

## **ASPERA Submission for Screen Australia's Enterprise Funding: Program Review & Future Options**

ASPERA is the "Australian Screen Production Education and Research Association", the peak discipline body of Australian tertiary institutions teaching and researching film, video, television and new media as screen based production practices. We have been established for over 10 years and have over 20 member institutions across Australia that include AFTRS, VCA, QUT, UTS, Swinburne University of Technology, Curtin University and Flinders University amongst many others.

Our membership includes all institutions that teach film, television, and animation production at the tertiary level. The ASPERA membership is comprised of film, television and educational professionals who teach and research and maintain industry participation. The focus of our research addresses structural relationships that can be created between scholarly research and national and international screen industries.

### **ASPERA REVIEW RESPONSE**

To assist in refining the Enterprise Program through this feedback opportunity a selection of the feedback points have been addressed:

- *What do you think would be the best possible outcome for the sector from Enterprise funding?*

Increased consumption of Australian screen content through a broader mix of productions derived from a diverse and robust production and distribution sector.

- *What do you think are the areas of greatest potential to encourage commercial sustainability in the Australian screen industry?*

Online audiences and media consumption behaviours that transcend national boundaries.

Revised digital economy based business models.

Increased collaboration in the Asia Pacific region.

- *How will we know it's worked?*

Audience, employment, and corporate earnings growth.

- *What have been the key learnings from the current program?*

Sustainability of the industry is linked to growth, diversification and professionalization. The 'cottage industry' nature of the Australian screen production sector needs to be replaced with sophisticated business acumen conducive to entrepreneurial risk taking, expansion and innovation.

- *What has it achieved? What has worked well?*

Slate diversification with shifts into "all media" production.

Corporate growth through international expansion as well as the appointment of dedicated development and finance executives in suitably scaled enterprises.

- *What could be done better?*

Alignment with State Funding agencies and policies.

Mandatory internship and training positions attached to funding.

- *Should the attraction of commercial investment into the sector be essential?*

Yes

- *Should the emphasis on growing individual businesses be shifted to new activities for established companies or new partnerships to build capacities in the sector? [1]*

- *Should funding be open to unique proposals from any able company, including already sustainable companies, addressing a set of priorities outlined by Screen Australia? [2]*

- *Should only companies that can't raise capital be eligible? E.g. could a model addressing market gaps be available to large established companies for sector development activities that would not normally be undertaken? [3]*

[1] [2] [3] = No

- See assistance to the Australian automotive industry as precedent for struggling yet highly established and capitalised companies that are always willing to accept public monies but produce poor outcomes. At established levels of business and market capitalization, i.e. Village Roadshow, it has to be a sink or

swim policy. The Enterprise Funding scheme has to be maintained as a development policy not a subsidy.

- *Should sole traders be eligible?*

No

- *Should enterprise only be for production companies or should other companies working to support the sector be eligible?*

This is an area that could represent some building in of flexibility into the Enterprise Program. Given shifts in digital consumption and emerging market players seeking audiences and generating new kinds of entertainment based content this scenario would be worth assessing on a case-by-case basis.

- *How should eligibility for a model targeting the next generation of screen businesses be based?*

It will have to acknowledge the micro nature of emerging businesses in the digital economy. It will also need to recognize shifts in funding models and the diminishing role of broadcasters, presales, and theatrical releases. Equal emphasis will have to be afforded to sponsors and sponsorship arrangements, crowd funding and social media based assets.

As for specific feedback on the three options:

### **Option 1: Growth**

This is the most viable option, overall the criteria is very strong and more clearly articulated. The criteria points directly to emerging entrepreneurial models for screen business and this is very risky, yet necessary option for growth in the sector. It must take priority to facilitate growth in the Australian screen production sector.

### **Option 2: Youth**

This appears to be a 'start-up' fund for current film graduates? How will these start-ups demonstrate the proof of their ideas? The next generation of filmmakers are more likely to benefit from employment in thriving businesses that have international deals from businesses that can offer mentorships and training programs to cultivate new talent.

### **Option 3: Gap**

While there is merit in this scheme, it appears to be the weakest option. It repeats some of the criteria from Growth and perhaps duplicates other programs that exists in other agencies (i.e.: script development, talent professional development)

Dot point 4 read 'Strategies to enhance international capabilities of Australian Companies', which could be similar to points 2 and 3 from Growth (to establish and build sector alliances and progress collaborations with foreign partners.)

### **Conclusion**

Screen Australia is to be congratulated for devising the Enterprise Funding Program in response to international trends for supporting company development as well as individual projects. The scheme is evolutionary and not revolutionary given antecedents in the General Development Program and Screen Business Venture Program and its continuation and refinement should remain a priority for Screen Australia.

Continuation of the "Enterprise Asia" initiative is also strongly endorsed and aligns with the case made in the 2012 White Paper "Australia in the Asian Century" and the 2013 AFTRS White Paper, 'Beyond the Great Wall – Pathways to Australia China Co-productions'. Tangentially, the Asia Pacific Screen Awards and accompanying industry events across Brisbane in November 2013 demonstrated the benefits of strong engagement with the world's fastest growing, most diverse and populous region. It is axiomatic that Australia's international engagement and economic future in the twenty-first century is inextricably tied to this region.

In conclusion, despite some gaps in the reporting data there is strong evidence pointing to the success of the Enterprise Funding Program and it contributing to the sustainability of Australian screen businesses. Continuation of the Enterprise funding program is strongly supported by ASPERA deeming that it has a vital role in assisting with the future proofing of the Australian Screen Production Sector.

Dr Sean Maher

[s.maher@qut.edu.au](mailto:s.maher@qut.edu.au)

President ASPERA

Dr Susan Kerrigan

[susan.kerrigan@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:susan.kerrigan@newcastle.edu.au)

Executive Member and Former President ASPERA