

# Story Power: Oklahoma's 2026 Film Boom, Rebates, and Cherokee Film

By Lisa Lee Martin

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Oklahoma's film industry in 2026 is defined by two big shifts: a maturing, statewide production ecosystem and a more realistic, layered incentive structure that looks lower on paper but often works better in practice. Oklahoma City and Tulsa both benefit from a stable statewide rebate and new local programs, while Cherokee Film is emerging as a Native-led powerhouse that centers Indigenous talent and stories yet still welcomes outside productions that respect tribal priorities. Together, these forces are turning Oklahoma—especially Tulsa and the Cherokee Nation Reservation—into one of the most strategically interesting places to make film and television in the country.

## The New Rebate Reality: Lower Percentages, Smarter Stacks

Oklahoma's primary statewide tool is the **Filmed in Oklahoma Act**, a cash rebate program that now starts with a 20% base on qualified in-state expenditures, with a hard cap of 30% once all uplifts are stacked. Those uplifts reward behavior that grows the local industry—filming in rural counties, using certified Oklahoma soundstages, completing post-production and music work in-state, and committing to television seasons or multi-film slates—but the total state rebate will not exceed 30% of eligible spend.

On paper, that ceiling looks lower than the 35–40% figures touted in some competing markets, yet when producers factor in Oklahoma's lower day-to-day costs for crew, locations, housing, and

transportation, many projects still land with a better overall budget here than in higher-percentage states.

The state program requires a minimum of \$50,000 in qualified Oklahoma expenditures and offers clear, predictable timelines for application and payment. For producers used to navigating opaque incentive processes in other states, Oklahoma's straightforward structure—with transparent caps and defined categories—removes much of the guesswork from budget planning.

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## **PRODUCER RESOURCE BOX: State Incentive Details**

### **Filmed in Oklahoma Act (Statewide Rebate)**

- **Base rebate:** 20% of qualified in-state spend
- **Maximum total:** 30% (with all uplifts combined)
- **Minimum spend:** \$50,000 in Oklahoma
- **Annual program cap:** Approximately \$30 million statewide
- **Sunset date:** June 30, 2031

### **Key uplifts within the 30% cap:**

- **Rural County Uplift (3%):** 25%+ of principal photography days in counties under 250,000 population
- **Certified Soundstage Uplift (2–3%):** Qualifying percentage of filming days and spend at certified Oklahoma soundstages
- **Post-Production Uplift (3%):** At least 3% of qualified spend on Oklahoma post-production
- **Music Uplift (2%):** Qualifying spend on Oklahoma music production/licensing
- **TV/Multi-Film Uplift (up to 5%):** For qualifying TV pilots (2%), full seasons, or multi-film deals (5%)

### **More information:**

- Program details: <https://www.okfilmmusic.org/incentives>
  - FAQ & application: <https://www.okfilmmusic.org/faq>
  - Contact: Oklahoma Film + Music Office, (405) 230-8440
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# Tulsa's Local Rebate: Modest, Practical, and Performance-Based

Tulsa's new city-level incentive mirrors this move toward grounded realism. Beginning February 1, 2026, the Tulsa Office of Film, Music, Arts & Culture (Tulsa FMAC) will allocate up to \$400,000 annually to support film and television productions in the region, with maximum awards of \$50,000 or \$75,000 per project—roughly up to about 5% of qualified local spend.

Rather than an automatic bump, Tulsa's rebate is performance-based: projects are evaluated on their use of Tulsa crew and vendors, the share of filming days inside the Tulsa Production Zone, and the extent of local music and post-production work. For independent films and TV blocks that are already in Oklahoma for the state rebate, this modest but focused local contribution often becomes the margin that saves a shooting day, secures a key location, or keeps more local crew on payroll.

The Tulsa incentive is designed to reward genuine community engagement rather than drive-by location shoots. Productions earn points for hiring within a 45-mile radius, contracting with Tulsa-based vendors, filming in designated zones, and using local post-production and music services. The quarterly application cycle allows multiple projects to benefit throughout the year, and unused funds roll over, creating sustainability for the program.

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## PRODUCER RESOURCE BOX: Tulsa Local Incentive

### Tulsa Film Incentive Program

#### Tier 1 (up to \$50,000 per project):

- Feature films: \$100,000–\$5,000,000 local spend
- TV (scripted/reality): \$100,000–\$500,000 local spend

#### Tier 2 (up to \$75,000 per project):

- Feature films: \$5,000,000+ local spend
- TV series: \$500,000+ local spend

**Annual fund:** \$400,000 (unused funds roll over)

**Application cycle:** Quarterly

#### Evaluation criteria (points-based):

- 50%+ local crew (within 45-mile radius of Tulsa city limits)
- 50%+ Tulsa-based vendors (taxable contracts in city limits)
- Filming days in Tulsa Production Zone
- Use of Tulsa music and post-production services
- Diversity contracting practices
- Qualification for state Filmed in Oklahoma rebate

#### More information:

- Program hub: <https://www.visittulsa.com/film-music/film-incentives/tulsa-film-incentive/>
- Official announcement: <https://www.okfilmmusic.org/news/tulsa-announces-citys-first-ever-film-incentive-program>
- Contact: Tulsa FMAC, [film@visittulsa.com](mailto:film@visittulsa.com)

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## Cherokee Film: Native-Centered, Open to Partners

Within the Cherokee Nation Reservation, incentives and infrastructure are tied directly to a cultural mission. **Cherokee Film**—which includes the first certified tribal film commission, studio facilities, and the Cherokee Film Institute—exists to reclaim Cherokee and Native narratives by increasing Indigenous representation

across film and media while building an economic ecosystem on tribal land.

Cherokee Film's approach is fundamentally about **narrative sovereignty**: ensuring that Cherokee and broader Indigenous stories are told by Native people, with Native talent shaping every stage of the creative process. The Cherokee Film Institute trains Native citizens and local residents in screenwriting, producing, cinematography, and technical crafts, building a pipeline from reservation communities directly into professional film careers.

The infrastructure backing this mission is substantial. Cherokee Film Studios in Owasso offers 27,000 square feet of production space including a virtual production soundstage with LED volume, production offices, and flexible support areas, plus an additional 10,000-square-foot building with a second soundstage. A 200-acre backlot near Welling—formerly a Boy Scout camp—provides forests, water features, and rural settings that allow productions to build entire worlds without leaving tribal land.

Cherokee Film's incentive is clearly Native-centered—prioritizing Cherokee and other Native cast, crew, and vendors and aiming to correct decades of misrepresentation—yet it is not restricted exclusively to Native-themed or Native-owned productions. Non-Native projects can access Cherokee stages, locations, and the tribal rebate if they meet the spend requirements and collaborate respectfully with the Nation's guidelines, particularly around avoiding harmful stereotypes and engaging Native talent meaningfully.

For producers, this means Cherokee Film operates as both a partner and a gatekeeper: productions that demonstrate genuine commitment to authentic representation, Native hiring, and community benefit will find exceptional resources and financial support. Those looking only to extract value from tribal locations without meaningful engagement will find the doors closed.

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## **SIDEBAR: Understanding Cherokee Film's Mission**

### **Who Cherokee Film Serves:**

Cherokee Film is a **Native-led, Native-focused** initiative designed to:

- Reclaim Cherokee and Indigenous narratives from decades of misrepresentation
- Train Cherokee citizens and Native talent for professional film careers
- Create sustainable economic opportunity on the Cherokee Nation Reservation
- Increase Indigenous representation both in front of and behind the camera

### **Can Non-Native Productions Participate?**

Yes. Cherokee Film's incentive, studios, and locations are open to **any qualifying production** that:

- Meets minimum spend requirements in Oklahoma and within the Cherokee Nation Reservation
- Demonstrates meaningful engagement with Native hiring (cast, crew, vendors)
- Avoids exploitative or stereotypical portrayals of Native people
- Collaborates respectfully with tribal guidelines and priorities

The content does not have to be Native-themed, but productions must treat the Cherokee Nation as a **creative partner**, not just a filming backdrop.

### **Cherokee Film Institute:**

The Institute offers courses and training specifically for Native American and local talent, with strong emphasis on Cherokee citizens. Classes cover screenwriting, producing, cinematography, editing, and technical crew skills—building a professional workforce rooted in the communities being represented on screen.

### **Learn more:**

- Main site: <https://cherokee.film>
- Institute: <https://cherokeefilmstitute.com>
- Commission details: <https://cherokee.film/commission/>

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## PRODUCER RESOURCE BOX: Cherokee Film Incentive

### Cherokee Nation Film Production Incentive

- **Eligible projects:** Film and television productions that meet spend thresholds
- **Minimum spend:** \$50,000 in Oklahoma; \$25,000 within Cherokee Nation Reservation (14-county jurisdiction)
- **Rebate structure:** Reported as up to approximately 20–25% on qualifying in-reservation expenditures (stacks with state and city incentives)
- **Priority:** Projects that hire Native cast, crew, and vendors; avoid stereotypes; demonstrate authentic representation

### Cherokee Film Studios (Owasso, OK):

- 27,000 sq ft facility with virtual production soundstage (LED volume)
- Additional 10,000 sq ft building with second soundstage
- Production offices and support spaces

### Cherokee Film Backlot (near Welling, OK):

- 200+ acres with forests, water features, and rural settings
- Flexible locations for period and contemporary productions

### More information:

- Cherokee Film: <https://cherokee.film>
  - Incentive overview: <https://www.visittulsa.com/film-music/film-incentive/cherokee-film-incentive/>
  - Application (PDF): <https://cherokee.film/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Initial-Incentive-Application-New.pdf>
  - Contact: Cherokee Film Commission, [info@cherokee.film](mailto:info@cherokee.film)
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# What "Lower" Really Means for Producers

For producers looking at Oklahoma in 2026, the financial picture is a deliberate stack rather than a single blockbuster number:

- **State rebate:** 20–30% via Filmed in Oklahoma Act
- **Tulsa local incentive:** Up to roughly 5% of qualified local spend (capped per project)
- **Cherokee Nation incentive:** Targeted rebate on in-reservation expenditures (approximately 20–25%)

None of these individual pieces advertise the eye-popping percentages that once dominated incentive battles. Instead, they offer realistic, capped rebates, backed by clear rules and growing infrastructure. When producers combine these incentives and then factor in Oklahoma's lower baseline costs for crew, housing, locations, and daily operations, the "lower" headline percentages often translate into stronger net savings and deeper community impact.

The strategic shift is from chasing the highest number to building the best total cost structure. A production that earns 25% back in Oklahoma while spending 30% less per day on operations will outperform one that earns 40% back in a market where every vendor, permit, and meal costs substantially more.

For Oklahoma and Cherokee Nation communities, this approach prioritizes sustainability over flashy wins. The goal is not to drain a fund with one or two massive productions, but to create steady, recurring work that builds careers, supports local vendors, and allows the infrastructure—stages, post houses, equipment rental, crew training—to mature into a self-sustaining ecosystem.

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## QUICK REFERENCE: Oklahoma Film Incentive Stack (2026)

| Incentive Layer                | Range   | Cap/Notes  |
|--------------------------------|---------|--|
| State (Filmed in Oklahoma Act) | 20–30%  | Maximum 30% with all uplifts; \$50K minimum spend                |
| Tulsa Local                    | ~5%     | Up to \$50K or \$75K per project; \$400K annual pool             |
| Cherokee Nation                | ~20–25% | On qualifying in-reservation spend; \$25K minimum on reservation |
| Total Potential Stack          | 45–60%  | When combining all three layers on qualifying spend              |

**Plus:** Lower daily costs (crew, locations, housing, operations) compared to coastal hubs

**Result:** Competitive net budget even with "lower" individual percentages

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## Looking Ahead: March 2026 and Beyond

As March 2026 begins, Oklahoma's film landscape is more grounded, more transparent, and arguably more strategic than it has ever been. The days of incentive arms races and unsustainable percentage promises are fading; in their place is a model that acknowledges fiscal limits while still creating meaningful competitive advantage.

For business leaders, vendors, and entrepreneurs across Oklahoma, the opportunity is to recognize that film is no longer a boom-and-bust novelty but a recurring economic driver. The state, cities, and tribal nations have committed to long-term funding, infrastructure, and training. Cherokee Film is proving that cultural sovereignty and economic development can reinforce each other. Tulsa is showing that modest, performance-based local incentives can yield genuine community benefit without breaking municipal budgets.

For producers, the message is equally clear: Oklahoma in 2026 is not trying to be the cheapest option or the flashiest rebate. It is positioning itself as the smartest total package—predictable incentives, lower costs, growing crew depth, modern infrastructure, and increasingly, stories that could only be told here, by the people who live here.

The rebates may be lower than yesterday's headlines. The industry being built is stronger for it.

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## Additional Resources

### **Oklahoma Film + Music Office**

Website: <https://www.okfilmmusic.org>

Phone: (405) 230-8440

Incentives page: <https://www.okfilmmusic.org/incentives>

Film Friendly Communities: <https://www.okfilmmusic.org> (see resources)

### **Tulsa Office of Film, Music, Arts & Culture**

Website: <https://www.visittulsa.com/film-music>

Email: [film@visittulsa.com](mailto:film@visittulsa.com)

Tulsa Incentive: <https://www.visittulsa.com/film-music/film-incentives/tulsa-film-incentive/>

### **Cherokee Film**

Website: <https://cherokee.film>

Email: [info@cherokee.film](mailto:info@cherokee.film)

Cherokee Film Institute: <https://cherokeefilminstitute.com>

Studios & Locations: <https://cherokee.film/studios/>

### **Industry News & Updates**

MovieMaker Magazine Best Places 2026:

<https://www.moviemaker.com>

Oklahoma Film + Music News: <https://www.okfilmmusic.org/news>

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