2026 Talking Points

What is CASCADIA International Women's Film Festival (CASCADIA)?

- CASCADIA is a multi-day annual film festival celebrating exceptional films directed by women from around the world. Ours is one of a few festivals in the U.S. dedicated to this purpose. **Currently, it is the only festival of its kind in the Pacific Northwest. Since its first festival in 2017, CASCADIA has presented the films of 300 women.** The 2026 festival, to be April 30-May 3 in person and May 7-17 online, will be our tenth. The organization also works year-round to provide film production, exhibition, and distribution education.

- CASCADIA's films span all genres: narrative, live action, animation, documentary, and experimental films of all lengths.

- CASCADIA is based in Bellingham, WA., a city of approximately 100,000 people on the shores of Puget Sound. It lies about halfway between the film meccas of Seattle, WA and Vancouver, BC. The city enjoys strong local and regional support for the arts. It is also a destination for hikers, kayakers, climbers, sailors and other outdoor enthusiasts. Increasingly, filmmakers, too, are finding Bellingham, attracted to its proximity to urban and rural environments, as well as the ocean, lakes, rivers and mountains. It is also home to Western Washington University, with 15,000 undergraduates and graduate enrollment, including the well regarded College of Fine and Performing Arts.

  CASCADIA is an IRS-registered non profit 501(c)(3) organization.

What else does CASCADIA do, besides run a film festival?

Helps women directors pursue their goals, by offering educational forums, panel discussions, and director Q&A's, designed to encourage information-sharing and networking

.**Educates audiences and the community,** by partnering with businesses, Western Washington University, arts and other organizations to sponsor forums, workshops, special film showings and events.

Promotes Bellingham, Whatcom County and the surrounding area as a destination for filmmakers and for film enthusiasts to spend time and enjoy the city's and region's many restaurants, microbreweries, shops and hotels, while attending the festival.

When and where does CASCADIA occur?

CASCADIA's festival occurs in Bellingham over several days in the spring. **The 2026 festival is scheduled to be April 30 - May 3 in person with an online festival May 7-17.** Approximately 35 films will be accepted for the 2026 festival.

What other events take place during the festival?

- CASCADIA stages a **Script Studio** during the spring festival with up to four short film scripts by women writers selected from submissions. The event is open to the public and free of charge.
- At the spring festival, **CASCADIA sponsors multiple networking and educational opportunities** for working and aspiring filmmakers. It offers these in partnership with numerous local and regional organizations, including Western Washington University (WWU), the non-profit organization Bellingham Film, and other organizations.
- In 2024, CASCADIA introduced a **curated art exhibition** that showcased the work of women artists from throughout the area. In an exhibit titled: **"Women Rising: Expanding Visions, Diverse Perspectives**" at the Dakota Art Gallery in Bellingham. Submissions for the 2026 exhibition will open in December.
- **CASCADIA presents an online version of the festival after the in person festival. The online version of the festival provides accessibility** to those unable to physically attend the theatre as well as to those located elsewhere in the country.

Why focus on films directed by women?

- A woman's perspective is too rarely seen in film. An art form that teaches, informs, inspires and motivates, is missing an essential perspective on humanity when women's voices are not heard.
- Numerous studies document the persistent, ongoing failure of Hollywood studios to fund and support the work of women directors. In 2024, women accounted for **only 16% of directors** working on the top 250 films and **only 11%** on the top 100 films.
- Sexual harassment and sexual violence against women in the entertainment business frequently point to one principal factor driving this bullying, predatory behavior towards women: the lack of women in decision-making roles.
- CASCADIA is committed to changing that by offering a venue and a support system for women to tell their stories through the medium of film.
- A film festival dedicated to showcasing quality work by women is an important and welcome extension of these new technology-driving opportunities, by creating a forum for the work of women directors to be seen and their voices heard.

What other events does CASCADIA present?

CASCADIA has presented women-directed documentary films at the Pickford Film Center's annual **"Doctober" Documentary Film Festival in Bellingham** since October, 2015.

Throughout the year, **CASCADIA presents special screenings including for Native American Heritage, PRIDE and Black History months, and International Women's History Day**. It also partners with other organizations such as the Fairhaven Merchants Association, the Bellingham Symphony Orchestra and the Bellingham Queer Collective and other film festivals to showcase women-directed films.

What has CASCADIA done to date?

Since its first festival in 2017, CASCADIA has showcased films by more than 300 women directors from around the world. More than one-third of the films shown at the 2025 festival were made by women of color. Films by students, emerging directors and Indigenous women were also included in the festival program.

Directors and panelists have come from Los Angeles, New York, Washington D.C., Atlanta, San Franciso, Seattle, Canada, Brazil, Macedonia, Italy, Iran, Slovenia, Australia, Russia and Hong Kong, among other places to participate in the festival.

Who are CASCADIA's Honored Guests?

- **CASCADIA** selects an honored guest to recognize during the festival who is chosen for their career achievements, contributions made to the film industry and the art, and their advocacy for women in the industry. CASCADIA's honored guests have included:
    - **Cheryl Boone Isaacs**, immediate past president of the Academy of MotionPicture Arts and Sciences was **Honored Guest** at the 2018 festival.
    - The **2019 Honored Guest** was **Freida Lee Mock**, Academy Award-winning documentary director whose film, "Anita Hill: Speaking Truth to Power" was presented.
    - In **2020, CASCADIA celebrated the centennial of the 19th Amendment** and recognized the American suffragists with a special screening and online discussion of the film, "Iron Jawed Angels" directed by **Katja von Garnier.**
    - The **2022 Honored Guest was director Martha Coolidge,** first woman president of the Directors' Guild of America. Best known for her classic film, "Valley Girl."
    - **Honored Guest at the 2023 Festival was legendary documentary director Barbara Kopple,** the only woman to have received two Oscars for Best Direction of a documentary film.
    - **CASCADIA's 2024 Honored Guest was Catherine Hardwicke,** best known for her film, "Twilight" that shattered box office records for women-directed films when released in 2008.
    - Award-winning producer-director **Yvonne Russo was CASCADIA's 2025 Honored Guest. Russo,** a proud member of the Sicangu Lakota Tribal Nation and a trailblazing director, producer, and writer whose work elevates diverse and underrepresented voices.

In 2024, CASCADIA introduced the **Shirley Jo Finney Featured Filmmaker** designation to honor the legacy of one of CASCADIA's Advisory Board, final selection committee and Script Studio panel members. The festival selected as its first **Featured Filmmaker director Jules Koostachin** of Canada whose films have appeared in several of CASCADIA's festivals and who the festival has seen grow and develop as a filmmaker.

Who can enter a film, and how are entries accepted?

CASCADIA presents a curated selection of women-directed films. Short films are submitted through www.FilmFreeway.com.

Submissions for the 2025 festival opened August 18th, 2025. Short films by women directors are

submitted through www.FilmFreeway.com.

CASCADIA's short film jurors are located all over the world. Nearly all are professionally affiliated to the film industry as directors, writers, producers, actors, cinematographers, editors, critics, festival programmers, film scholars or professors.

CASCADIA's feature films are curated by Program Director Claudia Puig. Filmmakers who wish to have CASCADIA consider their feature need to contact us at info@cascadiafilmfest.org.

Why the name: CASCADIA?

The festival's name was chosen to reflect the naturally beautiful surroundings of the festival and the Cascade Mountain Range that figures prominently in Bellingham's landscape and lifestyle.

The festival is always referred to as CASCADIA International Women's Film Festival on first reference and always as **CASCADIA thereafter**, similar to Telluride or Sundance. This aligns with our branding and relates back to our geographical location. The word, "CASCADIA" also always appears in all caps as part of our branding.

Who are the people working on CASCADIA?

- CASCADIA is a diverse group of people with a love of film, and a commitment to opportunity and diversity in art and all walks of life. They have had or currently enjoy successful careers in film or other art forms, business, education, recreation, community development and government.

- **CASCADIA's Program Director is Claudia Puig**, is immediate past president of the Los Angeles Film Critics Association, and a longtime critic on NPR's Film Week, a film festival programmer and cultural consultant. She is currently Program Director for the Santa Barbara International Film Festival and in 2020 she was Senior Programmer for AFI Fest. She curates CASCADIA's feature film selections.

- All share a vision of building a unique international event that showcases the work of women directors, and what they believe are the extraordinary opportunities for filmmakers to work in Bellingham, Whatcom County and the surrounding area.

Why should you support CASCADIA?

- You should support CASCADIA if any or all of the following apply:
- You understand the power of film to engage, inform, inspire and sometimes empower change in both individuals and society.
- You see that the absence of women's perspectives in this powerful art form results in a dangerous imbalance, affecting the way we see and seek solutions to concerns among individuals and communities.
- You want to support the City of Bellingham and Whatcom County, by encouraging people from outside this area to come here for a festival, vacation here, and support local businesses.

- You have a business that offers goods or services that would interest the same people who would likely attend the CASCADIA Festival.
- You're committed to diversity, in art as in other walks of life and community.
- You love film and want to support quality work.

Additional Research Regarding Women in the Industry:

In 2024, according to **The Celluloid Ceiling report** by Dr. Martha M. Lauzen, San Diego State University's Center for the Study of Women in Film and Teleivision:

- **84%** of the 250 top grossing films last year had **no women directors**.
- Women accounted for **16% of directors working on the 250 top films in 2024.**
- Women comprised **11% of directors working on the 100 top films of 2024, down 3 percentage points from 14% in 2023.**
- **Films with at least one woman director employed substantially more women** in other key behind-the-scenes roles than films with exclusively male directors.
- Having monitored credits for a quarter of a century, the Celluloid Celing provides the longest-running and most comprehensive account of women's behind-the-scenes representation available. This historical record reveals that **women remain dramatically underrepresented in many key behind-the- scenes roles** on the top 100 and 250 (domestic) grossing films of 2024.