

What you need to know.

Significant dollars are added to the state's economy each year by film and video production companies and commercial still photographers who choose to work in Michigan. One of the ways those production dollars get into Michigan's economy is via the fees paid to private property owners for use of "locations." Production companies and photographers produce feature films, documentaries, television shows, television commercials, print ads and catalog photographs. Locations can be as common as an overgrown field, the interior of a bar or the front yard of a house in a residential neighborhood. In Michigan, they also can be as exotic as an island lighthouse, sports arena, or coastline helicopter shot. Allowing the use of your home, land or business as a location can be an exciting and possibly profitable venture. It can be a profitable venture if the scope of the project and the process is clearly understood. Productions usually leave money behind with other businesses and landowners in the area. It can be a positive opportunity for the entire community.

This guide is aimed at helping you evaluate the pros and cons of your own situation should you be approached by a production company about the use of your property as a location. Step by-step guidelines about the process of becoming a "location" are provided.

The Impact of the Film Industry in Michigan

The economic benefits of film industry productions in Michigan have recently come to light. First, there are direct economic benefits of the money spent on wages, products and services. The production company itself spends dollars with local businesses on lodging, clothing, groceries, restaurants, fabrics, lumber, hardware, office supplies, laundry services, etc. Individual cast and crew members may spend money on any or all of the above plus leisure activities, books and magazines, souvenirs—the list could go on and on. Even temporary "extras" and curious visitors from neighboring areas will leave additional dollars within the community hosting a production. Productions also play a part in creating and retaining jobs within the state, as they allow Michigan's freelance film crew members and support services to earn their living. These projects are much like having a new, medium-size business move into the community, except that they generate thousands or millions of dollars of activity over a few months instead of a few years.

Location Owner Services

Information and Guidelines

Straightforward information about how the film industry works and what the location owner should consider is provided in this brochure and through direct contact with the Film Office. Sample location contracts will be provided upon request. However, the Film Office does not become involved in actual contract negotiations.

Location photos and resource listings

Photos of selected properties are kept on file in our office for use in custom photo presentations requested by production companies. Property owners who would like to have their locations considered for inclusion in the state's location files are encouraged to submit photos using the forms provided in this document. Information about locations, as well as photos and other resources made available to interested productions are maintained by the Film Office.

Film Industry Services

Location Research

This includes location photography as well as information and assistance in finding and securing locations. An extensive photo library is used to provide photo presentations of Michigan locations that are customized to meet the needs of inquiring production companies.

Production Assistance

Information and assistance regarding accommodations, equipment, transportation, crew members and local services are provided through direct contact and the Michigan Production Directory.

Liaison

Information and assistance are offered with federal and state agencies, city offices and local businesses, as well as individual landowners and the general public.

The Process of Becoming a Location—a Step-By-Step Guide

A request to use your property as a location is, in fact, a business proposal. Since each project has specific considerations, it is impossible to address all situations. However, the following guidelines should provide a basic foundation on which to establish an agreement between the property owner and the film company that is successful for everyone.

- Initial contact is generally made by a location scout, or location manager. This person is often hired locally by the film company but also may be from out of state. His/her credentials can generally be confirmed through the Michigan Film Office.
- Determine the nature of the project and how the location will be used. It is reasonable to ask to read the script segment where the property will be used. Will there be smoke, fire, gunshots or other effects?
- Determine the exact number of days required for the shoot. Be aware that a “day” can be as long as 16 hours and can be either daytime or nighttime. Days required should include:
 - “Prep days” (preparation time before actual filming)
 - Days of actual filming
 - “Strike” days or “wrap” days after filming (the time needed to return the location to the agreed upon condition)
 - Back-up days (also known as “cover set” days)
- Arrange for a walk-through with the location manager to determine such specifics as:
 - Exact interiors and exteriors desired for filming
 - Where equipment and vehicles will be positioned or parked
 - Any “off-limits” areas as determined by the owner
 - Any areas (such as roof, trees, fences, windows) which may need to be used or altered during filming

- Determine which personal property in or on the location is desired for use, how and where to store items not used, and who will be responsible for packing and moving items
- Determine who will be allowed “on set” (location) during periods of use and how this will be enforced. A feature film or television movie may have a crew of 60 to 150 people; commercials may require 5 to 40 crew members; documentaries and video crews usually require fewer crew.
- Determine rules and regulations regarding:
 - Smoking
 - Use of restrooms, water, electricity, kitchen, food, laundry, etc.
 - Where meals will be eaten
 - Trash collection and disposal
 - Floor coverings
- Determine phone use and how the bill is to be covered (\$20 upfront courtesy? All calls collect? Calls to production office only?)
- Determine how the owner and family will be accommodated during location use and any living expenses that may be required.
- Designate parking for personal vehicles.
- Location fees are negotiable. The owner should feel comfortable with the amount agreed upon, and payment should be made in full prior to any filming. If the movie is legitimate, this should never be a problem.
- The owner should have agreed-upon specifics IN WRITING.
- The owner should get a certificate of insurance, including a hold harmless clause for protection in case of any injuries on the property. All production companies should carry insurance policies that cover third-party rentals for property damage and liability. A copy of the insurance certificate should be given to the owner before any crew comes on the property.
- It is important to understand that, with the uniqueness of each film project, unforeseen circumstances or even weather changes can require more time, additional space, additional personnel, etc. This is the norm in making motion pictures, so contingency plans, options, and fees should be discussed with the production company.
- Determine clean-up requirements: who is responsible, time limit for completion (such as 24 to 48 hrs.), etc. Arrange for a final walk-through for owner approval.
- Don’t be afraid to ask a lot of questions! Make sure you fully understand the terms of the contract, and in turn, that your conditions are understood.

Please contact the Michigan Film Office if you have any concerns or questions about your property being used as a location.

Michigan Film Office, 300 North Washington Square, 4th Floor, Lansing, MI 48913
(800) 477-3456, mfo@michigan.org