

Screen Australia Documentary Program Review: Funding Stories that Matter

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Summary

The “impact space” around documentary film is exploding globally as is the popularity of one off documentaries. This is in contrast to the Australian funding market where production funding favours series or formats, despite positive audience engagement with longer form one off documentaries.

Screen Australia should include a framework to fund Social Impact Documentary film making as part of the documentary funding program.

This could include a focus on funding social issue documentaries themselves – as a distinct funding program – but most importantly Screen Australia should create a fund for “outreach, engagement and distribution” specifically for documentaries that specialise in this work – social change documentary films.

Social Impact Documentary Making – What is it?

There is a hugely exciting ‘impact space’ emerging in documentary filmmaking worldwide. Three of the five films nominated for Academy Awards in 2013 were social impact documentaries with impact and outreach campaigns; *Dirty Wars*, *The Square* and the hugely successful *Act of Killing*.

From films such as *An Inconvenient Truth* to *Sicko* to *End of the Line* and *Bully* the last 10 years has seen an explosion in social change documentaries

In Australia films such as *Mary Meets Mohammad*, *The Hungry Tide*, *Molly and Mobarak*, *Frackman* (In production), *Rise of the Eco Warriors* (about to release) and *Drive* and *Namatjira* are part of this tradition. However with very little resource available to fund the outreach and engagement work most filmmakers do this critical distribution off their own bat.

I am Eleven and *Mary Meets Mohammad* are two recent documentaries films where the filmmakers have had great success at the box office and with self managed distribution. This success is based on an enormous personal outlay of energy and resource and Screen Australia would be making a huge contribution to the distribution of film in Australia to make small investments in supporting the outreach of documentary films.

Funding Social Impact, Outreach and distribution

Internationally there are an increasing number of funding programs for outreach campaigns including Fledgling Fund, Ford Foundation Just Films and BRITDOC Bertha Connect Fund. Alongside these funding programs there is an emerging impact measurement practice and a field of practice known as “impact producing”.

Why should Screen Australia fund it?

- Encourages innovation in the way that documentaries are created – embedded in communities, locally and globally

- Encourages more rigorous outreach and therefore broader audience reach - The process by which the film is made in turn means they are reaching audiences that may not normally connect with documentary
- In terms of 'funding stories that matter', social impact documentary gives documentaries a life beyond the screen, encourage collective action in response to 'stories that matter'
- Rather than films being created and just released into the world, this involves targeted distribution campaigns, to reach both broad and specific audiences. This 'life beyond the screen' requires specific funding –eg for an 'Impact / Outreach producer'
- This is taking off as a huge and exciting new movement in filmmaking and Screen Australia should be part of this movement
- Good Pitch Australia is happening in October and will further inspire this approach in Australian context – Screen Australia should have skin in the game

Some links:

Alex Kelly Churchill report on impact and outreach

<http://echotango.org/portfolio/churchill-fellowship/>

What is an impact producer? <http://www.pbs.org/pov/blog/2013/11/whats-in-a-name-impact-producer/>

Impact Producers group: <http://borderlinemedia.net/impact-producers-group/>

Fledgling Fund <http://www.thefledglingfund.org/>

BRITDOC Bertha Connect http://britdoc.org/real_funds/bertha-britdoc-connect-fund

Ford Foundation Just Films <http://www.fordfoundation.org/issues/freedom-of-expression/justfilms>

BRITDOC GOOD PITCH AUSTRALIA <https://goodpitch.org/events/gpau2014>