REEL
EAST TEXAS

STRATEGIC PLAN

2024 - 2028

Approved

March 3, 2024

Executive Summary

Encapsulating REEL East Texas's strategic plan for 2024-2028

FOCUS

- Film Festival
- Film Industry
- Education
- Historic Revitalization
- Venue Management

CORE VALUES

- Creativity
- Collaboration
- Community Engagement
- Sustainability
- Excellence

The strategic plan outlined herein serves as a comprehensive blueprint for the future of REEL East Texas, spanning the years 2024 to 2028. Guided by our mission to foster a thriving film culture, safeguard historic theaters, and nurture talent within our community, this plan sets forth a strategic framework to achieve our vision of transforming East Texas into a vibrant center for film and creativity.

In 2023, REEL East Texas achieved significant milestones that underscored our commitment to excellence and innovation. Our Film Festival attracted widespread attention, boasting 191 film submissions, securing three major benefactors, and selling 99 tickets. The production of "Through the Ghost" showcased the talent of East Texas filmmakers, while our 4th annual Summer Intensive fully funded 10 students in a comprehensive filmmaking program. Historic Revitalization efforts received a boost with city approval for Texan Theater's yard concept design, and our Venue Management secured a long-term lease, ensuring operational stability. Oktoberfest marked a milestone with sold-out mugs, signaling strong community support.

Building on the successes of 2023, 2024 saw strategic shifts and innovative initiatives to further elevate REEL East Texas. The Film Festival redirected its focus to attract more filmmakers, fostering collaboration and diversity. The introduction of the Annual State of REEL event initiated outreach efforts for educational programs. Historic Revitalization efforts prioritized funding aligned with our mission, and Venue Management expanded operations to include the Old Post Office. Oktoberfest enhanced the festival experience with a redesigned layout, setting the stage for future growth.

The strategic plan unfolds across three distinct phases, each tailored to propel REEL East Texas towards its long-term objectives.

Phase 1: Shore Up Foundational Programs (2024-2025)

Phase 2: Grow into a Recognized Leader (2026-2027

Phase 3: Sustain REEL East Texas & Look Forward (2028)

2023

A Year of Growth & Success

As we reflect on the past year, REEL East Texas is pleased to share the journey of growth and innovation that defined 2023, along with the exciting changes on the horizon for 2024. Together, we've achieved remarkable milestones, solidifying our commitment to nurturing a vibrant film culture in our rural East Texas town.

Film Festival

In 2023, our Film Festival stood as a resounding testament to the extraordinary depth of creativity inherent within our community. With an impressive influx of 191 film submissions, we proudly showcased the rich and diverse talent flourishing in our midst. Notably, the festival garnered the support of three significant benefactors, each generously contributing over $10,000, and drew a robust crowd, with 99 tickets sold. Our success was further bolstered by a highly effective fundraising campaign on Give Butter, enabling us to amplify the festival's growth and extend its profound impact on our community and beyond.

Through the Ghost

A significant achievement for our Film Industry mission was the production of "Through the Ghost," a film embodying the rich storytelling traditions of East Texas. This project not only showcased the talent of our local actors and filmmakers but also underscored our commitment to nurturing and celebrating their creativity.

Our dedication to education and mentorship shone through the 4th annual Summer Intensive, where we fully funded 10 students to participate in a comprehensive filmmaking program. Initiatives like this empower the next generation of filmmakers and storytellers in our community

Historic Revitalization

In the realm of Historic Revitalization, we secured city approval for the concept design of the Texan Theater's yard, marking a significant step in preserving and enhancing this historic landmark. This endeavor highlights our commitment to conserving the cultural heritage of East Texas for future generations.

Our Venue Management achieved a milestone by securing a long-term lease with the city, ensuring stability and continuity in our operations. This achievement lays a solid foundation for our continued growth and success in supporting local artists and events.

In 2024, we're thrilled to announce several significant changes that will further elevate our impact and reach. Our Film Festival will shift its focus to attract more filmmakers, fostering networking, collaboration, and showcasing diverse talent. Additionally, our inaugural Annual State of REEL event has initiated early outreach efforts for recruitment and sponsorships to our educational programs.

Historic Revitalization efforts will prioritize funding based on our mission, and we've partnered with stakeholders to begin the final phase of restoring the Texan Theater to its former glory. Moreover, our successful venue management of the Texan has expanded our agreement with the City of Kilgore to include the Old Post Office, enhancing our capacity to support local artists and events.

STATE OF REEL COMMUNITY SURVEY

Based on valuable feedback gathered from our community survey, we have gained deeper insights into how to enhance our programs and events to better meet our audience needs and expectations. We are committed to using this feedback to drive continuous improvement and ensure that our offerings remain engaging, inclusive, and impactful for all members of the REEL East Texas community.

WHAT IS YOUR PRIMARY REASON FOR ATTENDING THE REEL EAST TEXAS FILM FESTIVAL?

38% to network with filmmakers and industry professionals

34% to support community & economic development efforts

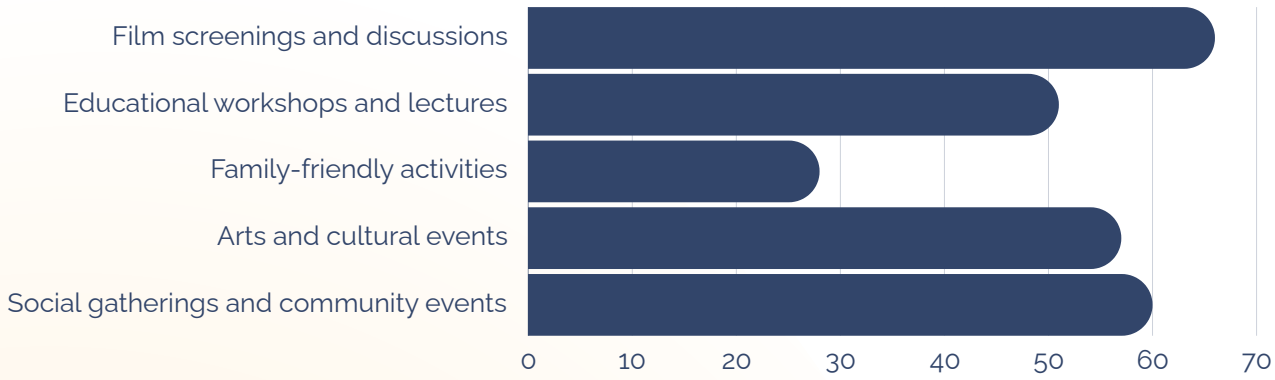
19% to experience the unique atmosphere of the festival

> *More workshops and panels from film professionals would be wonderful!*

> *The logistics and communications were outstanding for the film festival.*

> *The hospitality was fantastic and the festival was lots of fun and had a great energy...*

WHAT TYPES OF ACTIVITIES WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN ATTENDING IF OFFERED BY REEL EAST TEXAS?



81% believe the restoration of historic theaters is VERY IMPORTANT to the Kilgore community.

Strategic Plan

Building a Foundation, Fostering Growth, Ensuring Sustainability

Building on the significant changes and achievements of 2023 and 2024, REEL East Texas is excited to share our updated 5-Year Strategic Plan. This plan reflects our ongoing commitment to fostering a vibrant film culture, preserving historic theaters, and nurturing talent in our community. We're eager to outline our vision, mission, and strategies for the future.

PHASE 1	**SHORE UP FOUNDATIONAL PROGRAMS (2024-2025)** In the first phase of our strategic plan, we will focus on establishing a solid foundation for our initiatives. This involves forming committees and programs, clearly defining their roles and objectives. We will actively recruit committee members with relevant expertise and passion, ensuring that our team reflects the diversity and talent of our community. Initial program plans and budgets will be developed, aligned with our overarching five-year goals. Additionally, we will begin cultivating relationships with new funding partners, initiating smaller asks to establish rapport and build trust.
PHASE 2	**GROW INTO A RECOGNIZED LEADER (2026-2027)** As we enter the growth phase of our strategic plan, we will expand the scope and impact of our programs and initiatives. Committee responsibilities will be broadened, and program activities will be scaled based on performance and learnings from previous years. We will actively seek additional funding and resources to support program growth, leveraging our established relationships and successes. Program designs will be refined based on data and stakeholder feedback, ensuring that we continue to meet the evolving needs of our community. To further support our mission, we will recruit new and/or additional Board members who can provide expertise and guidance for mission-critical programs.
PHASE 3	**SUSTAIN REEL EAST TEXAS & LOOK FORWARD (2028)** In the final phase of our strategic plan, we will focus on solidifying our programs as sustainable pillars of REEL East Texas. We will explore ongoing funding streams and partnerships to ensure financial stability and longevity. Evaluating program impact will be paramount, allowing us to refine and adapt our initiatives for lasting community benefit. Additionally, we will consider launching new programs or initiatives aligned with emerging opportunities, ensuring that REEL East Texas remains at the forefront of fostering a vibrant film culture, preserving historic theaters, and nurturing talent in our community.

As REEL East Texas embarks on the first phase of our strategic plan, our committees are poised to lay the groundwork for transformative change. Each committee has identified key goals aimed at building a strong foundation for our initiatives, ensuring that we can effectively foster a vibrant film culture, preserve historic theaters, and nurture talent in our community.

PHASE 1 (2024-2025)

Shore Up Foundational Programs

In the quest to cultivate a dedicated community of film enthusiasts and supporters, the REEL Society committee has outlined three primary objectives. Firstly, they aim to organize viewing parties and offer exclusive incentives for **REEL Society** members, fostering engagement and loyalty within our community. Additionally, the committee will focus on identifying potential sponsors, developing sponsorship packages, and nurturing relationships to secure vital financial support for REEL Society initiatives. Lastly, they aspire to create an annual community engagement event in the second quarter, designed to raise awareness and expand membership, thus strengthening the foundation of our society.

The Education Committee is committed to developing a comprehensive curriculum that resonates with East Texas high schools, aligning with local educational standards and interests. Furthermore, they seek to forge partnerships with local businesses and organizations to provide scholarships and meals for participants, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility. Additionally, the committee will host weekly screenwriting classes, providing aspiring filmmakers with valuable skills and insights while fostering a supportive learning environment.

In the realm of **Building and Facilities** management, the committee has outlined ambitious goals to enhance the infrastructure of REEL East Texas. They plan to repurpose Old Post Office (OPO) mailboxes into a donor plaque wall, recognizing and honoring the contributions of supporters. Furthermore, they aim to secure funding to complete the Texan Yard project, transforming the outdoor space of the historic Texan Theater into a vibrant community hub. Additionally, the committee will raise funds for the Texan lighting package, improving the ambiance and functionality of the theater for film screenings and events.

With a focus on elevating the quality and impact of our film production initiatives, the **Film Production Committee** has devised strategic goals to set REEL East Texas apart. They aim to develop a festival framework that emphasizes meticulous film selection, thoughtful program curation, and an immersive attendee experience. Furthermore, the committee will implement a tiered plan to submit all parts of "Through the Ghost" (TTG) to festivals, maximizing exposure and recognition for the film and its creators. Lastly, they will explore opportunities for cost reduction through co-production ventures and seek in-kind donations to support film production endeavors.

The **Oktoberfest Planning Committee** is dedicated to enhancing the festival experience and expanding community engagement. They plan to redesign the layout to create a welcoming beer garden with a single, flat entrance fee, fostering camaraderie and enjoyment among attendees. Additionally, the committee will collaborate with beer distributors to secure donations of beer and equipment, minimizing expenses while offering a diverse selection of beverages. Furthermore, they will work closely with the City of Kilgore to promote and grow Oktoberfest, leveraging municipal resources and support to elevate the event's profile and reach.

PHASE 2 (2026-2027)

Grow into a Recognized Leader within the Creative Economy

REEL SOCIETY

In the pursuit of securing REEL East Texas as a recognized leader, the REEL Society committee has set forth strategic objectives to secure major multi-year sponsorship agreements, ensuring long-term financial stability and growth. Additionally, they plan to offer travel and cash awards for festival winners in prestigious categories, enhancing the prestige and allure of our film festival. Furthermore, the committee will organize a grand 10th Anniversary celebration, showcasing the talents of 10 East Texas filmmakers and commemorating a decade of achievements and milestones.

BUILDING & FACILITIES

In the realm of building and facilities management, the committee aims to position REEL East Texas as a premier destination for events and gatherings. They plan to begin hosting open houses for event planners and venue industry professionals, showcasing our facilities and amenities. Additionally, the committee will create a preferred vendors list for venue rentals, streamlining the planning process for event organizers. Furthermore, they will complete the OPO lighting package, enhancing the ambiance and functionality of the space for a wide range of events and activities.

OKTOBERFEST

The Oktoberfest committee remains dedicated to promoting and growing our beloved community event. They will continue to work closely with the City of Kilgore to enhance and promote Oktoberfest, leveraging municipal resources and support. Additionally, they will explore new initiatives and partnerships to further elevate the festival experience and increase attendance and engagement.

EDUCATION

The Education committee is committed to enhancing our educational offerings and impact within the community. To this end, they aim to convert the Old Post Office (OPO) "board room" into a dedicated computer lab, providing students and filmmakers with access to essential technology and resources. Additionally, the committee will identify success stories and establish an alumni network, fostering connections and mentorship opportunities. Furthermore, they will develop a Career and Technical Education (CTE) program for educators, equipping them with the tools and knowledge to inspire the next generation of filmmakers.

FILM PRODUCTION

With a focus on expanding our film production initiatives, the Film Production committee has outlined strategic objectives to solidify our position as a hub for East Texas filmmakers. They aim to select the next REEL East Texas production project, providing opportunities for local talent to showcase their creativity and skills. Additionally, the committee will develop a list of East Texas filmmakers with 20+ members, fostering collaboration and networking within the local film community. Furthermore, they will actively advocate for policy changes that incentivize film production in the region, ensuring continued growth and prosperity for our industry.

2027

A DECADE OF FOSTERING CONNECTIONS AND CELEBRATING CREATIVITY ON SCREEN.

Originally established as a grassroots initiative, REEL East Texas started in 2017 with a small group of dedicated volunteers who recognized the potential of the region's creative community. The organization quickly gained traction, attracting filmmakers, artists, and enthusiasts who were eager to contribute to the growing film scene in East Texas.

PHASE 3

Sustain REEL East Texas Foundational Programs & Look Forward (2028)

REEL SOCIETY	In our ongoing commitment to community engagement, the REEL Society committee plans to host regular events that bring together industry leaders, fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing within the film community. Additionally, we aim to secure legacy partnerships and offer naming rights opportunities, ensuring the long-term sustainability of REEL Society initiatives. Through targeted outreach and enhanced membership benefits, we strive to increase REEL Society membership by 20%, ensuring a strong and supportive community of film enthusiasts and supporters.
EDUCATION	To sustain and expand our educational initiatives, the Education committee will establish an endowment fund specifically for the Summer Intensive program, providing sustainable funding for scholarships, equipment upgrades, and program enhancements. We also plan to broaden our offerings to include a middle school component, reaching a wider audience of young filmmakers and nurturing talent at an earlier age. Additionally, we will hire a full-time staff member to manage and expand youth educational programming, ensuring continuity and growth in our efforts to inspire and educate the next generation of filmmakers.
BUILDINGS & FACILITIES	With a focus on infrastructure and community development, the Building & Facilities committee aims to explore converting the Old Post Office (OPO) basement into low-rent artist studios, providing affordable workspace for local artists and fostering a vibrant creative community. Additionally, we will work to secure an endowment for historic theaters in the City of Kilgore, ensuring the preservation and maintenance of these cultural landmarks for future generations. Furthermore, we will begin supporting Crim projects, investing in community development initiatives that align with our mission and values.
FILM PRODUCTION	In our commitment to supporting emerging filmmakers, the Film Production committee plans to launch a filmmaker incubator program for Summer Intensive alumni, providing mentorship, resources, and support to help bring their projects to fruition. We will also partner with local businesses to offer "film tourism" opportunities, promoting East Texas as a destination for film enthusiasts and showcasing our region's unique cultural heritage. Additionally, we will explore and apply for tax incentives for film production in East Texas, advocating for policies that support and incentivize filmmaking in our region.
OKTOBERFEST	Lastly, we will work closely with the City of Kilgore to grow and promote Oktoberfest, expanding the event's reach and impact through strategic partnerships and community engagement initiatives.

Implementation and Evaluation

Each committee within REEL East Texas has meticulously crafted a detailed action plan, outlining specific activities, timelines, and responsible individuals to achieve the goals set forth in our strategic plan. These action plans serve as roadmaps, guiding our efforts and ensuring that we stay on course towards realizing our vision.

Progress towards our goals will be tracked through regular monitoring and evaluation using defined metrics, allowing us to measure our success and identify areas for improvement. By closely monitoring our progress, we can make timely adjustments and interventions to address any challenges or obstacles that may arise.

Our strategic plan is a living document, designed to evolve and adapt to changing circumstances and priorities. As such, it will be reviewed and updated regularly to reflect new insights, emerging opportunities, and shifting community needs. This ongoing process of review and refinement ensures that our strategies remain relevant and effective in achieving our long-term objectives.

To provide oversight and ensure accountability, the Board of Directors will receive biannual updates on the strategic plan's progress. These updates will allow the board to assess our performance, provide guidance, and make any necessary adjustments to our strategic direction.

Additionally, the Executive Committee will meet monthly to track budgets and ensure good governance. By closely monitoring financials and governance practices, we can ensure that resources are allocated effectively and transparently, and that our organization operates with integrity and accountability.

Resource Allocation

Resources will be allocated to each committee based on their goals, needs, and potential impact. A committee-specific fundraising plan will be developed to secure necessary funding for program implementation and growth.

Conclusion

In closing, the strategic plan outlined for the years 2024 to 2028 sets a clear path for REEL East Texas to continue its impactful journey towards fostering a vibrant film culture, preserving historic theaters, and nurturing talent within our community. With a steadfast commitment to our mission and vision, we embark on this ambitious roadmap, confident in our ability to effect positive change and leave a lasting legacy in East Texas.

As we reflect on the significant milestones achieved in 2023 and the exciting initiatives planned for 2024, it is evident that REEL East Texas is positioned for continued growth and success. From the resounding success of our Film Festival to the transformative impact of our educational programs, each achievement serves as a testament to the dedication and passion of our community.

Looking ahead, our strategic plan delineates three distinct phases: building a foundation, fostering growth, and ensuring sustainability. Each phase is meticulously designed to address key areas of focus, from enhancing community engagement to expanding educational offerings and preserving historic landmarks. Through these strategic initiatives, we aim to solidify our position as a recognized leader within the creative economy, driving positive change and innovation in East Texas and beyond.

Implementation and evaluation will be key to the success of our strategic plan. Each committee has developed detailed action plans with specific activities, timelines, budgets, and responsible individuals, ensuring accountability and progress tracking. Regular monitoring and evaluation using defined metrics will allow us to measure our success and make informed decisions to adjust our course as needed. This iterative process of review and refinement underscores our commitment to continuous improvement and adaptation to changing circumstances and priorities.

This strategic plan serves as a roadmap for REEL East Texas to achieve its mission and vision over the next five years. With the support and dedication of our community, we are poised to make a meaningful impact on the cultural and economic landscape of East Texas, leaving a lasting legacy for generations to come.

About REEL East Texas

Originally established as a grassroots initiative, REEL East Texas started in 2017 with a small group of dedicated volunteers who recognized the potential of the region's creative community. The organization quickly gained traction, attracting filmmakers, artists, and enthusiasts who were eager to contribute to the growing film scene in East Texas.

The REEL East Texas Film Festival is an annual event that takes place in the city of Kilgore, Texas. The festival showcases films made by independent filmmakers from all over the world, with a focus on those from the eastern region of Texas. It is held over three days and features screenings of short and feature-length films, as well as panel discussions, workshops, and networking events.

Today, we are more than a film festival.

REEL hosts a two-week summer intensive for high school students in the East Texas area to equip students with a passion for film and storytelling with the skills and experiences necessary to pursue a successful career in creative economy. The Summer Intensive employs experienced filmmakers who provide guidance, share industry insights, and impart practical knowledge.

The Texan Theater holds a cherished place in our town's heritage. Built in 1931, it bears witness to the golden age of cinema, with autographs of renowned western movie stars etched in the sidewalks outside. Our vision is to transform The Texan into an aesthetically appealing and vibrant space that serves as a catalyst for downtown Kilgore's revitalization. By preserving its rich history and creating a thriving cultural hub, we aim to attract visitors and locals alike, breathing new life into the heart of our community.

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