



Frequently Asked Questions about Filming at the Smithsonian Institution

This fee schedule was developed for film projects in SI museums. Please consult with us regarding fees for natural history filmmaking, or if this fee schedule would dissuade you from working at STRI.

1. Why does the Smithsonian charge fees? The Institution is supported with tax dollars and we should all have access to it for free.

The Smithsonian is supported by federal funds which cover the costs of collections care, buildings and federal salaries. It does not cover costs of escorting and assisting filmmakers and researchers. Therefore, when working with independent and commercial organizations, we must recover our costs. Our fees cover the costs incurred by the museum in making its facilities, collections and staff available. In special circumstances, the fee may be waived.

2. What are the fees to film at the Smithsonian?

To recover institutional costs, the Smithsonian has a standard fee schedule based on the length of time crews will spend in the museum or interviewing staff.

The fees are as follows:

- Up to one hour \$500
- One to four hours \$1,000
- Five to eight hours \$2,000
- After eight hours \$350 per each additional hour

These fees cover the costs incurred by the museum in making its facilities, collections and staff available. Costs include the following staff support: curatorial, communications, electrical, security, audiovisual, equipment operation and cleaning.

Checks should be made payable to the “Smithsonian Institution” and are due on the first day of filming.

3. Why do you need to know so much information before we can film at the Smithsonian?

Providing the information as requested on the application gives us an accurate picture of your project, which we use to determine if the project is appropriate for the Smithsonian and consistent with its mission and objectives. It also serves as the basis for preparing a contract.

Additional information, if requested, gives us the details we need to determine if the content is consistent with Smithsonian research and programs and provides us the opportunity to correct or modify references that may conflict with or inaccurately represent the Institution.

Finally, the Smithsonian receives a high volume of requests to film, and we cannot accommodate all requests. In addition, institutional policies and procedures require that we have a complete understanding of all aspects of a project before Smithsonian participation can be approved.

4. Why do we need a contract to film there?

A contract outlines exactly how the film can be used now and in the future, sets forth the fees that will be charged, and provides a written record of permissions and limits placed on the footage. It also stipulates how you will use the name “Smithsonian Institution” which is necessary because of the reputation and goodwill associated with it.

5. We don't need a contract, we have our own release forms.

The Smithsonian does not use outside organizations' release forms or contracts. The contract drawn up by the Institution for your project will be all-inclusive and sufficient for these purposes.

6. I have heard that the Smithsonian is limiting access to its collections and archives because of a new contract with Showtime for Smithsonian on Demand.

We have always regulated use for a variety of reasons—the nature of the program is inappropriate and/or not in keeping with the mission of the Smithsonian; lack of staff to oversee the work; or rights restrictions attached to requested items are some examples.

For More Info

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