/presentations/outreach had a total cost of just over \$28,000. Costs were reduced through collaboration with native WV film professionals and other organizations..
- Partnered with sponsors like Marshall University, Appalachian Arts Academy, WV Filmmakers Guild, film festivals and other arts organizations.

Ongoing outreach efforts:

Additionally, the WVDED has had consistent outreach across the state by participating as guest speakers at WV Economic Development Conference, at Rotary clubs, at West Virginia

University, Marshall University, WVU Film Club, Governor's Academy for Arts, Culture and History, Arts in Our Communities conference, at regional film festivals, high schools, and other educational institutions to make students aware of, and to connect them to, film workforce opportunities in West Virginia.

An early effort to solidify workforce training has included a letter and vocal support for Marshall University to transform its video production major into the state's first BFA program in Filmmaking. Marshall started the state's first dedicated Filmmaking degree program in the Fall of 2024. That program's existence has already attracted multiple out-of-state filmmakers to shoot in West Virginia.

Business Recruitment Program:

The WVDED has taken a comprehensive approach to understand, connect with, and support the film and TV production business through the following activities since July 1, 2022:

Industry Tradeshow and Event Attendance:

- Displayed a booth at LocationsExpo during the American Film Market in Los Angeles (November 2025) in partnership with Berkeley County CVB and County Commission.
- Attendance at SXSW Film and TV Conference in Austin, Texas (March 2025).

In-state engagement:

- Participation in state and regional economic development and tourism conferences and business meetings.
- Regional engagement with WV businesses to educate them about their potential role in the film industry.
- Leveraging media - The office has worked with Commerce Communications to leverage media of all platforms: newspapers, magazines, TV, radio, podcasts and blog appearances to spread the word frugally for free through "earned" media. In 2025, we've racked up 51 pages of links to "good news" media stories about WV made films, music videos, and TV productions shot in West Virginia
- Focus on helping businesses understand the economic impact of bringing films to their areas.

Promotion at film festivals and premieres:

- Attendance at more than a dozen film festivals and film premieres around the state.
- Promotion, connection, and recruitment of in-state filmmakers and production companies
- Leveraging local, regional and state media to cover the film industry.

Membership and Associations:

- Renewal of membership in key film industry associations: Film USA (free membership for state film offices).
- Membership into the Indie Arts Media South a group of Southern filmmakers and industry professionals

Networking and Meetings:

- Meetings with more than 100 different productions.
- Constant networking and outreach to film industry professionals globally, particularly those from WV or with ties to West Virginia.

Infrastructure Emphasis:

- Asset mapping for infrastructure development: Identification of current studios & exploration of sites and buildings for potential transformation into studio space.
- Meetings with interested film industry companies looking to expand in West Virginia.

Funding and Support:

- Compilation and connection with additional funding sources:
 - WV venture capital funds.
 - Grants and other sources.
- Assistance and connection of WV filmmakers to additional funds for project development and growth of the film industry in West Virginia.

Film Industry Investment Act Program Applications

In 2025, the WVDED approved applications for ten productions as eligible for the tax incentives that have filmed in locations across the state. One project of the ten did not come to fruition due to lack of funding. Many of these projects are now in the process of compiling expense verification reports and filling out subsequent applications required to be awarded the actual tax incentive. In total, the nine eligible productions reflect an estimated \$26,210,576 in **estimated** direct production and post-production expenditures in West Virginia. The ten productions are listed below:

- *Stolen By A Serial Killer* - TV motion picture, filmed in Marion and Monongalia counties
- *Mothman Prophets* - TV Motion picture, filmed in McDowell, Mercer, Fayette counties
- *Seven X* - Feature length motion picture, proposed to be filmed in Lewis and Monongalia counties. This production will have to reapply as eligible in the future, as they did not begin principal photography within 120 days of the approval issued.
- *River* - Motion picture, filmed in Monongalia, Preston and Marion counties
- *Black Creek* - TV series pilot (in the Prison Break universe), filmed in Ohio and Marshall counties
- *MidAir* - Feature length motion picture, filmed in Berkeley County
- *Valley of The Shadow* - Direct to video motion picture, filmed in Lewis county
- *Gun On Second Street* - Feature length motion picture filmed in Marshall and Ohio counties
- *The Cryptid* - Feature length motion picture filmed in Mercer county
- *Swipe Left Season* - Feature length motion picture to be filmed in Mercer county

Project Highlights in 2025:

In addition to the projects that plan to leverage the tax incentive, many more nationally-viewed TV shows and films have utilized services provided by the WVDED. Just a few of those larger projects include:

- Meta's 2026 Super Bowl commercial
- Mr .Beast video (No. 1 YouTube creator) with Dig Deep
- Black Creek/Prison Break - HULU TV Pilot (Disney/20th Century)
- Discovery Channel *Homestead Rescue*
- Discovery Channel *Expeditions Unknown*

- *ABC News 20/20*
- Oliver Anthony Music Video
- Charles Wesley Godwin concert film
- *Annihilator Unleashed* (Bollywood drama)
- *Barnwood Builders*
- *Fly Rod Chronicles*
- *Whitetail Frenzy*
- Independent WV-made documentaries: *Breaking the Mould* (Blenko), *Freeland: A Blackwater Story*, *Lost River World: The Eastern Legacy*,
- Indie features: *Self-Help*, *Camp Triple Moon*, *Kingdom of Rexamonte*.

Recommendations for Expanding the Film Industry in West Virginia

Recommendation 1: Allocate resources to the WV Division of Economic Development for more full-time, strategic, support to the program:

To accommodate continued growth and activity within the WV film industry, there is an opportunity to allocate a budget within the WV Division of Economic Development for film workshops, industry promotion, and/or full-time personnel to focus on film to assist with the strategy, management, and oversight of the program. For the most recent context, the Film Office budget in 2016 was \$341,177 and the office previously had three staff members. Full-time or additional staffing within the WVDED would be helpful to provide capacity and more comprehensive development assistance to the industry within the state.

Recommendation 2: Implement an application fee to help better administer the program.

To strengthen administration of the Film Industry Investment Act, we recommend adopting a tiered application fee structure. This fee will provide a dedicated revenue stream to offset program costs while ensuring applicants are serious about pursuing the credit rather than casually exploring options. Other incentive programs managed by the West Virginia Division of Economic Development, such as the Build WV Act (\$5,000 fee) and the Tourism Development Act (\$10,000 fee), already require significant fees. Given the range of film projects we typically see—from \$50,000 to over \$12 million in qualified spend—we believe our proposed structure, starting at \$1,000 for entry-level productions and scaling for larger budgets, is both reasonable and aligned with industry practice.

WV Spend (Qualified)	Suggested Fee	Rationale
\$50K – \$199K	\$1,000	Entry-level projects; comparable to states like Louisiana (flat \$500–\$1,000 fees).
\$200K – \$799K	\$2,500	Majority of WV projects fall here; fee reflects mid-range budgets without being burdensome.

\$800K – \$999K	\$3,500	Transitional tier before \$1M; ensures proportional contribution.
\$1M – \$3M	\$5,000	Larger projects with higher administrative oversight; comparable to New York and California fees (\$5K+).
\$3M – \$12M+	\$7,500–\$10,000	High-budget productions; fee remains modest relative to spend but covers compliance costs.

Many states with film incentive programs charge application fees ranging from \$500 to \$5,000, with larger markets like California and New Mexico reaching \$5,000 or more. By comparison, West Virginia’s proposed tiered structure—starting at \$1,000 and scaling with project size—positions the state competitively while remaining accessible to smaller productions.

Recommendation 3: Consideration of modernizing the definition of "Qualified Project"

To enhance West Virginia’s competitiveness in attracting diverse film and digital media productions, West Virginia could consider modernizing the definition of a "qualified project" under the Film Industry Investment Act. Expanding eligibility to include short films (under 40 minutes in length) and digital content, such as web series or streaming platform projects, aligns with industry trends and positions the state to attract smaller, independent creators alongside traditional productions. States like Massachusetts, New Mexico, and Georgia have successfully embraced similar updates, generating economic benefits through increased local spending and workforce engagement across both traditional and digital media sectors. By broadening what is considered a qualified project, West Virginia can encourage innovative projects that capitalize on its unique landscapes and build a sustainable, inclusive creative economy.