



Australian Government

**SCREEN**  
AUSTRALIA

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# PROGRAM GUIDELINES: FEATURE DEVELOPMENT, MATCHED INITIAL OPTION FUNDING

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ISSUED 24 DECEMBER 2010  
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Screen Australia reserves the right to change its program guidelines from time to time. Please ensure you check the website for the latest version.

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with Screen Australia's Terms of Trade.

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We receive many more applications than we can support. Inevitably some applications will be unsuccessful and applicants may be disappointed by this result. However, Screen Australia's decision is final.

Screen Australia does not negatively discriminate on the basis of racial background, sexual preference, culture, language, gender, or physical or intellectual disability.

Specific requirements apply where there is Indigenous community participation or content involved in a project. Please refer to [www.screenaustralia.gov.au/funding/business/Indigenous\\_Content.aspx](http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/funding/business/Indigenous_Content.aspx)

## Update log

17 May 2011

- **Single-project Feature Development:** addition to 'Funding is for': A minimum of a treatment is required for all applications including the development of screenplays based on an underlying work (see the Screen Australia publication *What is a Synopsis? An Outline? A Treatment?*); amendment to 'Eligibility – multiple applications': As of 1 July 2011, applicants who have been the subject of four unsuccessful single-project applications in the same financial year are ineligible to submit further applications in that financial year.
- **Matched Initial Option Funding:** clarification that funding is for initial option negotiation for an underlying work for a feature film; addition to 'Available funding'; amendment to 'Assessment process'.

19 August 2011

### Single-project Feature Development:

- under 'Funding is for' added '10–20 pages' following the word treatment.
- under 'Definitions' removed 'theatrical feature documentary'.
- under 'Assessment criteria' added the word 'potential' before 'strength of the concept and the underlying premise'.

12 October 2011

### Single-project Feature Development:

- addition to overview of program: 'Projects that have been submitted to Screen Australia for a Letter of Interest (LOI) or for finance will not concurrently be considered for Development funding.'
- under 'Available funding' added 'Late-stage funding'.
- under 'Funding is for' added 'A cap of \$3,000 applies per option renewal' to fees for option renewal.
- under 'Assessment process' added list of script assessors and information regarding conflict of interest.

## SINGLE-PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

### Feature Development

Screen Australia's feature development funding program is open to projects of all genres, and to animation as well as live-action. Screen Australia is looking for striking and engaging storytelling that will connect with audiences.

Screen Australia generally requires the commitment of an experienced producer as part of the team, and that the application should come from the producer. This is in recognition of the producer's key role in providing creative guidance, financing and the overall strategy for the project. Writers, writer/directors and writer-director teams may apply for funding without a producer if they meet the eligibility criteria outlined below.

Less experienced producers must also have an experienced producer or executive producer committed to the project. In such cases the application may still be made by the less experienced producer and the rights may remain with them, or with them in conjunction with other key creatives.

Where an international executive producer is attached in order to satisfy eligibility requirements, strong consideration will be given to the nature of their involvement and their creative intentions.

Less experienced producers who do not wish to work with proven producing partners may access Screen Australia development support through its Talent Escalator programs.

Screen Australia invests in the development of projects which will enable a consistent flow into the marketplace of high-quality, diverse, audience-engaging screenplays. Applications will be evaluated on creative merit, the team, and the potential for the project to reach an audience appropriate to its cost. The screenwriting craft and development plan are looked at closely.

Access to Screen Australia's development funds is increasingly competitive so it is in your interest to apply for funds only when you are thoroughly prepared and can submit the strongest application to us for consideration. Bear in mind that two consecutive unsuccessful applications will make the project ineligible for this program.

Projects that have been submitted to Screen Australia for a Letter of Interest (LOI) or for finance will not concurrently be considered for Development funding.

If your application is successful, Screen Australia generally expects a draft to be delivered within three months of your first drawdown.

#### **Available funding**

Applications can be for any amount up to \$50,000 per tranche, and may be made at any time.

In some circumstances Screen Australia may accept and pre-approve an application for multiple (up to three) tranches from producers with a proven, significant track record. Such an applicant will need to have had two films in

Cannes, Venice, Berlin, Sundance or Toronto OR have produced two films that were an outstanding commercial success OR one film that has received an Academy Award®. In such a case the applicant will not need to re-apply from tranche to tranche; however, a positive assessment of progress is required before the subsequent tranche of funding is triggered.

**Matched Development funding:** Projects that come with an offer of cash development funding from a genuine arm's length marketplace entity will receive matched funding up to \$50,000, subject to a risk assessment by Screen Australia. (For the purposes of these guidelines, a marketplace entity is defined as an entity whose core business is the financing, sales, distribution, exhibition or broadcast of feature films.) All the requirements relating to rights and options set out on page 6 apply equally to matched funding.

**Late-stage funding:** Where there is no writing component for late-stage development, funding will be capped at \$20,000.

## Funding is for

Where relevant:

- A first or subsequent draft feature screenplay, including, where appropriate, fees for writer, producer, director, development executive/script editor, digital media consultant, legal and/or department head,
- Fees for option renewal (the full cost of renewal may be included in the budget; note, however, that we do not fund option fees retrospectively so applicants should plan ahead and allow for the eight-week turnaround of their application). A cap of \$3,000 applies per option renewal. Screen Australia can also support the purchase of an initial option through the Matched Initial Option program (see page 9).
- Marketing strategy and pitch materials; plans for adjacent or multi-platform delivery,
- Casting, pre-visualisation work, financing or pitching costs, including the cost of producing a short scene or other materials that enhance the likelihood of production; travel, production budgeting and scheduling expenses. Please note: the stage of project development will be looked at closely in such cases as these funds are not intended to provide gap financing in pre-production nor to fund explorative travel.

A minimum of a treatment (10–20 pages) is required for all applications including the development of screenplays based on an underlying work (see the Screen Australia publication *What is a Synopsis? An Outline? A Treatment?*).

From time to time we may invite applicants to attach a script consultant or mentor to a project. In such a case Screen Australia may cover the cost of the consultant or mentor.

## Eligibility

Recipients of Enterprise Program funding need to refer to the Enterprise Program guidelines regarding their eligibility for this program.

# FEATURES

Applications must be from a producer on behalf of a team involving at least a writer or writer/director.

The producer must be considered an 'experienced' producer, or must have an experienced producer or 'experienced executive producer' working with them (see definitions below). This is in recognition of the increased complexity of international film financing, and the need for market knowledge and financing skills on the producing team.

There are no special eligibility requirements for writers or writer/directors applying with an eligible producer.

However, in recognition of their level of experience and/or success, the following may apply for one tranche of development funding without a producer or executive producer attached:

- 'proven' writers and writer/directors,
- 'proven' directors in conjunction with a writer.

Their application must detail at what stage they plan to attach a producer, and subsequent applications must be made with an eligible producer on board.

## Definitions:

- An 'experienced producer' is defined as having at least one credit as producer on:
  - a feature film that has been released on a minimum of five commercial screens in one territory, OR
  - a primetime broadcast drama miniseries or telemovie.
- An 'experienced executive producer' is defined as having at least two credits as producer or executive producer on:
  - feature films that have been released on a minimum of five commercial screens in one territory, OR
  - primetime broadcast miniseries or telemovies.
- A 'proven' writer, director or writer/director is defined as having :
  - one credit in these roles on a feature that has been selected for Cannes, Venice, Berlin, Sundance or Toronto or has received an Academy Award® nomination, or has been a significant commercial success, OR
  - at least two credits in these roles on features released on a minimum of five commercial screens in one territory, or primetime broadcast miniseries or telemovies, OR
  - credits in these roles for at least six broadcast hours of primetime series (not serials).

For writers, television credits should be 'written by'.

Outstanding projects that emerge through Screen Australia's Talent Escalator programs may be given special consideration. This provides the opportunity for practitioners to access single-project development funds notwithstanding that usual eligibility requirements may not be satisfied.

**Rights:**

Screen Australia expects the option or rights to be held by the applicant, be they a producer, writer, writer/director or director, or by them in conjunction with other key creatives.

Where the applicant is a less experienced producer who has attached an experienced producer or EP, the option or rights may remain with the less experienced producer, or with them in conjunction with other key creatives.

Any commitment from Screen Australia will be subject to us sighting all rights agreements and being satisfied that they comply with industry standards. Applicants must establish clear chain of title to all works in development as a pre-condition of development funding. If a project is based on an underlying work, evidence of the option agreement and length of option must be supplied. Screen Australia expects the accumulated periods of the option and its subsequent extensions to be at least four years. Screen Australia advises producers to have an option to acquire where possible sequel, prequel, remake, TV spin-off rights and all ancillary rights as these rights will be required at financing stage.

**Further funding:**

Projects funded under this program may reapply for further development investment once they have fulfilled their delivery requirements. Further development investment will be considered in light of the advancement of the project, the development notes, momentum, marketplace attachment, producer's strategy, and the overall viability of the project. Applicants will be required to supply script development notes from the writer or script editor articulating the plan for the next stage.

Projects from proven writers, directors or writer/directors that have received one tranche of funding must attach an eligible producer in subsequent applications for further funding.

**Multiple applications:**

Projects that are unsuccessful in applying to this program may only reapply if the project and application are substantially and demonstrably reworked. Projects which have been the subject of two consecutive unsuccessful applications for feature development funding – through this program or the Australian Film Commission's feature development programs – are not eligible.

As of 1 July 2011, applicants who have been the subject of four unsuccessful single-project applications in the same financial year are ineligible to submit further applications in that financial year.

**Documentaries and general eligibility requirements:**

Documentary projects, including theatrical or feature-length documentaries, are not eligible under this program (see Documentary Development).

Applicants must also meet the general eligibility requirements set out in Screen Australia's Terms of Trade.

## Assessment process

Applications will be assessed by a combination of Screen Australia executives and industry specialists/peers as required (a minimum of two readers at all times).

Industry specialists currently used as script assessors by the Development Department are: Randal Allan, Andy Cox, Amree Hewitt, Karin Altmann (Scriptworks), Michael Brindley (Scriptworks), Marcus Cole (Forty-Fourth Dunbar Pty Ltd), Tim Richards, Joan Sauers. The name of the assessors used for a particular project will remain confidential.

If you are concerned about any of these people assessing your project because of a perceived conflict of interest, please let us know when you submit your application. A [Conflict of Interest Policy](#) applies both to industry specialists engaged as consultants, whether on a project basis or longer-term, and to all staff involved in assessment or investment decisions. Where a conflict of interest is confirmed, Screen Australia will take this into account when allocating projects to assessors.

Screen Australia will advise applicants of the success or otherwise of their application. Where an application is unsuccessful, the reasons will be conveyed to the applicant, with a written statement of reasons provided on request.

## Assessment criteria

When assessing applications for this program, Screen Australia will take the following criteria into account:

- The potential strength of the concept and the underlying premise
- The strength and distinctiveness of the story and the quality of the writing
- The development notes, and the degree to which they articulate the issues to be faced in the next stage of development and outline the strategies to address them
- The potential of the project to reach its target audience
- The viability of the project and whether it can be realised for an appropriate budget relative to its audience
- A successful track record of the producer, writer, and, where appropriate, the director and development executive or script editor; and the likelihood that their experience will advance the project.

## Application materials

Applications must be made on the relevant Screen Australia application form, and include all supporting material listed in the checklist on that form.

If you wish to apply for subsequent draft funding you will need to submit a new application and must include information clearly reflecting the advancement of the project.

## Application timing

Applications can be received at any time. Turnaround time for application decisions is approximately eight weeks.

### **Terms of funding**

Funding through this program is provided as a limited recourse loan. Where Screen Australia provides development funds and subsequently invests in the production, its investment in the development phase will be added to the production financing amount and the total investment will be recouped in accordance with the terms of trade for production financing.

### **Funding recipients must deliver**

- The negotiated delivery materials for which the funding was provided.

**Applicants should be ready to commence work on the project should their application be successful and be able to deliver a draft within three months.**

## FEATURE DEVELOPMENT

### Matched Initial Option Funding

Screen Australia recognises that special conditions apply in the case of an initial option negotiation for an underlying work for a feature film, where a screenwriter may not yet be engaged and a treatment not yet written. This program provides a specific assessment process for such a situation.

In addition, special consideration may be given in circumstances where there is a limited window of opportunity to option an underlying work, for example, where there is competitive interest in a best-selling book. In such cases Screen Australia will endeavour to provide an answer within three weeks. Where Screen Australia receives more than one application for the same work, a decision will be made on a non-exclusive basis, and all applicants will be given the same answer.

In assessing the potential in the underlying work, Screen Australia will consider the criteria detailed below and will expect the terms of the option to be consistent with marketplace practice.

Screen Australia expects the initial option period to be no less than 12 months (but prefers 18 months) and the accumulated period of the option and subsequent extensions to be at least four years.

Applicants for Matched Initial Option funding must be experienced producers, proven writers, proven writer/directors or proven directors in conjunction with a writer, as defined in the Feature Development guidelines (see page 5).

#### Available funding

Up to \$5,000 in total per initial option, to be matched by the applicant. Any proposed amounts above this will be considered on a case by case basis.

Funding is exclusively for the purchase of the option. Additional costs such as legal fees and overheads cannot be included.

#### Assessment process

Applications may be assessed solely by a Screen Australia executive or by an experienced external professional, depending on time constraints, using the criteria set out below.

Screen Australia will advise applicants of the success or otherwise of their application. Where an application is unsuccessful, the reasons will be conveyed to the applicant, with a written statement of reasons provided on request.

#### Assessment criteria

When assessing applications for this program, Screen Australia will take the following criteria into account:

- the cinematic potential of the underlying work, including:
  - the controlling idea

- whether the structure could be realised cinematically
- whether the visual world would translate well to the screen
- the strength of the central character and their journey
- whether the proposed terms of the option are consistent with current market place practice
- the track record of the applicant and their ability to develop the underlying work.

### **Application materials**

Applications must be made on the Screen Australia Matched Initial Option Funding application form, and include all supporting material listed in the checklist on that form.

### **Application timing**

Applications can be received at any time. If demonstrably time critical, the expected turnaround time is three weeks from receipt of a complete application form. Turnaround time for application decisions other than time critical applications is approximately eight weeks.

### **Terms of funding**

Funding through this program is provided as a limited recourse loan.

Where Screen Australia provides development funds and subsequently invests in the production, its investment in the development phase will be added to the production financing amount and the total investment will be recouped in accordance with the terms of trade for production financing.

### **Funding recipients must deliver**

- Acquittal of the funds expended.