

Virginia Film Festival Volunteer Manual

The 39th Annual
Virginia Film Festival
October 21 –25, 2026

This manual is prepared as a guide to the function, policies, and procedures for Virginia Film Festival Volunteers. It is expected that all volunteers familiarize themselves thoroughly with the contents of this manual.

THE ROLE OF A FILM FESTIVAL VOLUNTEER

1. To Welcome and Assist VAFF Patrons and Guests

As an usher, house manager, or event volunteer, you are considered the public face of the VAFF. Your job is to greet, welcome, and help our patrons enjoy our events. There are three important encounters every VAFF patron experiences when they choose to attend our events: with the box office staff, with the front of house staff, and with the event itself. There should never be any reason why any patron is dissatisfied with either the box office or the front of house staff. If they did not like the film or did not enjoy our event, that largely is out of our control, but a patron should not utter a negative word concerning their treatment by the box office staff or the front of house staff.

2. To Represent the Festival

As a VAFF volunteer, you are representing both the VAFF and the University of Virginia while wearing your volunteer badge and working a volunteer shift. We ask that you project a welcoming and professional image with your demeanor and attitude while on the job. Please be helpful, friendly, and respectful in your interactions with the public; VAFF patrons, staff, and guests; as well as your fellow volunteers. And please treat others the way you would want to be treated.

3. To Enforce the Policies of the Festival

As a volunteer, you are required to enforce the policies of the festival described in this manual. The enforcement of policies should always be done in a professional and friendly manner.

VOLUNTEER POLICIES

1. Dress Code

For all volunteer shifts, please wear your 2026 Virginia Film Festival Volunteer Shirt, Badge, comfortable shoes, and pants (please no shorts). Shirt and badges will be distributed at your first shift. Please note the following exception: if you are working during the Opening Night Gala or Late-Night Wrap Party, please wear all black with your volunteer badge.

2. Conduct Code

All volunteers are expected to treat patrons and fellow volunteers with courtesy and respect. We expect you to always use proper language. The answer to a patron's questions should never be "I don't know." If you do not know the answer, find a manager or staff member who can answer the question. If no staff or manager is present, take the patron's contact information so that we can follow up with the patron later.

3. Tardiness

Please report 30 minutes before your shift to your house manager. Transition between shifts can get a little tricky if there's a lot going on at that moment, so please welcome new volunteers reporting to work and help them get settled until the manager can greet them.

4. Commentary Code

All volunteers are expected to refrain from openly criticizing our events, films, staff, and guests in public. To this end, you are encouraged to review our Program so that you can speak knowledgeably when answering patrons' questions.

WHERE TO PARK FOR YOUR SHIFTS

Parking for downtown volunteer shifts is available at the Water Street Parking Garage and Market Street Parking Garage. The festival has set up an account at the Market Street and Water Street Garages. Your venue manager will have parking validation passes on hand to give you at the end of your shift to charge your parking fees to the Virginia Film Festival account.

Parking for Culbreth shifts is available for free at the Culbreth Road Garage across from the Culbreth Theatre.

SCREENING VENUE USHER RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Volunteers may be stationed at the door of the theatre to **scan or tear tickets**. Please check the correct performance and date before you scan or tear each ticket. For ticket scanning, your venue manager will train you on site on how to use the scanners. If the scanners are not working, we will resort to ticket-tearing. VAFF tickets are perforated on both ends. Tear off the end with the bar code and keep it.

Ushers are responsible for managing the entry doors during events. **One ticket must be taken or scanned for each patron entering the theater.** This is a Fire Code regulation at all venues. Exceptions are only made for VAFF staff or any discussants or guests speaking at a specific event. At the start of your shift, the theater manager will fill you in on any reserved or late seating procedures for that site.

Volunteers are also responsible for assisting with standby line management at the Violet Crown. Standby Line Managers will train volunteers to manage standby lines for sold-out performances. Responsibilities include crowd management, handing out standby line cards, and allowing patrons in as seats become available as dictated by the box office.

2. Please know that a **VAFF badge is not a ticket**. A badge alone does not allow a patron access to a screening or event. All patrons must present a physical ticket for the current screening before being allowed to enter the screening venue, due to fire code regulations. Please direct any badge holder without a ticket to the venue's box office.
3. Most of our films are eligible for our **Audience Award**, and our audiences are encouraged to vote after each eligible screening. Our Audience Award voting is done electronically via iPad kiosks in the lobby of the venue. Our patrons may ask our volunteers about the voting process, and our venue managers will advise ushers on site on how to direct patrons to vote.
4. Volunteers may also be stationed inside the theatre to **greet patrons**. Our screenings are general admission, so it is not necessary to direct patrons to specific seats. If an event includes reserved seats for VIPs or filmmakers and guests, make sure that other patrons do not claim them so that they can remain available. You should also keep an eye on empty seats. If a screening is sold out, help late arriving patrons find empty seats. Make sure nobody sits or stands in the aisles or rear of the theater, as this is a fire hazard.
5. Volunteers may be asked to help with **crowd control and line management**. Be friendly and assertive, not timid; try to handle problems tactfully and with a smile. If you run into problems, ask your venue manager for help. During a sold-out screening or event, please make sure coats and purses are not filling up empty seats.
6. **Assisting patrons:** Please assume people with disabilities are independent and capable, and don't assume what kind of help someone needs. If someone requests assistance, please offer to help them and say, "How can I help?" If you see a need, ask, "Can I help you?" Speak directly to the person, not their companion. Be polite and courteous. Listen carefully and patiently, and don't interrupt. Accommodate requests or ask a house manager for guidance.

7. **Food and Drink:** At Violet Crown, food is allowed in the theater (no outside food is allowed). However, no food and drink (except water) are allowed inside Culbreth. If patrons are unwilling to follow venue rules, report them to the house manager.
8. **Answer Questions:** Patrons will ask you many questions (“Don’t I get the other half of the ticket back?” “I just bought this coffee...can’t I take it inside?” “Where’s the bathroom?”) Again, the answer to any and all questions should never be ‘I don’t know’. If you do not know the answer to a question you are asked, refer the patron to the house manager. It is important to be friendly and helpful when dealing with patrons.
9. **You may be asked to act as backstage/audience crew** for pre- and post-film discussions. The house manager may require assistance moving chairs and microphones onto the stage prior to or immediately following the screening.
10. **Clean up** the house between shows. This involves picking up papers and trash, and the VAFF will provide plastic gloves for this task. It is important that all aisles and rows are clear after every show. If someone has spilled food or beverage, please contact the venue’s staff for cleaning support.
11. At the beginning of your shift, the venue manager will inform you of your duties in the case of a **fire or other emergency**. Remember, the patrons will be looking to you for help so be sure to remain calm.
12. **Can volunteers watch films during their shifts?** This is entirely up to each venue manager as different screening venues have different needs during and between screenings. Please check in with the venue manager to ask if he/she needs help with anything before entering the theater to watch the screening. If you do watch a film during your volunteer shift, you are still very much on duty. Please watch for problems like hairs in the picture, picture out of frame, subtitles too low, the sound or picture going off, etc. If you notice any issues inside the theater with sound, picture, audience, etc, please quickly alert the venue manager. If patrons enter the theater in the dark after the screening has begun, please assist them in finding seats. And keep in mind that the venue manager may have to pull you out of a screening if the need arises.
13. **It is important that we treat our Industry guests with respect and consideration.** Our volunteers are part of the protective wall between our guests and those who might crowd them, hound them, or start waving screenplays. It is not appropriate for Festival volunteers to engage in behavior even closely resembling harassment.
14. **If you notice any problems with the venue’s facilities** (i.e. bathroom issues, paper towels need to be restocked, etc), please let your venue manager know immediately.
15. If you are going to be **unable to work** your shift, be sure to contact our **Volunteer Coordinator at volunteer@virginiafilmfestival.org**. Please give them enough notice so that they will have time to find a replacement. Please do not cancel your shift unless it is an emergency. If you are able to find a replacement, even better, as last-minute replacements are often hard to enlist. We depend on you!

PARTY VOLUNTEER RESPONSIBILITIES

Opening Night Gala and Late Night Wrap Party

Volunteers **must be 21 years of age** and should dress in all black while working our Opening Night Gala and Light Night Wrap Party. There should be no drinking of alcoholic beverages during shifts. Please arrive on time, and if you cannot make your shift or will be late, please contact our Volunteer Coordinator ASAP. Duties may include checking IDs, setting up, decorating, cleaning up, checking coats, checking tickets, providing directions, or anything the party planner, host/hostess, or caterer asks you to do. Positions will be distributed more thoroughly on the night of the event.

BOX OFFICE HOURS AND POLICIES

Please familiarize yourself with the box office hours and policies listed below. These appear in our Festival Program and on our website here: virginiafilmfestival.org/tickets

TRANSPORTATION

Many of our patrons may have questions concerning transportation while attending film festival events. We recommend that you suggest Lyft, Uber, Yellow Cab of Charlottesville at (434) 295-4131, or the Free Trolley, info below:

FREE TROLLEY [The CAT Free Trolley services](#) stops around the Downtown Mall and the Grounds of the University every 15 minutes on Monday through Saturday. On Sunday, Free Trolley service is every 30 minutes in the morning, and every 45 minutes in the afternoon. Service Hours are Monday – Saturday from 6:40 AM – 11:37 PM and Sunday 8:00 AM – 5:47 PM.

2026 SCREENING & EVENT VENUES

CODE Building (Panels)

**240 West Main Street
Charlottesville, VA 22902**

Google Maps: <https://goo.gl/maps/s6XoRyThE23Rncw47>

The new CODE Building is located on the end of the Downtown Mall, where the former Ice Park was located. Entrance to the CODE can be accessed from the top of Water Street (do not enter from the Mall side across from Whiskey Jar)



Culbreth Theatre

**109 Culbreth Road
Charlottesville, VA 22903**

Google Maps: <https://goo.gl/maps/pCmaR8KJZPu>

The Culbreth Theatre is housed within UVA's Drama Building alongside two smaller theatres. The traditional proscenium theater is entered from the back of the audience through a set of two doors from the main lobby. The lobby also houses UVA's Arts Box Office. Visit <http://drama.virginia.edu/> for more information.

The Bradbury**300 E Main St****Charlottesville, VA 22902**Google Maps: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/NstcJaKBUMgxhtkB6>

The Bradbury is located on the Downtown mall in an old historic bank building (previously Bank of America). We will utilize this venue for our Opening Night Gala. Visit <https://thebradburydowntown.com/> for more information.

Three Notch'd Craft Kitchen & Brewery**Located at IX Art Park****520 2nd Street SE****Charlottesville, VA 22902**Google Maps: <https://goo.gl/maps/cbirrTYhhoB2>

Three Notch'd Brewery will host Saturday's Late Night Wrap Party this year. Located at the IX Art Park, Three Notch'd offers ample free parking in the lots at the IX and on the street along Monticello Avenue. Visit <https://threenotchdbrewing.com/> for more information.

Violet Crown Charlottesville**200 W Main Street****Charlottesville, VA 22902**Google Maps: <https://goo.gl/maps/AkuDAKHIFZ32>

The Violet Crown movie theater is two floors with the main entrance on the bottom floor. All VAFF screenings will be in the upstairs theaters. The VAFF's main box office headquarters will be located on the bottom floor and patron traffic will be heavy at the entrance. Visit <http://charlottesville.violetcrown.com/> for more information.