



International **Photography** Assoc. Festivals

Best Practices Manual for Photography Festivals (2025)

This document is presented as an open draft intended to encourage collective reflection on the principles that should guide the modern management of photography festivals. At the **International Photography Festivals Association (IPFA)**, we believe that the professionalisation of the sector depends on sharing experiences, debating models, and collectively building common standards of quality, transparency, and professional commitment.

This manual is not intended to be a closed or exclusive set of rules, but rather a collection of **recommendations and guiding objectives** that each festival can adapt to its own reality and context. We recognise that every organisation has its own goals and particularities, and this diversity should be respected; we simply propose a **shared path**, offering ideas and principles that can guide the necessary modernisation of how we work together.

We intend to open a dialogue among directors, cultural managers, curators, artists, and audiences to identify the best practices that strengthen sustainability, equity, and international cooperation in the field of photography.

We invite all IPFA members to read, comment on, and enrich this document by contributing their experiences and perspectives. The conclusions and contributions arising from this discussion will help build a collective and consensual version of the **Best Practices Manual**, representing the shared values and aspirations of photography festivals worldwide.

1. Clear definition of mission and objectives

Defining the mission and objectives of a festival with precision is the first step towards professional and coherent management. This involves establishing its identity, artistic

goals, and social, cultural, and educational contribution within its specific context. Differentiating from other festivals requires a clear understanding of one's environment: analysing existing proposals, identifying suitable dates to avoid competition, and finding a unique focus that adds value to both the local and international community. Understanding the needs of the audience, artists, and cultural ecosystem helps align programming, communication, and funding strategies towards a clear and sustainable purpose that serves as a long-term strategic guide.

→ **Every festival must know who it is, who it serves, and where it wants to go.**

Examples and practical recommendations:

- Draft an internal document outlining the festival's **mission, vision, and objectives**, and review it annually.
- Analyse the **calendar of other national and international festivals** before confirming dates to avoid overlaps and encourage collaboration.
- Develop a **local context map** (audience, venues, institutions, resources) to guide strategic decisions.
- Create a **three-year development plan** with clear, measurable goals.

2. Economic sustainability

Planning balanced budgets and diversifying funding sources —public, private, sponsorships, crowdfunding, or self-generated income— is essential for maintaining the festival's stability. Financial transparency builds trust among the public and collaborators by clearly explaining where funds come from and how they are used. This **pedagogy of cultural economy** fosters shared responsibility and commitment. It is crucial not to commit to resources that cannot be guaranteed, ensuring realistic management that prioritises continuity and the well-being of everyone involved.

→ **Sustainability arises from transparency, planning, and responsibility.**

Examples and practical recommendations:

- Publish an **annual financial summary** showing income sources and expenditure distribution (approximate percentages).
- Diversify income: combine **public funding, private sponsorships, crowdfunding, and paid activities** (workshops, visits, portfolio reviews, merchandising).
- Establish a **10% annual contingency reserve fund** for unexpected expenses.
- Implement a **prompt payment policy**: all fees must be paid within 30 days after the event.

3. Professional, ethical, and labour management

A sustainable festival requires professional teams with defined roles, ongoing training, and an ethical work environment. Fair and balanced remuneration must be guaranteed for artists, workers, and collaborators, as well as **written contracts** specifying rights, timelines, and responsibilities. Protecting intellectual property and ensuring legal compliance are essential to building trust. Professionalisation is not only about efficiency but also about acting with integrity, respect, and care towards everyone who makes the festival possible.

→ **Ethics and respect for people are the foundation of truly professional management.**

Examples and practical recommendations:

- Guarantee **equal pay for all participating artists**, regardless of career stage.
- Formalise **written contracts** with artists, curators, technicians, and staff.
- Develop an **internal code of ethics** addressing labour rights, gender equality, and non-discrimination.
- Keep **copies** of all contracts, permits, and image rights agreements.

4. Professional, participatory, and transparent programming

A strong programme is built through transparent selection committees and explicit criteria that ensure diversity, artistic quality, and fairness. Ideally, at least **50% of the content** should come from open calls and reflect gender balance. It is essential to provide opportunities for emerging artists and collective projects, prioritising innovation and collaboration over media visibility or big names. The value of a festival lies not in its fame, but in the artistic community it nurtures.

→ **True quality is measured by diversity, openness, and support for new talent.**

Examples and practical recommendations:

- Ensure that **at least 40% of the programme** comes from open calls.
- Maintain a **minimum of 40% women and gender-diverse participants** in programming and juries.
- Publish on the website the **selection criteria and the curatorial committee members**.
- Support **emerging artists** through grants or production assistance.
- Avoid allocating most of the budget to **high-profile names**; prioritise diversity and creative processes.

5. Communities, education, and cultural mediation

A festival is not just an event, but a **living network** that generates relationships, learning, and collaboration beyond its dates. Its greatest achievement is the community

it builds. Encouraging active participation of artists, audiences, and cultural agents through meetings, forums, or digital platforms strengthens belonging. Educational and mediation activities, such as workshops, talks, guided tours, or labs, bring photography closer to different audiences and promote shared learning. Communication must be clear, accessible, and consistent with the festival's values, reflecting its commitment to participation and dialogue.

→ **The most successful festival is the one that leaves behind a united, active community after each edition.**

Examples and practical recommendations:

- Create **WhatsApp or Telegram groups** to stay connected with artists, volunteers, and audiences.
- Send a **monthly newsletter** (create a database) with updates, activities, and opportunities.
- Host **online meetings** with selected artists to prepare exhibitions or workshops collaboratively.
- Develop a **parallel educational programme** (school visits, public talks, family workshops, etc.).
- Set up a **physical or virtual meeting space** where artists and audiences can exchange ideas freely.

6. Evaluation and impact measurement

To evaluate is to learn. Setting clear indicators makes it possible to analyse artistic, educational, social, and economic results and improve future editions. Gathering feedback from workers, artists, volunteers, and venues helps capture diverse perspectives. Measuring each activity's impact and promoting responsible economic and environmental practices ensures the festival's sustainability, continuity, and balanced growth over time.

→ **Measuring, listening, and learning are key to evolving and improving each edition.**

Examples and practical recommendations:

- Conduct **post-event surveys** with artists, audiences, volunteers, and staff.
- Produce an **annual evaluation report** with quantitative (visitors, workshops, artists) and qualitative (satisfaction, learning) data.
- Hold an **internal feedback session** with the team after each edition.
- Publish key evaluation results to reinforce **transparency**.
- Assess the festival's **environmental footprint** (waste, transport, materials) and establish an improvement plan.

- Create and maintain an **archive** that collects catalogues, images, videos, reports, and key documents from each edition, ensuring continuity, transparency, and easy access for future teams.

7. Gender equality, inclusion, and diversity

Equality must be a guiding principle across all aspects of festival management. Achieving at least **40% gender representation** in teams and programming is a crucial step toward equity. Promoting participation from artists and audiences of various origins, ages, cultures, and abilities ensures accessibility and diversity. An inclusive festival not only reflects the world's diversity but also celebrates it as a source of cultural richness.

→ **Diversity is not a goal; it is the essential condition of a living culture.**

Examples and practical recommendations:

- Maintain a **minimum of 40% representation of women and gender-diverse individuals** in leadership, programming, and juries.
- Ensure **physical and cognitive accessibility** across all venues (ramps, signage, adapted materials, translations, subtitles, etc).
- Translate content into **multiple languages** to encourage international inclusion.
- Implement a **policy against discrimination and harassment**.
- Develop specific programmes for **young people, seniors, or underrepresented communities**.

8. Commitment to environmental sustainability

Every organisational decision has an impact. Implementing measures such as waste reduction, energy efficiency, local purchasing, and the use of sustainable materials demonstrates coherence between discourse and practice. Informing and raising awareness among artists and audiences reinforces collective responsibility. Environmental sustainability must be integrated throughout all festival stages, becoming a structural principle rather than an accessory.

→ **Ecological coherence is part of cultural commitment.**

Examples and practical recommendations:

- Use **recyclable or reusable materials** for exhibitions, signage, and furniture.
- Prioritise **local printing** and minimise paper use.
- Encourage **shared or public transport** for artists and audiences.
- Serve **local and seasonal food** during events.

- Measure the festival's **carbon footprint annually** and compensate it through local actions.

9. Networks and interdependence: from the local to the international

No festival exists in isolation: each one is part of a broader cultural network where cooperation and solidarity strengthen the whole. Collaborating with local and international institutions, sharing knowledge and resources, and developing joint projects expand both impact and sustainability. **Collective intelligence and institutional transparency** form the foundation of a healthy, resilient, and transformative cultural ecosystem.

→ **The future of festivals belongs to those who collaborate, not those who compete.**

Examples and practical recommendations:

- Join **international and local networks and associations** to share resources and knowledge.
- Coordinate **dates and calendars** with other festivals to avoid overlap and foster synergy.
- Develop **itinerant exhibitions or co-productions** with partner festivals.
- Invite other festival directors to **networking** events or residencies.
- Build a **shared database** of professional contacts, artists, and venues.