

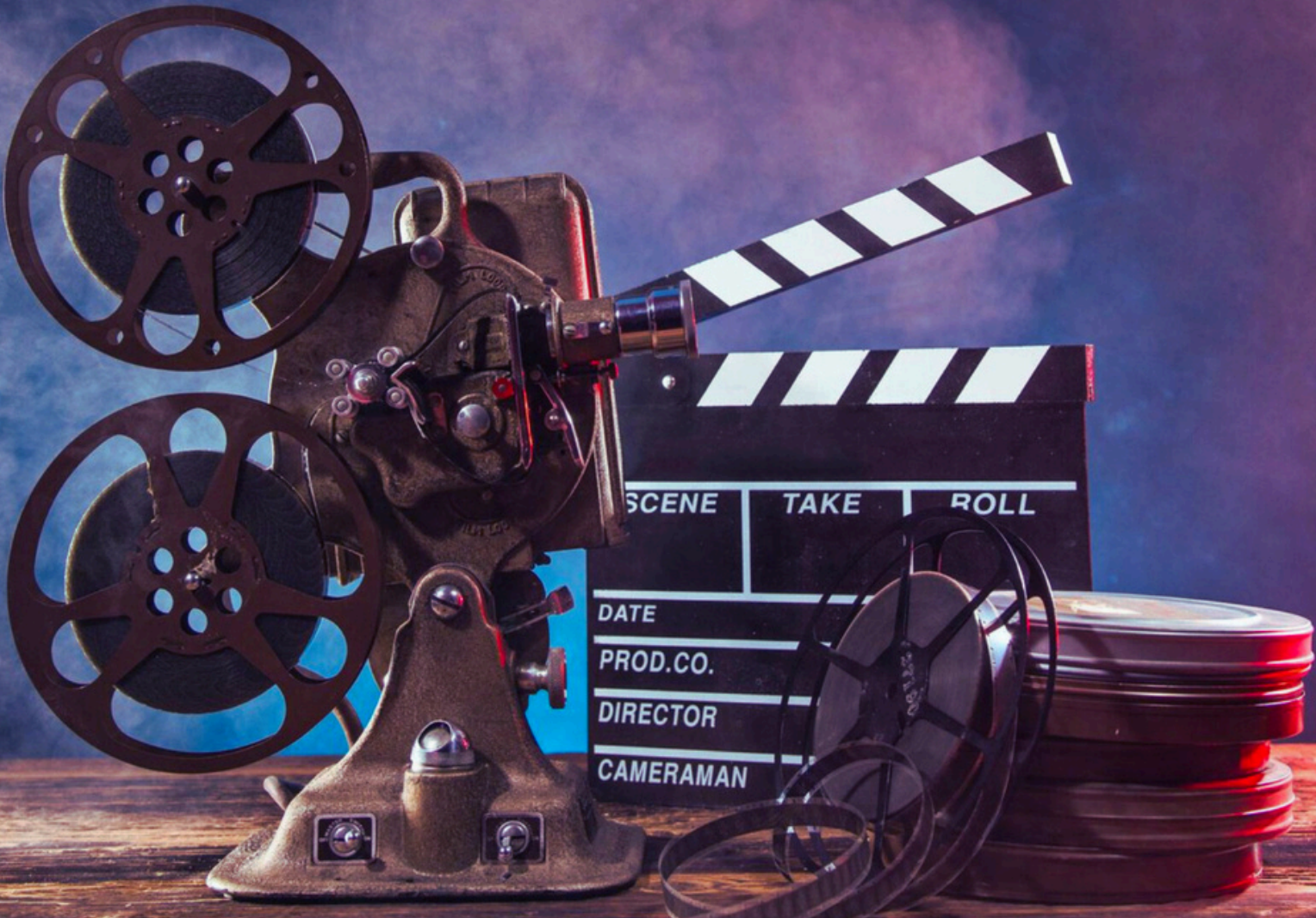
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DUBAI FILMS AND GAMES COMMISSION



dubai

on the Global Film Stage

Vision
2025



“

Dubai has all the ingredients to be a global film powerhouse —state-of-the-art infrastructure, a strategic location, and a vibrant creative community. Now is the time to take bold steps: streamlining regulations, empowering talent, and introducing competitive incentives. With a clear vision and decisive action, we will elevate Dubai’s position on the world stage and shape the future of cinema in the region.

Her Excellency Mona G. Al Marri

Chairperson of Dubai Films Comission

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Background of the Dubai Film Industry

Dubai's film industry is relatively young but has grown rapidly over the past two decades. Early cinematic activity in the UAE dates back to the mid-20th century with makeshift outdoor cinemas – Dubai's first theater (Al Watan Cinema) opened in 1953. The first Emirati feature films emerged in the late 1980s, with *Aber Sabeel* (1988) recognized as an early locally-produced film. For many years, however, film production in Dubai remained limited in scale and largely overshadowed by imports from Hollywood, Bollywood, and other Arab markets.

In the early 2000s, Dubai began investing in its film ecosystem as part of a broader media and cultural strategy. The launch of the Dubai International Film Festival (DIFF) in 2004 put Dubai on the festival circuit map, showcasing regional talent and international cinema. DIFF became a flagship event that ran annually until 2017, when it was put on hiatus as the city rethought its [strategy](#). Alongside DIFF, infrastructure projects like Dubai Studio City (established 2005) and Dubai Media City (2001) created dedicated zones for media and filmmaking.

By 2012, the government formed the Dubai Film and TV Commission (DFTC) to streamline permits and promote Dubai as a production hub. These initiatives marked Dubai's shift from merely hosting cinemas to actively developing a film production sector.

Today, Dubai's film industry sits at an important juncture. The city has leveraged its **modern infrastructure, diverse locations, and business-friendly environment** to attract high-profile productions. Major Hollywood and Bollywood movies have filmed in Dubai, taking advantage of its iconic cityscapes and desert landscapes. For example, scenes from Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol (2011) shot at Burj Khalifa and Star Trek Beyond (2016) were filmed in Dubai, highlighting the emirate's global appeal. Local film output has also increased – over 60 Emirati films have been produced since 2002 – and new voices are emerging in Emirati cinema. However, Dubai's local films have yet to achieve broad international reach, and the industry remains in a developmental stage compared to older film markets. Government support and strategic planning are seen as crucial to move the industry into its next phase of growth.

Current State

The UAE's film market is among the largest in the Middle East, with Dubai as a key driver. By 2024 the UAE had around 700+ cinema screens across 70+ venues (about 26 cinemas in Dubai alone as of [2020](#)) In the first eight months of 2024, UAE cinemas attracted ~11 million admissions and AED 517million in revenue, accounting for [30%](#) of the Middle East's box office market. This indicates a vibrant cinema-going culture and a strong distribution base that Dubai's filmmakers can tap into. On the production side, Dubai hosts over 270 companies and 2,500 industry professionals at Dubai Studio City, which offers state-of-the-art soundstages (the largest in MENA). Media City houses regional HQs of major broadcasters (CNN, Reuters, etc.), reinforcing Dubai as a media hub. The city's "**brand**" – known for safety, luxury, multiculturalism and futuristic skylines – makes it an attractive filming location, and authorities often highlight Dubai's neutrality and stability in a turbulent region as a competitive advantage. In summary, Dubai has quickly built a solid foundation for a film industry (infrastructure, talent base, and market), but still faces challenges in nurturing sustainable local film production and competing with global film hubs.



Dubai's film culture has grown in the 2000s – for instance, the Dubai International Film Festival (2004–2017) featured community events like outdoor beachfront screenings, bringing cinema to the public realm. Such initiatives raised Dubai's profile as an emerging film hub and fostered local appreciation for cinema.



Film Landscape in Dubai

This section surveys the current landscape of Dubai's film industry, covering the infrastructure in place, talent pool, governance (policies and regulations), distribution channels, and other key market features. It provides a snapshot of **what resources and frameworks exist in Dubai for filmmaking** and where gaps remain.

Infrastructure

Dubai offers impressive physical infrastructure for media production. Dubai **Studio City** stands out as a comprehensive production zone, boasting soundstages (11,000–50,000 sq ft) equipped with water tanks and high-tech support, production offices, outdoor lots, and rental houses for gear. Studio City and its sister, Dubai Media City, host hundreds of media companies, from global studios to local startups. This clustering enables easy access to high-quality equipment, post-production facilities, and technical services. Several studios provide 4K/8K filming capabilities, green screens, and even emerging virtual production stages, aligning Dubai with cutting-edge production trends. Additionally, the city's world-class transportation and hospitality infrastructure supports large film crews with ease – crews can fly in on Emirates Airlines' global network and be on set the next day, and the abundance of hotels and services can accommodate productions of any size.

Dubai's **locations** are another asset: within a short radius one can find ultra-modern cityscapes, sandy deserts, beaches, historic districts, and even mountains – a diversity of scenery that reduces the need to travel elsewhere for varied shooting environments. The government has been proactive in promoting iconic sites for filming; the Burj Khalifa, for example, famously partnered with Hollywood for Mission: Impossible, (the world witnessed **Tom Cruise** famously climb the Burj Khalifa) creating an unforgettable sequence that doubled as tourism marketing for the city. As noted in industry discussions, “everyone knows Dubai” and its **recognizability** can be leveraged in film branding. Moreover, local infrastructure extends to **support services**: an experienced pool of production crew, casting agencies, stunt coordinators, set builders, and more are available. Many crew members are seasoned from work on commercials and TV (Dubai has long been a regional advertising production center), which translates into solid skills for film shoots.

In short, the hardware (studios, equipment, locations) and **logistics (hotels, transport, crew)** make up a strong backbone for the film industry in Dubai.

However, some **gaps in infrastructure** remain. Stakeholders note a “shortage of technical talent, particularly in specialized roles such as VFX, sound design, and post-production”, which sometimes forces productions to outsource or import these skills . High-end post-production facilities (e.g. large sound mixing stages or high-capacity rendering farms for CGI) are limited in Dubai, leading to a portion of post work being done abroad. There is also demand for more **dedicated film production spaces** – while Studio City is large, as the market grows there may be a need for additional studios or backlots, especially if multiple big productions overlap. Importantly, participants have highlighted the **absence of a major international film festival** since DIFF’s suspension, which means Dubai lacks a regular marquee event to showcase its industry and infrastructure to the world. This absence is felt as a gap in the “soft” infrastructure that could otherwise promote networking and growth.

Talent and Workforce

Dubai’s talent pool for film is diverse and cosmopolitan. The city’s appeal as a global business hub means many skilled creatives – directors, cinematographers, editors, etc. – either reside in Dubai or are willing to work on projects there. **Local talent** includes a growing number of filmmakers and crew who have gained experience in recent years.



The industry benefits from a **multicultural workforce**, with professionals from the Arab world, India, Europe, and beyond, creating a rich mix of perspectives. Participants in the industry often cite **networking ease** in Dubai: because the community is relatively small, it’s possible to know key players and collaborate informally, which helps get projects off the ground in a collegial way . English being the working language also lowers barriers for international talent to integrate . In terms of education, there are a few media programs (e.g. at MBRSC, Dubai Men’s College, etc.) and private workshops, and many young filmmakers are self-taught via hands-on projects or by studying abroad.

Despite this, **talent development** is viewed as one of Dubai's greatest challenges. There is “no dedicated film school” in Dubai and only limited formal training programs for advanced film crafts. As a result, promising young creators may lack pathways to build skills. A number of skilled crew members in key technical fields (gaffer, sound engineer, VFX artist) are often expatriates or are flown in per project, indicating a need to train more residents in these areas. Retention of talent is another concern – with the industry still maturing, many creatives might leave for opportunities in larger markets like Hollywood, Europe, or even neighboring Abu Dhabi, where a 35% (and can go up to 50%) rebate can attract projects and talent. In workshops, stakeholders noted an “insufficient culture of performing arts and inadequate support and recognition of acting talent” locally . This suggests actors and writers need more encouragement (grants, awards, mentoring) to thrive. Additionally, connecting the veteran **industry leaders with newcomers** could be improved; currently, there's fragmentation and “weak visibility and connections between industry divisions and initiatives” , meaning that knowledge transfer and mentorship opportunities are being missed.



To address these issues, participants strongly call for **talent development programs**. Suggestions include integrating film and media studies into school curriculums to build awareness from a young age , creating apprenticeships or labs where young filmmakers can learn alongside professionals, and establishing a **dedicated film fund** to support local projects (so that emerging talent actually have work opportunities). The idea of a Dubai-based film academy or strengthening partnerships with institutions like local universities and international film schools was also raised. Ensuring that local talent is nurtured and can make a sustainable career in Dubai is critical if the city wants not just to host foreign productions, but to originate its own compelling content.



Policies & Regulations

Government policy in Dubai towards the film industry has been characterized by openness to business and ad-hoc support, but it currently **lacks a comprehensive regulatory framework** tailored for filmmaking. On the positive side, Dubai (and the UAE generally) offers a **tax-free environment** – there are no direct taxes on production companies or box office revenue, which is a competitive advantage versus many markets (**However, the cost of living is high**). Obtaining filming permits in Dubai is relatively straightforward for most public locations, managed through the Dubai Film & TV Commission’s one-stop online portal. The DFTC’s mandate is to facilitate filming, and it even offers **24-hour permitting services** for fast turnaround. Participants commend the film permit system for being clear and the supportiveness of entities like the Dubai Police for on-location shoots. This cooperative attitude (a “film-friendly” stance) is a strength that has drawn productions – as evidenced by the smooth process of hosting movies like Silver Spoon in Dubai (a Russian production) with DFTC coordinating all necessary permits across various authorities. Censorship and content regulation, while present, are generally predictable: scripts need approval to ensure cultural and religious sensitivities are respected, but many genres and topics are permissible with minor edits. Compared to some neighboring countries, Dubai’s content regulations are seen as moderate.

That said, industry feedback highlights several **regulatory and policy challenges** that need to be addressed:

Fragmented Oversight and Lack of One Authority

Currently multiple bodies (the DFTC, National Media Council, various free zone authorities, municipalities, etc.) have a say in film matters, leading to confusion. There is “no clear & recognizable central authority” fully empowered to make decisions, resulting in fragmented or mixed messages. Filmmakers sometimes get script approval from one office only to hit roadblocks with location approvals from another. The absence of a unified film law or single “film authority” is seen as an impediment.

Unclear Guidelines

There is a need for **transparent, published guidelines** on what content is acceptable (to reduce uncertainty on cultural sensitivities) and on the procedures for permits, fees, etc. Stakeholders noted that rules are not consolidated in one place and the DFTC website, which should serve this role, has had reliability issues (even crashing when people try to use it) .

Lack of Incentives and Funding

Unlike [Abu Dhabi](#) (which offers a 35%+ cash rebate on production spend), Dubai currently offers **no formal rebate or tax credit** to attract filmmakers. This is a major policy gap – producers and studios often choose destinations with robust financial incentives to offset costs. As a result, Dubai sometimes loses productions to competitors. There is also no government-backed film fund or grant program in Dubai for local filmmakers (similar to British Film Institute (BFI), Korean Film Council (KOFIC), German Federal Film Fund (DFFF) etc.), which makes financing local projects difficult. The lack of funds was repeatedly cited as a weakness in industry consultations .

Intellectual Property and Legal Protections

Filmmakers feel current IP laws and contract enforcement in the UAE are not fully matured for the film sector. There have been instances of unclear ownership of content, or difficulties in enforcing agreements, which can deter investors. Strengthening IP protection and providing legal templates for co-productions and distribution deals would improve the business environment .

In summary, [Dubai's Film policy environment is welcoming but underdeveloped](#) for film. The government's general pro-business stance (low taxes, ease of doing business) is a boon, and the DFTC acts as a helpful facilitator, but strategic policies specific to nurturing film (like incentives, funding schemes, unified regulations) lag behind global best practices. Recognizing this, stakeholders have urged the government to take a more **proactive role**: for example, by creating a “Centralized Film Hub – a one-stop shop” authority , by enacting incentive programs, and by formally prioritizing the film industry in its economic development plans. The Dubai Media Council and other high-level bodies have begun to discuss such measures, and indeed officials have hinted that a rebate system is in the [works](#). Implementing these policies will be key for Dubai to remain competitive and to support its local creators.



Distribution & Exhibition

The end-to-end film landscape includes not just making films but also distributing and showcasing them. In Dubai, **distribution channels** for film are well-developed on the exhibition side – the city has a robust cinema infrastructure and is a lucrative market for theatrical releases. The UAE’s cinema sector (with Dubai at the forefront) attracts major studio releases on opening weekend, often simultaneous with or even before U.S. release dates. Major cinema chains like Vox Cinemas, Reel Cinemas, and Novo Cinemas operate multiplexes in Dubai’s malls, offering IMAX, MX4D, and other premium formats that draw audiences. With 11 million cinema visits in 8 months of [2024](#), it’s clear that **audience demand** for films is strong. This provides a solid foundation: filmmakers know that if they create a commercially viable film, the local audience is there and theaters can screen it. Moreover, Dubai’s multicultural population means there are markets for a wide range of content (Hollywood blockbusters, Indian cinema, Arabic films, European arthouse, etc.), making the city a potential hub for diverse film programming.

When it comes to distributing local UAE films or smaller independent projects, challenges emerge. The **visibility of Emirati films** in major theaters has historically been limited – big multiplexes would give only short runs to local titles (if at all), as those screens are dominated by proven international hits. This is slowly changing as more local films like *Al Kameen* (The Ambush) or *Going to Heaven* get theatrical releases, but it remains tough for local filmmakers to secure wide distribution. There is only one specialty arthouse cinema (Cinema Akil) which champions indie and regional films. Stakeholders pointed out the “**limited availability of cinemas for independent films**” as a bottleneck to showcasing local talent.

On the **international distribution** front, few Dubai-made films have secured global distribution deals. One cited issue was that **major streaming platforms and distributors have yet to strongly pick up UAE content** – e.g., “Netflix doesn’t take content/films made by UAE filmmakers, VOX neither,” as one comment noted. This could be due to quality gaps or simply the nascent state of the industry. However, Dubai’s position as a media hub gives it opportunity: companies like OSN (a regional streaming service) are based in Dubai, and MBC’s Shahid platform (popular Arabic VOD) could be partners in distributing content from Dubai creators.

On a positive note, **regional distribution networks** are expanding. Dubai-based distribution companies (e.g., Front Row Filmed Entertainment, Empire International) already handle Middle East releases of foreign films and could be leveraged to export Emirati films across the GCC. Also, Dubai's neutrality and central location make it an ideal meeting point for East-West collaboration – for instance, international co-productions that film in Dubai could also use Dubai as a launchpad into Middle East markets.

Regulations in distribution are generally favorable – there are no quotas or onerous rules limiting what films can be imported or exported, aside from content censorship standards. One existing policy that was highlighted as an opportunity is the **Dubai Municipality tax on cinema tickets**: a 10% fee is added to each ticket sold in Dubai . Currently that goes into general revenue; industry participants suggest reinvesting that into a film fund or distribution support program to fuel local content creation (essentially turning a portion of box office earnings back into the industry). This idea illustrates how aligning distribution success with production funding could create a virtuous cycle (similar to the South Korea that Imposes a 3% levy on cinema ticket sales to support the Korean Film Council (KOFIC) and local productions).

In terms of **broadcast and streaming**: Many films (especially short films and documentaries by local creators) find exposure through UAE television channels or YouTube and Vimeo. Dubai has several TV broadcasters that occasionally commission local films or series. The rise of streaming has not bypassed Dubai – global platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Disney+ are all available in the UAE, and they have started acquiring Middle Eastern content (though mostly from larger markets like Egypt or from Abu Dhabi's Image Nation). Dubai's filmmakers are keen to get their work onto these platforms; doing so will likely require building relationships and perhaps co-development deals with the streamers. Industry experts recommend **partnering with major streaming platforms to produce regionally focused content** that could then reach global audiences . Such partnerships, alongside hosting international film market events or festival tie-ins, would increase the visibility of Dubai's film output.

Overall, the **distribution landscape in Dubai** has strong fundamentals (modern cinemas, a hungry audience, and global connectivity) but needs strategic improvements to ensure locally produced films share in that success. By boosting support for independent distribution, fostering ties with global distributors/streamers, and possibly implementing incentives for distributors (e.g. subsidies or rewards for picking up UAE films), Dubai can better align its production side with worldwide film consumption trends.



Global Film Industry Trends

Dubai's film sector does not exist in isolation – it both influences and is influenced by global industry trends. Understanding these trends is crucial to see how Dubai can position itself internationally. Here we examine some key global developments and compare Dubai's alignment:

Rise of Production Incentives:

Around the world, film hubs compete by offering attractive financial incentives (tax credits, cash rebates, grants). From Canada and the UK's tax credits to New Zealand's rebates and many U.S. states' film funds, incentives have become a norm. Regionally, Abu Dhabi set the precedent with a 30% cash rebate for productions in 2012, which increased to the current 35%+ in 2024, and more recently Saudi Arabia announced a generous rebate (up to 40% for films meeting certain criteria). Dubai has recognized this trend and is in the process of catching up – officials have acknowledged that “a rebate system...exists in most other cities around the world” and Dubai should implement one soon. **Currently, the lack of a rebate is a differentiator (in a negative way):** it makes Dubai more expensive relative to peers.



Aligning with this global trend by introducing a competitive incentive will level the playing field and likely boost inbound productions significantly. **Currently, the lack of a rebate is a differentiator (in a negative way):** it makes Dubai more expensive relative to peers. Aligning with this global trend by introducing a competitive incentive will level the playing field and likely boost inbound productions significantly.

Globalization of Content and Co-Productions:

There is increasing collaboration across borders in filmmaking. Hollywood studios shoot overseas; Netflix produces content in dozens of countries; and co-productions between nations are common (for example, a film might have a French director, Emirati producers, and be shot in India – a hypothetical scenario that is more feasible than ever). For Dubai, this trend is an opportunity. The city's multicultural environment and reputation as a neutral business hub make it a natural co-production meeting point. Dubai can align with this by establishing co-production treaties or agreements (similar to those between Canada and Europe, etc.) to encourage international projects to partner with local producers. However, unlike many countries, the UAE currently has few formal co-production treaties. Pushing for such agreements and joining networks like Eurimages or Asia-Pacific co-pro forums could integrate Dubai into the global content supply chain. On the flip side, Dubai's local content needs to travel – currently, very few Emirati films have made a splash abroad (with rare exceptions in festival circuits). Learning from global successes of small national cinemas (e.g. South Korea's dramatic rise in global viewership culminating in Parasite's Oscar [win](#)), Dubai is aiming to find its unique voice that can appeal internationally. One trend is clear: **stories with authentic cultural elements but universal themes** are doing well globally (as seen with Korea, or even with India's crossover hits). Dubai's filmmakers are encouraged to develop stories that, while rooted locally, have global resonance.

Streaming and New Distribution Models:

The past decade's streaming boom has altered the film industry worldwide. Theatrical windows have shortened, and direct-to-digital releases are common. Globally, the pandemic accelerated this trend, and now even big-budget films sometimes debut on streaming concurrently with cinemas. Dubai's alignment here: the UAE population is extremely online (99% internet penetration) and has high social media and streaming usage. This means any strategy for the film industry must consider digital distribution as equally important as cinemas. Dubai's government and industry are adapting by engaging with streaming services – for instance, working with Netflix or Amazon to host workshops or content labs for local creators could be beneficial. A noted difference: censorship rules for theatrical releases in the region sometimes differ from what's available on streaming (where content might bypass local edits). This creates a challenge – how to uphold cultural values while embracing global platforms. Some countries have started negotiating with streamers for certain content codes; Dubai may need to clarify its stance as more local content goes to Netflix, etc. The trend of streaming also means **data is king**: understanding audience viewing habits (which genres are popular in the Middle East? how do Emiratis consume media?) can guide creators. Dubai's industry will benefit from tapping into global analytics to tailor content for both local and global appeal.



Technological Innovation in Filmmaking:

Globally, new tech like virtual production (using LED walls and game-engine graphics as seen in The Mandalorian series) and advanced CGI are changing how films are made. Many countries are investing in virtual production stages. In Dubai, the private sector has started moving in this direction – a few studios now offer XR/VR production services (such as [Pixojam](#) and [Wild Pixel](#)). Embracing these innovations can give Dubai an edge, as it aligns with its image as a futuristic city. Additionally, trends like AI in film editing or distribution (AI for subtitle translation, marketing analytics, etc.) are relevant. Dubai, being a tech-forward city, is likely to adopt such tools quickly. This can streamline production and distribution processes, but also requires policy to keep up (for example, updating regulations on drone filming or on using AI for script analysis).

Regional Competition and Collaboration:

Within the Middle East, several players are growing their film industries – notably Saudi Arabia (which opened cinemas in 2018 and is investing billions in film infrastructure and even a mega studio complex in NEOM), and Abu Dhabi (with its established rebate and new “Yas Creative Hub” housing media companies, as well as backlots and a plan to build over half a dozen state of the art studios). Dubai differs in that its approach so far has been more about leveraging the private sector and being a service hub, rather than direct government production of films. A trend in the region is government-led initiatives (like Saudi’s Film Commission funding movies, or Qatar’s Doha Film Institute backing arthouse films). If Dubai continues a primarily facilitative role, it must find ways to incentivize private investment into films to not fall behind. On the collaboration front, stakeholders suggested the **local Emirates (Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, etc.) should work together rather than have different goals**. Aligning a UAE-wide strategy (for instance, [Abu Dhabi focuses on big international productions, Dubai on being a talent/training and distribution hub, Sharjah on heritage films, etc.](#), all under a unified UAE film vision) could be a way to strengthen the country’s overall standing. Internationally, Dubai can differentiate by marketing itself as **the crossroads of East and West** – a place where an American director can work with an Indian cinematographer and Arab actors seamlessly. This resonates with global trends of diversity and cross-pollination in filmmaking.

In essence, Dubai is aligning with global trends in infrastructure and consumption, but policy-wise it’s playing catch-up. The world is seeing more content creation than ever (streamers fueling a content boom), and if Dubai can implement the right policies (funds, incentives, in addition to training) quickly, it can attract a slice of that boom. Conversely, if it remains without these for long, productions might flow to better-supported locales. The good news is Dubai’s natural advantages (location, infrastructure, and brand) are in step with what global productions look for in a hub. And culturally, as emerging markets’ cinemas (e.g. South Korea, India, Egypt) have shown their stories can travel, Dubai’s storytellers could be next – if given the platform and support to develop world-class content. Keeping an eye on global best practices and being nimble will ensure Dubai’s film industry grows in harmony with international developments, while also carving out its unique identity.

Thematic Analysis

During a recent industry workshop, stakeholders convened around four major themes critical to the Dubai film industry's growth. In this section, we provide a thematic analysis for each focus area – **Infrastructure & Market Growth, Talent Development, Policies & Regulations, and Distribution & Visibility** – summarizing the key points discussed. Each sub-section highlights **strengths** (what's working), **gaps/challenges** (what's missing or hindering progress), and some **opportunities or ideas** that emerged from the roundtable discussions.



1. Infrastructure & Market Growth

Focus: Physical infrastructure for filmmaking in Dubai and the overall market ecosystem (investment, financing, industry expansion).



Strengths:

Dubai's physical and logistical infrastructure for film is a strong foundation. Participants praised the availability of diverse filming locations and modern facilities: from expansive desert landscapes to futuristic city streets, Dubai offers a natural set for almost any story . There is ample land earmarked for expanding studios or building new backlots as needed. The city's **equipment rental houses** are well-stocked with high-quality gear, meaning crews can source cameras, lighting, and rigs locally . Another strength is **connectivity** – Dubai's status as a global travel hub (home of Emirates Airlines) makes it easy to bring in cast, crew, or even special equipment on short notice . Within the city, efficient transport and supportive government agencies (police, municipality) provide a conducive environment for smooth filming logistics . The roundtable also highlighted a collaborative industry spirit: key players know each other, and there's "strong leadership and collaboration within the film industry community" which helps in problem-solving . Lastly, Dubai's **global appeal** as a brand cannot be underestimated – the name "Dubai" itself draws interest and lends a certain prestige or curiosity that can be leveraged to market films or attract projects .

Gaps & Challenges

Despite great facilities, several gaps in infrastructure and market mechanisms were identified. A major challenge is the lack of a clear central authority or unified body overseeing the film sector, leading to fragmented decision-making and no single vision . This fragmentation can slow down infrastructure development (for instance, if multiple entities manage different studios or resources without coordination). **Financial barriers** are another issue: high costs for equipment and services in Dubai can price out smaller productions . Unlike some competing locations, Dubai has **no rebate system** or significant subsidies currently, which makes it less financially attractive – this is seen as a critical gap making Dubai “less competitive as an international filming destination” .



In terms of facilities, stakeholders noted a lack of access to certain production facilities – for example, specialized stages for advanced projects or public funding to utilize existing studios at lower cost for indies . There is also no **centralized production handbook or standard operating procedures (SOPs)** which could streamline workflows; each project navigates the system in its own way, sometimes reinventing the wheel . Another challenge is the **talent pipeline** specifically for infrastructure: running big studio operations and technical departments requires skilled managers and crew, and there’s a “shortage of specialized technical talent” such as visual effects artists, top-notch sound designers, etc., as mentioned earlier .

Finally, at an industry level, participants felt the market is fragmented and not fully mature, with a disparity between the TV sector (which is better developed with continuous series production) and the film sector (which is still more project-based and less frequent) . This disparity means less consistent work for film crews and thus slower market growth for cinema relative to television.

How Might We Questions (HMW)

- **HMW establish a unified film authority** that streamlines decision-making and provides a clear strategic vision for Dubai’s film industry (ending the current fragmentation)?
- **HMW make Dubai more financially attractive to filmmakers** – for instance, by reducing costs or offering incentives – so that more international and indie projects choose Dubai as a location?
- **HMW expand and optimize film infrastructure** (studios, post-production facilities, support services) ahead of demand, ensuring even as the market grows, Dubai can accommodate multiple large productions simultaneously?
- **HMW leverage Dubai’s global brand and diverse locations** to attract more international productions and co-productions, thereby injecting investment and showcasing the city’s capabilities to the world?
- **HMW create a buzz around Dubai’s film scene year-round** (through festivals, markets, or events) to strengthen the ecosystem’s soft infrastructure and stimulate market expansion?

Potential Solutions & Interventions (with Ownership)

A. Establish a Dubai Film Council (Public)

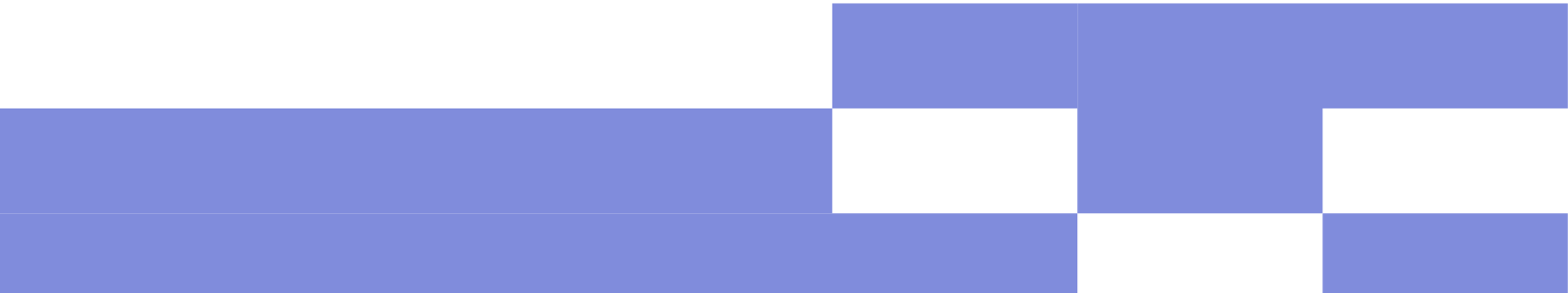
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Description:
A centralized governing body that oversees film industry strategy, infrastructure planning, regulations, and incentives, ensuring alignment across different government entities.

- Key Features:**
- Unifies decision-making on permits, incentives, and policies.
 - Develops long-term strategies for film infrastructure and market growth.
 - Acts as a single point of contact for local and international filmmakers.
 - Manages public funding, marketing initiatives, and industry advocacy.

- Implementation:**
- Government decree establishing the council under Dubai Media Council.
 - Industry consultation to ensure alignment with market needs.
 - Public-private advisory board with representatives from studios, distributors, and investors.

Potential Owner(s):
Public Sector:
Dubai Media Council, Dubai Film & TV Commission (DFTC).



B. Implement a Competitive Film Rebate Program (Public)

Description:

Introduce a **30-40% cash rebate** on qualifying production expenses to attract international and regional filmmakers.

Key Features:

- Covers expenses related to hiring local crew, studio rentals, post-production services, and accommodations.
- Minimum spend threshold to ensure high-impact productions.
- Fast-track approval process with clear and transparent criteria.

Implementation:

- Government allocates a fund for rebates, similar to Abu Dhabi's model.
- Dubai Film Authority manages applications and audits compliance.
- Marketing campaign to promote Dubai as a competitive destination for productions.

Potential Owner(s): Public Sector

Public Sector:

Dubai Media Council, Department of Economy and Tourism, Dubai Culture and Arts Authority and Department of Finance.

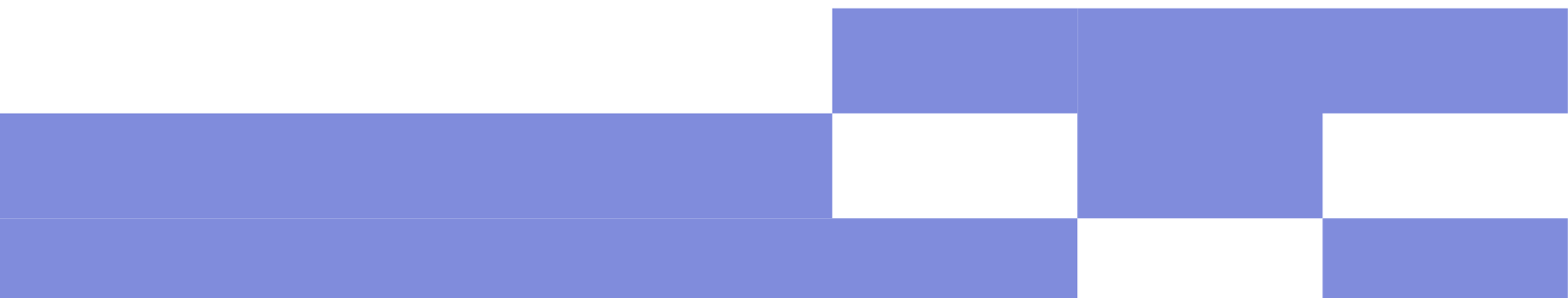
C. Develop Additional Production Facilities & Soundstages (Hybrid)

Description:

Expand Dubai's studio infrastructure by incentivizing private investment in new soundstages, backlots, and post-production facilities.

Key Features:

- Tax breaks or subsidies for private companies building new studios.
- Public-private partnerships (PPP) to develop advanced film infrastructure.
- Integration of new technologies (e.g., **virtual production stages, green screen facilities**).



Implementation:

- Government offers long-term leases at discounted rates for investors.
- Dubai Studio City & private developers collaborate on infrastructure projects.
- Incentives for foreign studios to establish regional production hubs in Dubai.

Potential Owner(s):

Hybrid :

Private sector (studio investors), public sector (Dubai Studio City, Dubai Film Authority).

D. Establish a Film Financing & Venture Fund (Hybrid)

Description:

Create a dedicated investment fund that finances both local productions and international co-productions involving Dubai.

Key Features:

- Funding tiers: Small grants for indie films, co-financing for larger productions.
- Public-private investment model where government seed funding attracts private investors.
- Special funding category for Arabic-language films and regional collaborations.

Implementation:

- Public funding for initial launch, transitioning to a private sponsorship model.
- Collaboration with international festivals for credibility and global reach.
- Industry networking facilitated by the Dubai Film Council.

Potential Owner(s):

Hybrid :

Government-backed but open to private investors.

D. Introduce a Dubai International Film Festival & Market (Hybrid)

Description:

Relaunch a **high-profile film festival** that includes a film market for distributors, buyers, and filmmakers, making Dubai a hub for international film trade.

Key Features:

- Red-carpet premieres, industry panels, and networking events.
- Marketplace where international distributors can acquire Dubai-produced films.
- Pitching sessions for emerging filmmakers seeking investors.

Implementation:

- Public funding for initial launch, transitioning to a private sponsorship model.
- Collaboration with international festivals for credibility and global reach.
- Industry networking facilitated by the Dubai Film Council.

Potential Owner(s):

Hybrid:

Government-backed with private sponsorship.

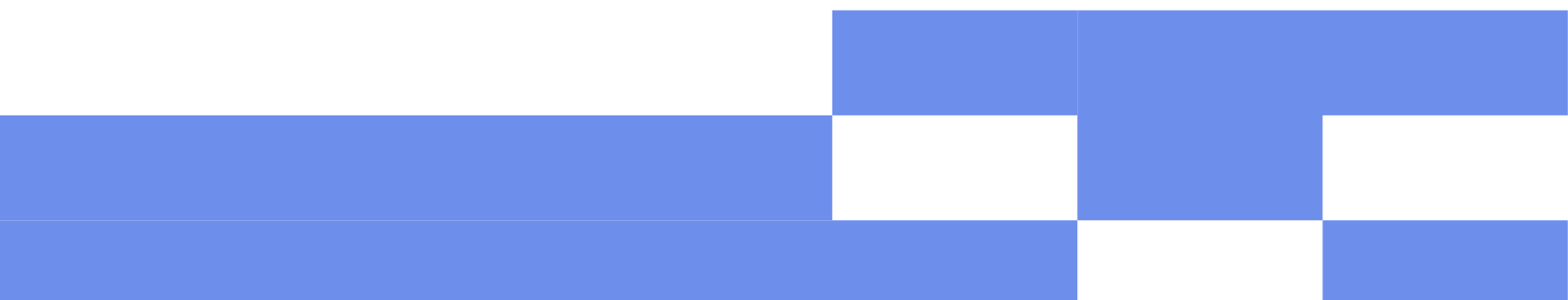
E. Develop a Comprehensive Production Roadmap & One-Stop Filmmaker Portal

Description:

A digital platform consolidating all information related to filming in Dubai, permits, funding opportunities, and industry contacts.

Key Features:

- Online database of filming locations, service providers, and talent directories.
- Step-by-step guide on obtaining permits, budgeting, and hiring local crew.
- Integrated application system for incentives, locations, and visas.



Implementation:

- Dubai Film Authority builds and maintains the portal.
- Public-private collaboration for updating content with industry trends.

Potential Owner(s):

Public Sector:

Dubai Film Authority, Dubai Media Office.

E. A.Strengthen Dubai’s Position as a Film Tourism Destination (Hybrid)

Description:

Leverage iconic filming locations to boost tourism and international productions.

Key Features:

- Create “Dubai Film Routes” showcasing famous movie locations.
- Encourage productions to include recognizable Dubai landmarks for branding.
- Offer tourism industry discounts for visiting production crews.

Implementation:

- Film authority collaborates with Dubai Tourism & airlines for marketing.
- Incentives for productions featuring Dubai’s skyline and attractions.

Potential Owner(s):

Hybrid :

Dubai Tourism Board, Dubai Film & TV Commission.



H. Develop Film Data & Market Intelligence Capabilities (Public)

Description:

Invest in market research to track box office performance, audience demographics, and content trends.

Key Features:

- Regular reports on UAE's film industry and audience behavior.
- Benchmarking Dubai's competitiveness against global film hubs.

Implementation:

- Government funds an industry research unit or partners with consulting firms.

Potential Owner(s):

Public Sector

Dubai Media Council, Dubai Economic Department.

I. Create a Film Co-Production Hub with GCC & International Partners (Hybrid)

Description:

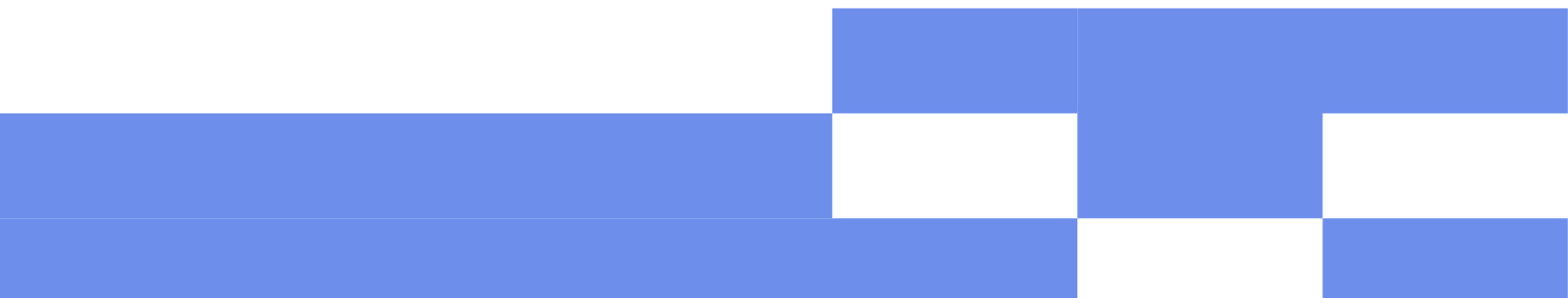
Position Dubai as a strategic partner for international co-productions through government-backed initiatives.

Key Features:

- Formal co-production treaties with countries such as France, India, UK, and the US.
- Regional co-production fund with GCC countries.
- A dedicated office to facilitate international collaboration

Implementation:

- Government negotiates treaties and incentives.
- Dubai Film Council serves as the facilitator for co-productions.

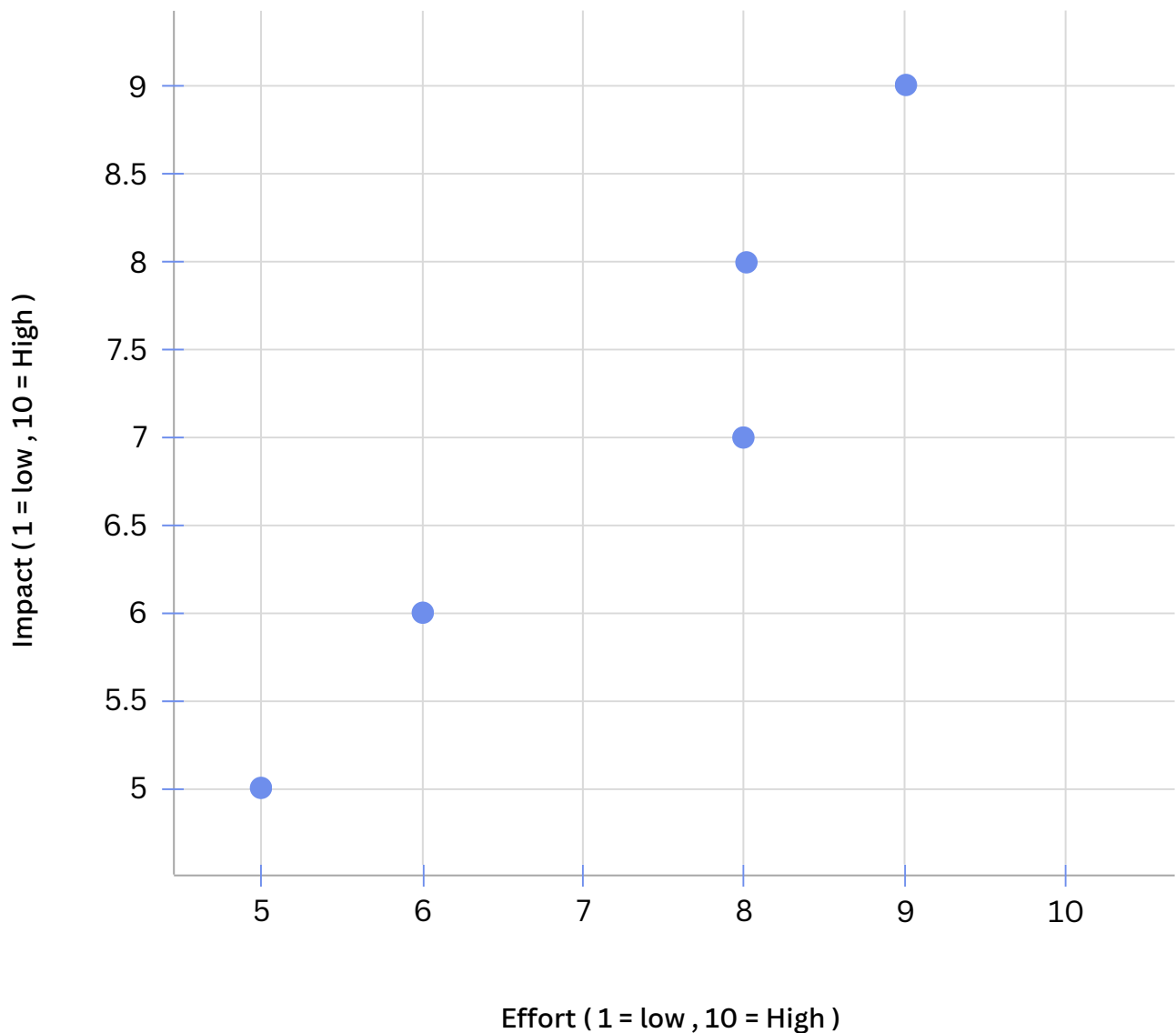


Potential Owner(s):

Hybrid :

Dubai Film Authority, international film bodies.

Effort vs Impact Matrix : Infrastructure & Market Growth



2. Talent Development

Focus: Human capital in the film industry – nurturing directors, producers, writers, crew, and actors; education, training, and retention of talent in Dubai.

Strengths:

Dubai's talent strengths lie in its **diversity and lifestyle appeal**. The city has a strong international reputation that attracts creatives from around the world – many freelancers and professionals are drawn by Dubai's dynamic environment and opportunities in media. The industry benefits from a mix of perspectives (Arab, Western, Asian, etc.) which can spark creativity. Dubai's ability to **adapt quickly** as a city also reflects in the creative sector; people are open to new ideas and quick pivots, which is useful in a fast-changing media landscape . Another strength is the **ease of living and working** in Dubai. The high quality of life (great housing, safety, entertainment) and the city's multinational environment make it a great place for talent to reside long-term . This helps retain talent who might otherwise move to Hollywood or other hubs – living in Dubai is a compelling proposition on its own. In terms of industry structure, because the community is relatively small, it's a **close-knit network**.



Collaborations often come from personal connections; as noted, the smaller size allows building personal relationships with key players, leading to strong informal mentorship and partnerships . There are also some institutions and companies contributing to talent growth: for instance, the MBRSC (Mohammed Bin Rashid School for Communication at AUS) and workshops by organizations like in5 Media, Twofour54 in Abu Dhabi (some Dubai folks train there), etc., have seeded a generation of media students. . Dubai's **digital infrastructure** is excellent, which indirectly benefits talent development – e.g., creators have access to the latest software, high-speed internet for collaboration, and digital platforms to showcase work. Lastly, a **supportive business environment** (easy company setup, freelancer licenses via Dubai Media City) helps talent commercially, enabling them to start their own production companies or work as independents with relative ease.

Gaps & Challenges:

Despite these advantages, the workshop identified numerous talent development challenges in Dubai's film industry. The foremost is the lack of structured education and training pathways. There is **no dedicated film academy or major training program** in Dubai for film production skills . Aspiring filmmakers often have to seek education abroad or learn on the job. This leads to inconsistent skill levels and a reliance on expatriate experts for many technical roles. Participants pointed out “no structured training or film literacy programs to develop future talent”, meaning film is not widely taught in schools or universities locally .

Another gap is **limited mentorship and knowledge transfer** – the industry lacks a formal mentorship network or incubation programs where veterans can guide newcomers. Additionally, there is a brain drain risk: without enough opportunities, talented Emiratis or residents might leave to work in more established film markets. Indeed, “develop strategies to retain talent” was listed as a key next step, implying that currently people may not find enough career growth and thus exit the local industry. **Funding for talent-led projects** is scarce as well – emerging filmmakers struggle to find financing for their first short or feature, which means fewer chances to prove themselves and hone their craft through real projects. The absence of a Dubai film fund or grants (unlike, say, Qatar’s Doha Film Institute grants or Saudi’s new fund) puts our talent at a disadvantage in getting projects off the ground. There’s also an issue of **visibility and recognition**: local filmmakers and crew don’t get much spotlight, which can be demotivating. The community felt there should be more acknowledgment (awards, press coverage) of local talent to raise their profile. Another challenge: “overwhelming number of approval requirements” – bureaucratic hurdles (like many permissions for student films, etc.) can frustrate young talent. While seasoned producers manage, newcomers might be discouraged by paperwork or unclear processes. Lastly, the **culture for performing arts** in general is still developing; as noted, acting as a profession isn’t widely encouraged by society yet, and there’s stigma or lack of awareness about careers in film. This cultural factor means fewer parents encourage their kids to pursue filmmaking, limiting the talent pipeline to only the most determined individuals.

How Might We Questions (HMW)

- HMW establish formal education avenues (e.g., a film school or accredited programs) in Dubai so aspiring filmmakers can train locally to a high standard?
- HMW facilitate mentorship and knowledge transfer between veteran industry professionals and newcomers to create a culture of continuous learning and collaboration?
- HMW retain local talent by ensuring that Dubai-based filmmakers see a viable long-term career locally instead of seeking opportunities abroad?
- HMW nurture a supportive culture and public appreciation for film arts, encouraging young Emiratis to pursue careers in filmmaking, acting, and production?
- HMW provide emerging filmmakers with more opportunities to practice and showcase their skills through funding, competitions, and distribution channels?

Potential Solutions & Interventions (with Ownership)

A. Establish a Dubai Film Academy (Public/Hybrid)

Description:

Develop a dedicated film school or training institute that provides formal education in directing, producing, cinematography, screenwriting, editing, and post-production. The curriculum should be designed in collaboration with leading international film schools.

Key Features:

- Accredited degree and diploma programs.
- Hands-on training using industry-standard equipment.
- International faculty and guest lecturers from Hollywood, Bollywood, and regional industries.
- Specialized programs for emerging technologies such as virtual production and AI in filmmaking.

Implementation:

- Government provides funding and accreditation support.
- Private sector partners (such as global film schools or major studios) co-develop the curriculum.
- Industry professionals contribute as visiting faculty.

Potential Owner(s):

Hybrid :

Government (Dubai Media Council, Education Authorities) partners with private sector educational institutions (e.g., NYFA, USC Film School, London Film School).

B. Film Apprenticeship & Mentorship Programs (Private/Hybrid)

Description:

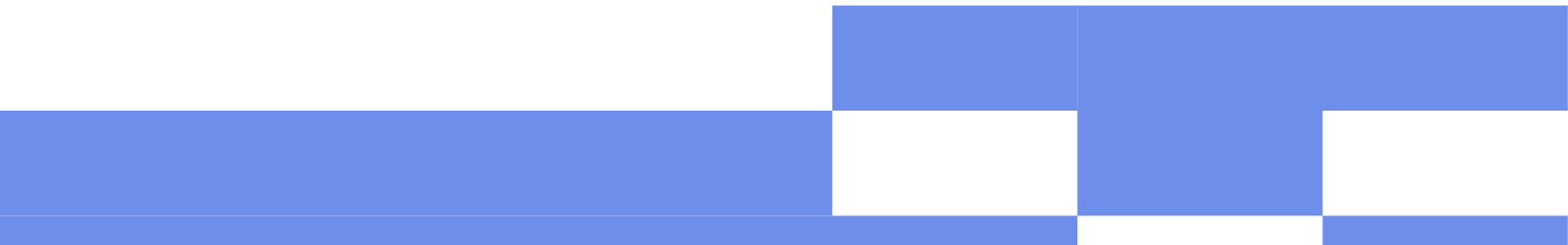
Position Dubai as a strategic partner for international co-productions through government-backed initiatives.

Key Features:

- **Apprenticeships:** Young professionals are placed on film sets with production companies, gaining experience in various departments.
- **Mentorship:** Senior filmmakers, producers, and technicians provide structured guidance, coaching, and networking.

Implementation:

- Production companies receive subsidies for hiring apprentices.
- Government funds mentorship programs through a grant scheme.
- An industry-led mentorship network is established with annual reporting on progress.



Potential Owner(s):**Hybrid :**

Private sector (production companies, Dubai Studio City, local broadcasters) with incentives from the public sector (Dubai Film & TV Commission).

C. Dedicated Local Film Fund for Emerging Talent (Public)**Description:**

Establish a grant-based funding program to support first-time and emerging Emirati filmmakers.

Key Features:

- Competitive application process for short films, features, and documentaries.
- Special funding category for female and youth filmmakers.
- Mentorship and financial literacy training included.

Implementation:

- The government allocates funds from the existing media budget or re-invests part of the cinema ticket tax.
- Filmmakers apply with a treatment, budget plan, and production schedule.

Potential Owner(s):**Public Sector :**

Dubai Film & TV Commission, Dubai Culture, Dubai Media Council.

D. Long-Term Residency & Creative Visas (Public)**Description:**

Introduce long-term residency options for film professionals, making it easier for global talent to settle and work in Dubai.

Key Features:

- 5-10 year visas for distinguished filmmakers, actors, and technicians.
- Pathway for permanent residency for individuals contributing to Dubai's film industry.

Implementation:

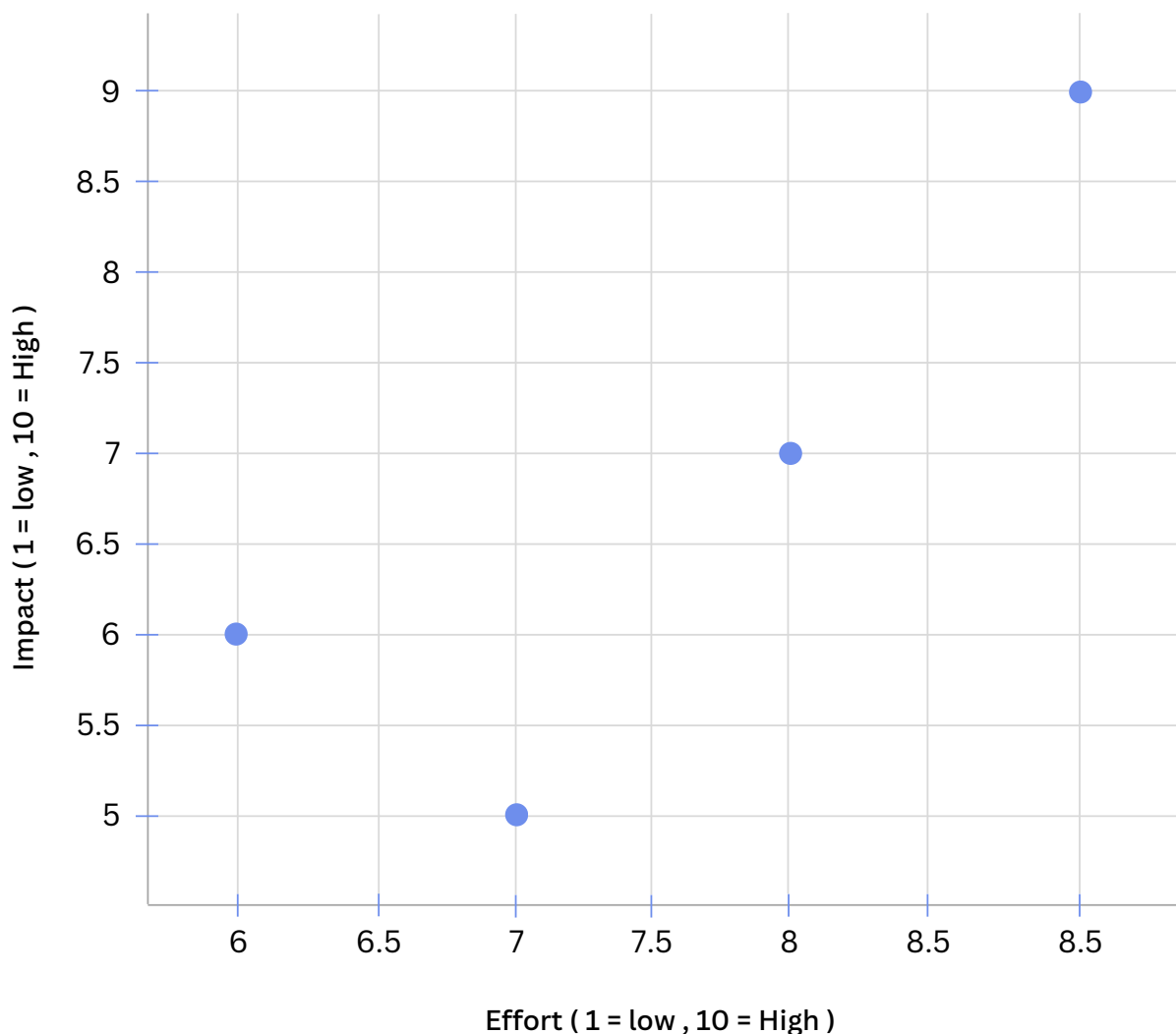
- Government revises visa policies to accommodate creative professionals.
- Dubai Film & TV Commission maintains a nomination process based on industry contributions.

Potential Owner(s):

Public Sector :

Dubai Immigration & Visa Authority, Dubai Media Council.

Effort vs Impact Matrix : Infrastructure & Market Growth



3. Policies & Regulations

Focus: Government policies, regulatory environment, and industry standards affecting the film industry in Dubai.

Strengths:



Dubai's policy environment offers several competitive advantages. **Taxation is minimal** – the UAE has no income tax or corporate tax on film production, making it financially attractive for companies (aside from a recently introduced general corporate tax that exempts many small businesses and free zone entities). This effectively means productions in Dubai keep more of their budget on the screen compared to high-tax jurisdictions. Additionally, the **range of locations and permits available** is a plus: Dubai is generally open to allowing filming in a variety of locations (public beaches, downtown streets, etc.) as long as permissions are obtained. The DFTC acts as a facilitator to get multi-agency approval, which simplifies what could otherwise be a complicated process. The **permit process** itself is considered efficient; participants noted a “clear and efficient film permit system” and praised the responsiveness of authorities like the Dubai Police who assist during shoots. Another positive policy aspect is Dubai's **media free zones** (like Dubai Studio City, Dubai Media City) which allow 100% foreign ownership of companies and easy visa processes for creative workers. This has attracted many international media companies to set up regional offices in Dubai, indirectly boosting the film sector's ecosystem. Censorship and content regulation in Dubai, while present, are predictable enough that filmmakers can usually navigate them with some guidance (e.g., avoiding explicit nudity, very politically sensitive topics, etc., which is common across many countries in the region). Also, the leadership has shown periodic support for the industry – e.g., Dubai's rulers have at times championed creative industries, and the formation of bodies like the **Dubai Media Council** indicates high-level recognition of media/film as important. The **English-language environment** and legal system (partly based on common law in free zones) also make contracts and partnerships with foreign entities easier.

Challenges :

Despite some strengths, the current regulatory framework has notable shortcomings that were a major focus of discussions. A core issue is the complex multi-jurisdictional landscape – Dubai has various authorities (DFTC, NMC in Abu Dhabi for script approval, free zone regulators, etc.), and lack of coordination can lead to confusion or delays. Filmmakers desire a single window approach. The **script/content approval process** was highlighted: cultural sensitivities are not clearly outlined in advance, so filmmakers sometimes operate in a gray area, unsure if certain creative choices will pass approval. Moreover, inconsistencies have occurred where a script is initially approved but later a particular location or agency objects to content, causing reversals mid-production. This uncertainty can scare away productions that fear last-minute complications. **Lack of published regulations:** there is no publicly available, detailed rulebook for filmmakers. For instance, things like drone filming rules, public decency laws on set, or what requires a police escort – these might be known to insiders but are not in a consolidated guide. The DFTC website is expected to host such info, but as noted, it's not always reliable and the content might be incomplete. On the **Financial policies** side: as mentioned earlier, the lack of film incentives or rebates is a policy gap – globally almost every major production destination offers something, so Dubai's current policy of not offering cash back is a disadvantage.

Also, financing policies like co-production treaties (which require government-to-government agreements) are missing, so producers can't easily access foreign film funds in a structured way. The **use of existing public funds** (like the cinema tax) is not optimized – that money goes to general municipal coffers rather than being reinvested into film. **Regulating costs:** Government has not intervened in price regulation for film services, so as discussed, location owners or equipment suppliers can charge very high rates, making budgeting difficult. Another regulatory challenge is with **free zones vs mainland:** different areas of Dubai have different rules (e.g., filming in free zone areas like DIFC or certain gated communities might involve separate approvals). This patchwork can slow projects. **Communication issues:** sometimes government entities outside the DFTC loop (like if you need RTA for a road closure, or DEWA for power on set) may not be fully in sync, causing delays – “lack of communication between government entities” was cited. Lastly, industry stakeholders feel there isn't enough formal representation or advocacy for them in policy circles – who speaks for the filmmakers at the table? The creation of something like a **Dubai Film Council** with private sector members could help voice industry needs in government halls.

How Might We Questions (HMW)

- HMW create a centralized film authority to oversee industry regulations, permitting, and incentives?
- HMW introduce competitive financial incentives (rebates, grants, tax credits) to make Dubai more attractive to filmmakers?
- HMW develop standardized industry guidelines for contracts, wages, and production rates to ensure fair and professional practices?
- HMW strengthen Dubai's legal framework for intellectual property and film co-productions to foster trust and international collaborations?

Potential Solutions & Interventions (with Ownership)

The workshop on policy produced a detailed list of recommended improvements to transform the regulatory landscape:

A. Establish a Dubai Film Authority (Public)

Description:

Create a central regulatory body to oversee all aspects of Dubai’s film industry, including permitting, incentives, and international collaborations.

Key Features:

- Unified film governance under one body.
- Streamlined and transparent permitting process.
- One-stop shop for location scouting, licensing, and funding applications.

Implementation:

- Government decree to consolidate film-related responsibilities under one entity.
- Industry consultation to refine policies and processes.

Potential Owner(s):

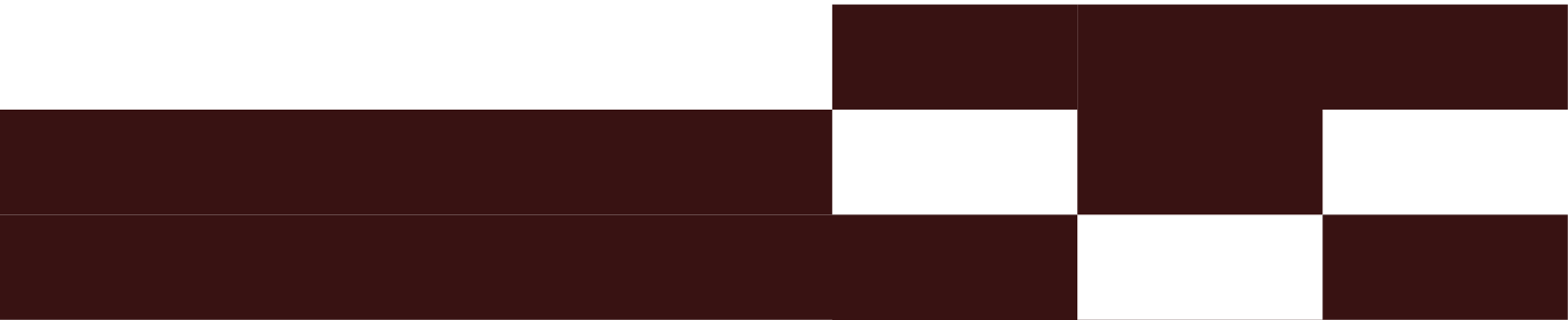
Public Sector:

Dubai Media Council, Dubai Film & TV Commission.

B. Launch a Dubai Film Rebate Program (Public)

Description:

Introduce a tax rebate or cash-back incentive for international and local productions to make Dubai more financially competitive.



Key Features:

- 30-40% rebate on qualifying expenses, including local hiring and services.
- Minimum spend threshold to ensure impactful productions.
- Fast-tracked approval process for applications.

Implementation:

- Government allocates initial budget for the rebate program.
- International benchmarking study conducted to refine criteria.

Potential Owner(s):

Public Sector:

Dubai Media Council, Department of Economy & Tourism.

C. Standardized Industry Guidelines (Hybrid)

Description:

Create official industry guidelines for crew wages, standard contracts, and filming regulations.

Key Features:

- Rate card ensuring fair pay for cast and crew.
- Standardized contracts for location usage, employment, and distribution deals.
- Compliance with global safety standards on film sets.

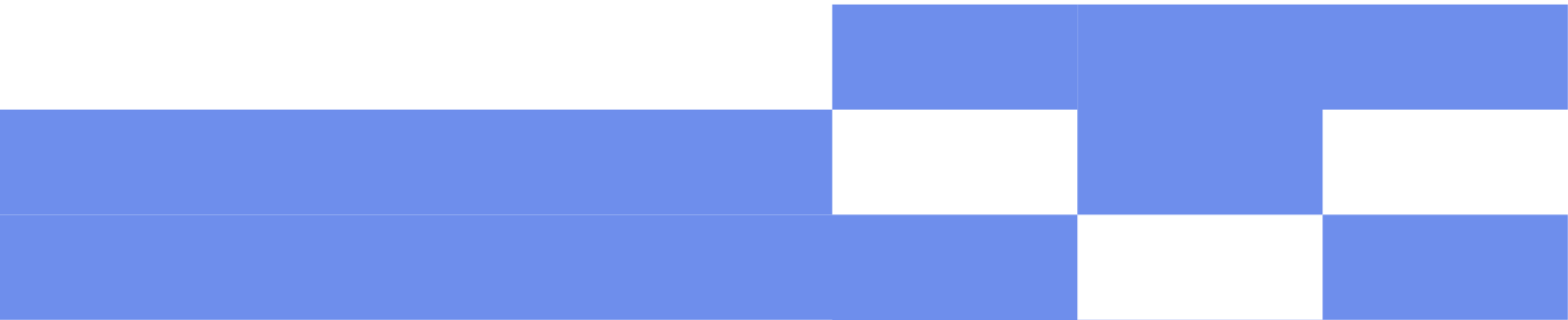
Implementation:

- Industry association drafts the guidelines.
- Government ensures legal enforcement and compliance.

Potential Owner(s):

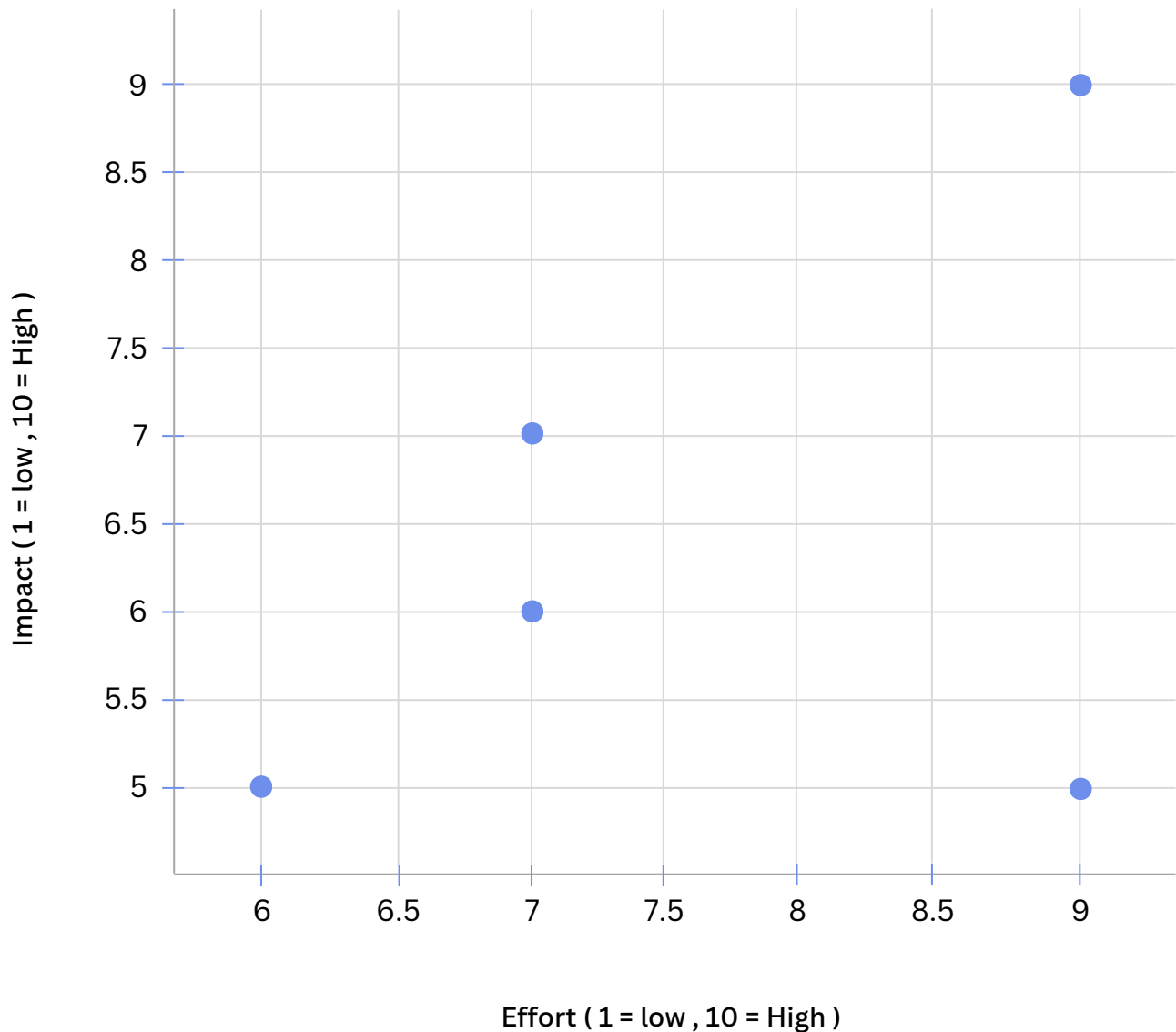
Public Sector:

Dubai Media Council, Department of Economy & Tourism.



Implementing these policy changes would address nearly all pain points raised: confusion would drop, costs could become more manageable, and support (financial and administrative) would increase. In turn, this regulatory reform could unlock a surge of production activity, both domestic and international, in Dubai.

Effort vs Impact Matrix : Policies & Regulations



4. Distribution & Visibility

Focus: How films from or made in Dubai are distributed and seen – locally and globally – and ways to increase their visibility. Also, making Dubai a hub for distribution companies and platforms.

Strengths:



Dubai already has a **solid distribution infrastructure** in terms of cinemas and regional reach. The city's numerous multiplexes and strong box office (highest in the Middle East by revenue [share](#)) mean that any film that appeals to audiences can do significant business here. This acts as a lure for distributors – if a film is popular in Dubai, it likely gains traction across the GCC. The presence of established **distribution companies** in Dubai (like Front Row, Empire, Vox Distribution) is a strength; these companies handle distribution of Hollywood, Bollywood, and independent films to the Middle East, and they are headquartered in Dubai, hence accessible for partnerships. There's also a burgeoning festival scene (outside of DIFF, smaller events like the META Film Fest launched in 2022, and specialized festivals like the Emirates Short Film Festival) that give films additional screening opportunities. The consensus was that **infrastructure for film distribution is in place** – the physical theaters, the networks, the logistics for film prints/digital delivery, etc., are not an issue. Moreover, Dubai's neutrality and cosmopolitan nature make it a place where all kinds of content can be shown (subject to censorship edits). As a "visibility" strength, Dubai's glamor and media-savvy image mean that when a film is associated with Dubai, it can generate PR interest. (We saw this with films like Mission: Impossible promoting their Dubai scenes heavily – effectively giving Dubai visibility as well.) For local filmmakers, one strength in recent years has been **government media (TV)** showing interest in their work

– for example, some local films or shorts get broadcast on Dubai Media Inc channels or one of the many satellite channels based here, providing at least a TV audience. And with social media, many Dubai content creators have built a following on YouTube/Instagram, which while not traditional film distribution, is a way to get visibility for their storytelling (sometimes leading to film opportunities).

Challenges :

The distribution and visibility theme pinpointed several challenges that mirror those discussed earlier for local content. A big issue is **limited global exposure** for Dubai-made films. Local films rarely get picked up for international distribution – whether theatrical or on major streaming platforms – resulting in low visibility beyond the UAE. This can become a vicious cycle: if global distributors aren't aware of or confident in UAE content, they won't acquire it, which keeps that content out of global view. Domestically, while cinemas are abundant, convincing them to program local independent films is tough. There's a perception issue where cinema chains assume audiences only want Hollywood/Bollywood, and local films are riskier. This is slowly changing as a few made-in-UAE movies have done well (for instance, the film *Al Kameen* (2021) became a local blockbuster), but generally local films struggle to secure screens during prime times or extended runs. Another challenge discussed is how to balance **international vs local content** focus. Some stakeholders worry that if Dubai focuses too much on attracting foreign productions and big names, local storytellers might be sidelined (their films could be overshadowed) . Others argue that attracting big projects elevates the whole industry and creates opportunities for locals. This debate indicates a challenge in strategy: how to ensure both local content development and international projects coexist beneficially. **Marketing and Promotion** of Dubai's film industry itself is also a challenge – it was noted that Dubai doesn't sufficiently publicize its film infrastructure and advantages abroad . So, many in the global film community still don't consider Dubai as a primary filming or content source destination. Improving visibility thus also means promoting "Dubai Brand" in film markets. On the distribution business side, while many distributors are here, they could be further empowered – perhaps through incentives to acquire local films or by hosting more film markets in Dubai. Another challenge: **digital disruption** – theaters face the global challenge of streaming. If theatrical attendance ever plateaus or declines, local filmmakers will need alternative distribution (like direct online releases), but monetizing that is uncertain. Currently, no UAE-specific VOD platform focuses on local indie films (Shahid and StarzPlay have some Khaliji content but relatively few Emirati films). So there's a gap in the OTT space for local film distribution. Lastly, an interesting point raised: understanding the **audience preferences in the Middle East** and how they're changing is crucial. Without market research, local producers may not be aligning content to what audiences want (be it genre, language, etc.), which can be a visibility issue – if you make films no one watches, visibility remains low. There's a need for more data-driven insight into Middle Eastern audiences.

How Might We Questions (HMW)

- HMW increase the exposure of Emirati films in local cinemas and on digital platforms?
- HMW enable Dubai's filmmakers to break into international markets?

Potential Solutions & Interventions (with Ownership)

To boost distribution and visibility, the group proposed a multi-pronged approach:

A. Cinema Slotting Policies for Local Films (Public/Private)

Description:

Ensure local films get guaranteed screen time in major cinemas through voluntary agreements or policy incentives.

Key Features:

- Dedicated slots for Emirati films in major multiplexes.
- Marketing support and promotion for local films.
- Subsidies for theaters screening independent films.

Implementation:

- Government negotiates with cinema chains to create a local content quota.
- Industry tracking to measure audience engagement and impact.

Potential Owner(s):

Hybrid :

Private sector (cinema chains) with public sector incentives.

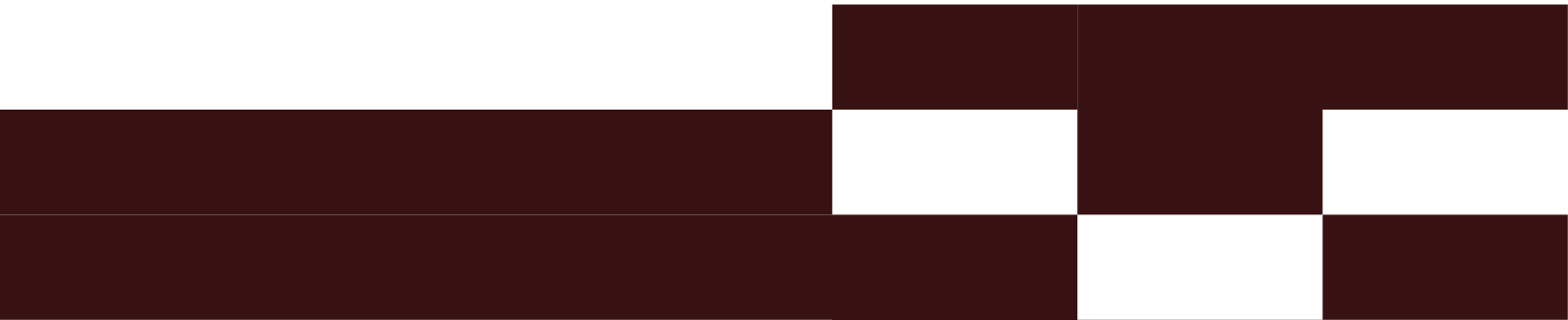
B. Dubai Film Festival & Market (Public/Hybrid)

Description:

Relaunch an international film festival that showcases local talent and attracts global buyers.

Key Features:

- Competitive sections for UAE films.
- Marketplace where distributors meet filmmakers.
- Networking and pitch sessions for co-productions.



Implementation:

- Public sector provides initial funding and logistics support.
- Private sponsors and partners contribute to operations.

Potential Owner(s):**Hybrid :**

Government funding, private festival management.

C. Streaming Platform Partnerships (Private/Hybrid)

Description:

Build strategic partnerships with global streaming platforms to increase the acquisition of Dubai-made films.

Key Features:

- Direct negotiations with Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+, Shahid.
- Government-backed initiatives to co-produce original content.
- Marketing campaigns positioning Dubai as a film content hub.

Implementation:

- Government organizes an annual "Streaming Content Summit."
- Funding for market research to identify key genres and trends.

Potential Owner(s):**Hybrid :**

Government funding, private festival management.

D. Local Content Broadcasting Initiative (Public/Private)

Description:

Ensure Emirati films get national broadcast exposure through dedicated TV programming.

Key Features:

- Weekly primetime slots for UAE films.
- Cross-promotion with local media outlets.

Implementation:

- Partnerships with TV networks and digital platforms.
- Public funding for licensing fees of independent films.

Potential Owner(s):

Hybrid :

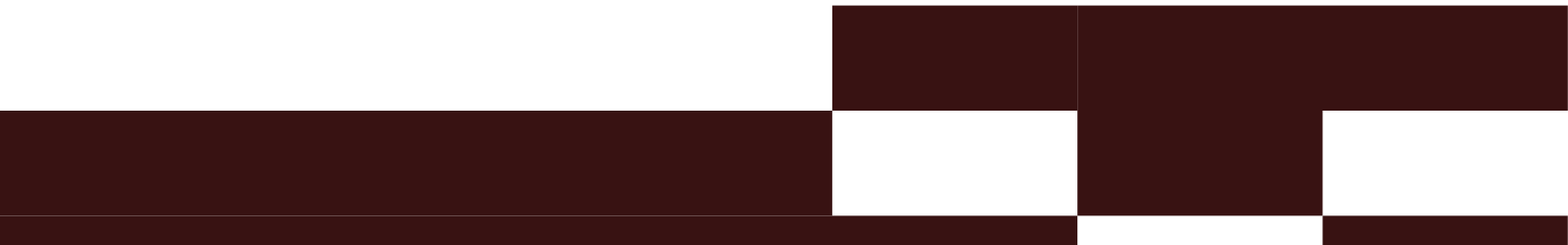
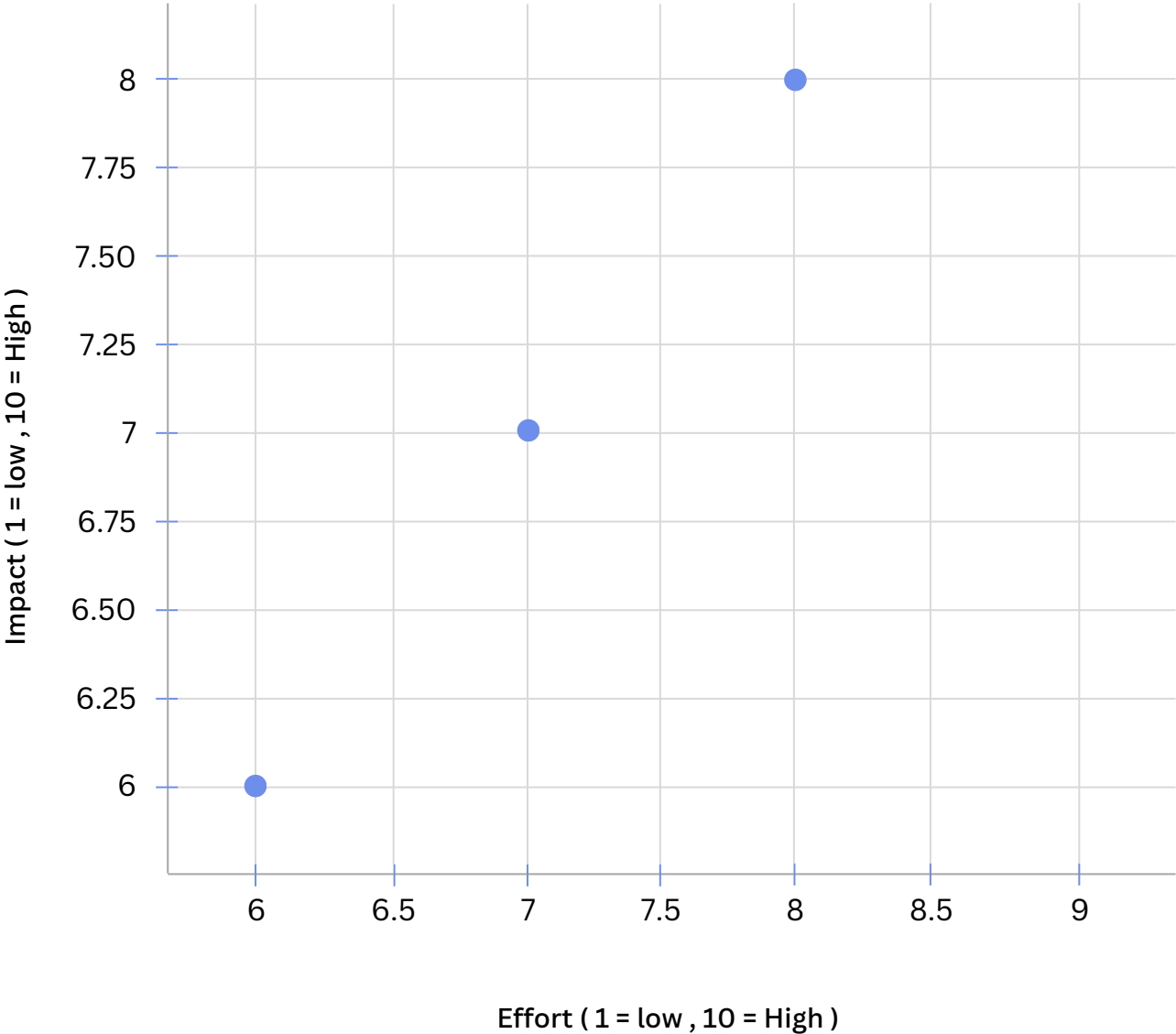
Public sector support with private broadcasters.

In essence, increasing distribution and visibility for Dubai's film industry will require strategic partnerships and possibly policy support akin to how production is supported. With its world-class exhibition infrastructure and media-savvy environment, Dubai has the tools to be not just a place where films are made, but where films (from anywhere) are **launched and celebrated**. By implementing the above ideas – from streaming collaborations to festival reboots – Dubai can ensure that its films and its film capabilities gain far more eyeballs both at home and internationally.



Effort vs Impact Matrix :

Policies & Regulations



A hand holding a pen is positioned over a desk. Several sticky notes are scattered on the desk surface. A cup is visible on the right side of the frame. The background is dark and out of focus.

Findings & Suggested Next Steps

Bringing together insights from all the themes, several **key findings** emerge about the state of Dubai's film industry and what it needs going forward. Dubai has made impressive progress to date – it boasts world-class filming infrastructure, a vibrant multicultural talent base, and a strong market for film consumption. The industry's growth aligns with Dubai's broader trajectory as a global city. **However, to unlock the next stage of development, coordinated action is required in policy reform, talent cultivation, and strategic investment.** The workshop's consolidated findings highlight that many of the industry's challenges are interlinked (for example, lack of funding affects talent retention; regulatory confusion affects market growth), and thus a holistic approach is necessary.

Summary of Key Findings:

- Dubai's film infrastructure and location appeal are top-notch, but the city lacks critical support systems (financial incentives, unified governance) that nearly all major film hubs have.
- There is no shortage of creative talent or interest in filmmaking, but without structured support (education, funding, mentorship), much of this talent risks not reaching its potential or leaving the field.
- **Policy gaps** (notably the absence of a rebate and a one-stop authority) are the single biggest factor holding Dubai back from competing with global film destinations. These gaps also contribute to high costs and inefficiencies that deter both local and international productions.
- Dubai's position in the **global film ecosystem** could be significant – it has the ingredients to be a regional powerhouse for content – but currently it is under-leveraged on the world stage. Better alignment with global practices and proactive marketing of Dubai's strengths are needed.
- The industry stakeholders are **eager and aligned** on the major steps needed. There is a sense of urgency and optimism: urgency because regional competition is rising, and optimism because the government has successfully developed other sectors and can do the same for film with the right focus.

Building on these findings, below are **actionable recommendations** and next steps suggested for government and industry stakeholders. These recommendations are geared towards enabling Dubai's film industry to flourish and are organized by priority areas:

- 1. Establish a Centralized Film Authority ("Dubai Film Council"):** Create a high-level body or task force that brings all relevant authorities under one umbrella for the film industry. This council should include representatives from DFGC, culture, tourism, municipalities, and the private sector. Its mandate: serve as the one-stop shop for filmmakers and drive the strategic vision. This will streamline decision-making and eliminate the current fragmentation. Immediate step: issue a decree or policy statement naming film as a priority sector and forming this council.
- 2. Implement a Dubai Film Incentive Program:** Design and launch a **film rebate** scheme (or tax credit equivalent) to attract productions. A competitive rebate (e.g. 30%- 40% of qualified spend rebated) should be instituted as soon as feasible. Complement this with incentives for using local talent (such as an extra bonus for productions that hire a certain percentage of local crew or cast). Start by conducting a quick economic impact analysis (many studies show film rebates yield positive ROI, e.g. [Abu Dhabi's finding](#) of AED 4.5 GDP per 1 AED rebate) to finalize the model, then announce it widely. This single move will put Dubai on the radar of global producers and is crucial to remain competitive.

3. **Launch a Dedicated Film Fund for Local Productions:** Allocate funding (government seed money, possibly matched by private investors or media companies) for an annual film fund. For example, commit to funding **5-10 Emirati or UAE-based film projects per year** (shorts, documentaries, or feature films) that meet quality criteria. This could be managed by the film council or an arts authority and could draw from sources like the cinema ticket tax. The fund would provide grants or co-production financing to filmmakers, focusing on emerging talent. This ensures a pipeline of local content and gives creators the opportunity to develop their craft with less financial burden.
4. **Develop a Unified Film Industry “Playbook” and Portal:** As a quick win, compile all guidelines, processes, and resources into a single **Dubai Film Industry Guidebook** (both online and print). This should include: How to obtain script approval, how to get permits (with an interactive checklist), contact info for location managers in all major sites, cultural guidelines for content, standard contract templates, and a directory of studios and services. The online portal should allow permit applications, fee payments, and tracking in one place . Also, fix the DFTC website stability and make sure all information is up to date . Having this transparency will greatly improve the user experience for filmmakers and signal that Dubai’s industry is organized and professional.
5. **Regulatory Reforms and Standardization:** Initiate regulatory changes to support the industry’s efficiency and fairness. Key actions:

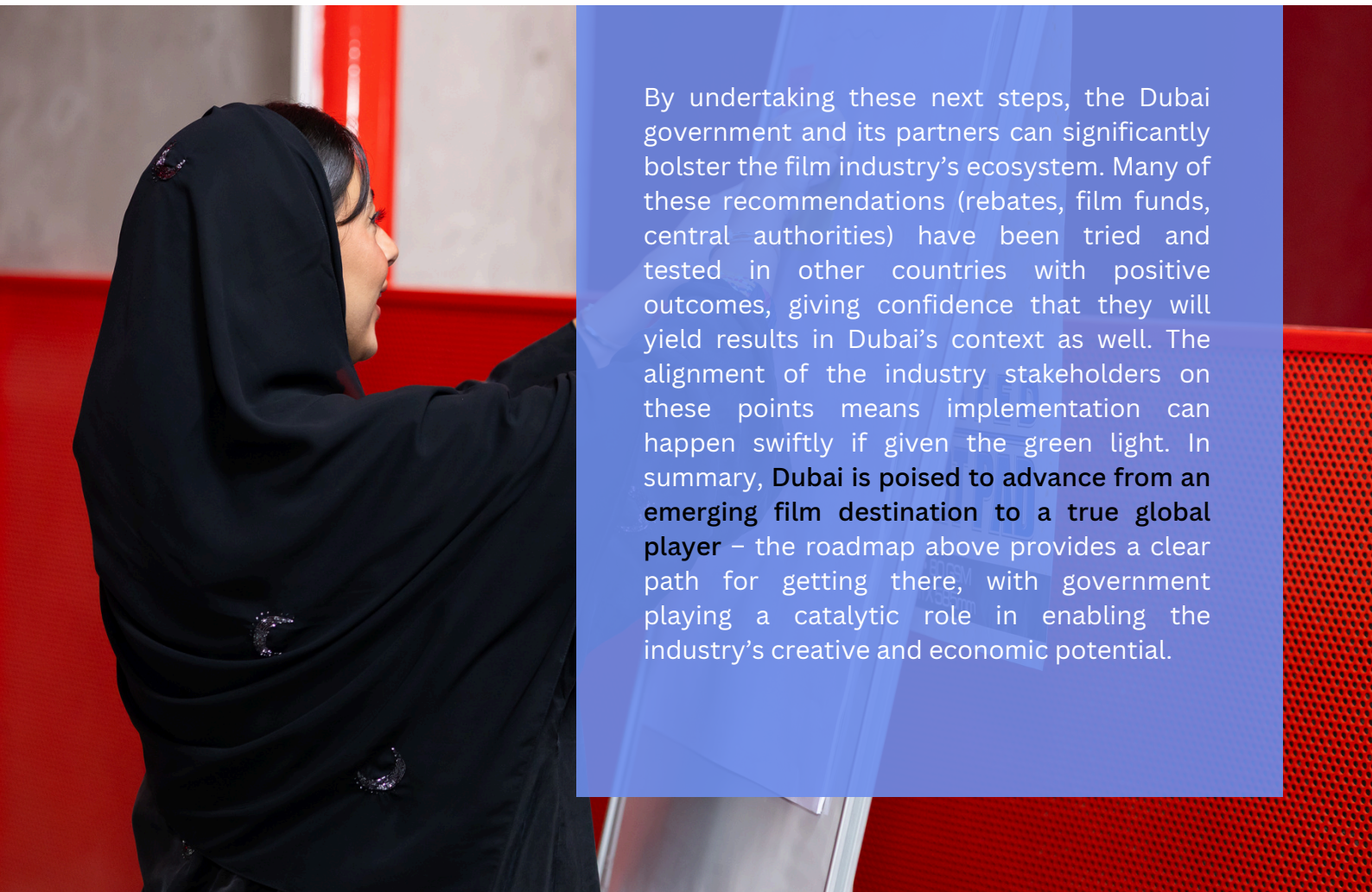
- **Standardize Contracts & Rates:** Introduce template contracts for location rentals and encourage their use across the industry. Publish recommended rate cards for various crew roles and equipment to guide the market (not fixed enforcement, but guidance to avoid extreme variances).
- **One-Stop Permitting:** Empower the new film authority to issue permits on behalf of all agencies, reducing the need for filmmakers to approach multiple entities. Assign dedicated film liaison officers in each key agency (police, transport, etc.) as single points of contact .
- **Clear Content Guidelines:** Have the media regulation office publish a clear list of content red lines and a quick consultation service for script issues, so producers can get early feedback on potential cultural sensitivities . This prevents costly surprises later and builds trust that if guidelines are followed, approvals will stick.

6. **Education and Training Initiatives:** In collaboration with educational institutions, **embed film and media education** in the curriculum. For instance, introduce a Media/Film Studies elective in high schools across Dubai, and support universities in creating film production bachelor programs or diplomas. In the short term, sponsor workshops by international mentors:

e.g., invite a Hollywood cinematographer to teach a one-week masterclass, or partner with entities like Sundance, TorinoFilmLab, or Institut Français to run labs in Dubai. Additionally, create a mentorship program pairing experienced industry figures with young filmmakers for a 6-month mentoring period. To prevent talent drain, launch a “Creative Careers” campaign highlighting success stories of people who built film careers in the UAE, thereby encouraging the next generation and reassuring families that film can be a viable profession.

- 6. Enhance Industry Collaboration & Networking:** In collaboration with educational institutions, [embed film and media](#) education in the curriculum. For instance, introduce a Media/Film Studies elective in high schools across Dubai, and support universities in creating film production bachelor programs or diplomas. In the short term, sponsor workshops by international mentors: e.g., invite a Hollywood cinematographer to teach a one-week masterclass, or partner with entities like Sundance, TorinoFilmLab, or Institut Français to run labs in Dubai. Additionally, create a mentorship program pairing experienced industry figures with young filmmakers for a 6-month mentoring period. To prevent talent drain, launch a “Creative Careers” campaign highlighting success stories of people who built film careers in the UAE, thereby encouraging the next generation and reassuring families that film can be a viable profession.
- 7. Enhance Industry Collaboration & Networking:** Foster a tighter community and continuous dialogue between stakeholders. Establish a [Dubai Film Industry](#) Association (if one doesn’t exist) where professionals can register, network, and collectively voice needs. The government can support this by providing meeting spaces or minor funding for events. Regular roundtables (like the workshop itself) should continue, perhaps semi-annually, to track progress on these recommendations – basically an ongoing public-private task force. Collaboration should also extend regionally: coordinate with Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, and others to avoid duplicate efforts and to maybe create joint initiatives (for example, a UAE-wide film location database, or reciprocal benefits where a permit in Dubai can easily be extended to Abu Dhabi scenes and vice-versa).
- 8. Revive and Reinvent Dubai’s Film Festival/Market Presence:** High visibility events are crucial for industry promotion. Work on bringing back an international film festival to Dubai in some form – it could be a revamped DIFF or a new concept aligning with Dubai’s brand (for example, a focus on films about technology/futurism, given the city’s image, or a flashy Dubai International Film Market). Even if the festival is biennial or scaled down, announcing its return will signal Dubai’s commitment to cinema. In the meantime, secure Dubai’s representation at major festivals elsewhere: ensure a [Dubai Pavilion at Cannes 2025](#), with sponsorship to send a delegation of local filmmakers to network and promote their projects. This will help attract global attention and partnerships.

- 9. Promote Dubai as a Production & Distribution Hub:** The government (via Dubai Tourism or Media Council) should roll out a global marketing campaign focusing on “Film in Dubai”. This might include producing slick promotional videos that showcase Dubai’s locations and studios, attending trade shows like CineEurope or the American Film Market, and inviting influential producers to Dubai on familiarization tours. Alongside production, emphasize distribution and audience reach – tout the [statistic](#) that UAE has 30% of the Middle East’s cinema market and growing digital penetration, meaning content made in Dubai has strong regional distribution opportunities. Also, consider offering incentives for distributors: for instance, a grant or prize for international distributors who pick up Dubai-made films, or free office space in Media City for foreign distribution firms to set up regional operations. These steps can make Dubai not just a place to shoot, but a place to sell films from.
- 10. Monitoring and Continuous Improvement:** Finally, institute a mechanism to **track the impact** of all these initiatives. The film council or relevant body should compile annual metrics – number of productions shot in Dubai, total spend, number of local films made, festival selections, etc. – to measure growth. Solicit feedback from filmmakers who use the new systems (rebate, one-stop shop, etc.) and refine policies accordingly. Essentially, treat this as an ongoing program with KPIs, so that government support remains accountable and effective. Showing year-on-year improvement will also help make the case to maintain or increase support for the film sector.



By undertaking these next steps, the Dubai government and its partners can significantly bolster the film industry’s ecosystem. Many of these recommendations (rebates, film funds, central authorities) have been tried and tested in other countries with positive outcomes, giving confidence that they will yield results in Dubai’s context as well. The alignment of the industry stakeholders on these points means implementation can happen swiftly if given the green light. In summary, **Dubai is poised to advance from an emerging film destination to a true global player** – the roadmap above provides a clear path for getting there, with government playing a catalytic role in enabling the industry’s creative and economic potential.

CINEMA AKIL سِينَمَا عَقِيل

DUBAI FILMS AND GAMES COMMISSION X FILM ROUNDTABLE MEET US INSIDE



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وَالْأَلْعَابِ الْإِلِكْتَرُونِيَّةِ
DUBAI FILMS AND GAMES COMMISSION

