

## Draft Guidelines Documentary Programs: Stories That Matters

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your revised draft guidelines for Documentaries.

It is timely to review the funding guidelines in response to the rapidly changing landscape for documentaries and factual entertainment. The guidelines need to be both **robust and flexible** to meet the variety of ways filmmakers are now raising their films' budgets and delivering the films to audiences on multiple platforms.

We also believe it is of critical importance to focus on the development and production of a *diverse* range of programs, in subject and style, and to recognise that new pathways to audiences need to be supported in an era where audiences are hungry for, and seeking, content beyond and beside the broadcast.

In the 6 years that DAF has been operating we have seen many filmmakers with strong work that is unable to attract broadcaster presales and yet is clearly of interest to both private funders and audiences. Over \$6.3 million has been donated to DAF and productions, highlighting the growth and engagement of philanthropic support for documentary.

DAF is the only organisation in Australia that exists to create an alternative and private source of funding for documentaries in the form of tax-deductible donations. DAF provides advice, support, and educational services to the filmmaking, philanthropic and not for profit sectors and actively works towards encouraging and enhancing the culture of documentary. In some instances DAF will broker and manage partnerships between filmmaker and funder.

### Responsiveness to an evolving media landscape

DAF welcomes and endorses the draft guidelines in addressing and embracing the changing models in production and consumption of screen content. For the first time Screen Australia is acknowledging alternative sources of funding outside the traditional broadcaster-subsidy-distribution model. By relaxing the narrow interpretation of the market-place requirement, the Documentary Australia Foundation is now able to participate in partnering with Screen Australia on the expanded match-funding model.

DAF encourages filmmakers to engage and partner with communities of interest around their films from the development stage onwards. It is often the communities and funders that surround non profit organisations with existing databases and promotional channels that create alternative pathways to growing audiences with shared aims. It is encouraging that Screen Australia is acknowledging the capacity and contribution of these non-traditional partners to extend audience reach.

DAF anticipates that the matched funding possibility will encourage increased philanthropic giving, which will continue to underpin documentary production of stories that deal with matters of national interest and cultural importance to Australians.

### Screen Australia Budget cuts and cuts to the Documentary Budget

Screen Australia's total budget is to be cut by \$24 million over the next 4 years - \$5million per year for the next two years and then \$7 million per year for the following two years. The Documentary Budget has been sitting at \$19million - \$20 million per year. It is anticipated that the budget will be reduced in 2014-15 to \$18-19million.

It is not clear if Documentary is carrying \$1 or \$2 million of the cuts to the \$5million for 2014-15. It would be reassuring to know that the budget cuts are apportioned pro rata across the Screen Australia production budgets with Documentary not bearing a disproportionate load of reduced funding.

## **Role of Broadcasters**

DAF applauds Screen Australia's recognition of alternative funding and distribution pathways, other than the traditional broadcast model, as evidence of audience interest. It is in line with DAF's aims to encourage philanthropic grantmaking to support high quality documentary production and contribute to the culture and art form of documentary.

Except for the Premium Fund, Screen Australia proposes to do away with a set minimum licence fee for broadcast presales encouraging an 'open market' – leaving it to the broadcasters to decide what a program is worth. The potential downside of this is that it will ultimately drive presale fees down, reducing the automatic matched funding from Screen Australia. The producers will bare the brunt of this as they work to fill the widening gap in their production budgets.

With falling licence fees (and matched funding) DAF anticipates more filmmakers turning to DAF for advice, education and guidance in how to secure philanthropic funding. While being pleased with the growth in philanthropic support for documentaries, DAF would not want the assumption made that budget gaps can be easily filled with philanthropic funding. Philanthropic funding supports films where there is a shared vision for social change and impact. Securing philanthropic funding requires commitment from the filmmakers to form respectful and trusting relationships with donors. These relationships take time and are often slow to develop but can prove ultimately rewarding with the support extending over a number of films. Philanthropic partners expect filmmakers to be engaged in social impact aims with their films long beyond its initial release. This is an expectation of working in this model that needs to be understood and resourced.

Apart from the reservations above it is difficult to predict how this policy will play out – ideally it will allow the strongest and most favoured projects to rise to the top attracting responsible and appropriate licence fees.

DAF supports Screen Australia in exploring new models of providing funding to the documentary industry that will assist in delivering diversity of programming to audiences.

## **Pathways to Audience**

The demonstration of pathways to audiences is important. Private funders place an equal importance on distribution as the government funding agencies. Philanthropic funders are interested in a return on their investment but as grantmakers they are looking for a social return rather than a financial return. They recognise a financial return is extremely rare in documentary, however a social return can be significant. This can be achieved through well planned and resource audience engagement strategies.

A well planned and thought through long term audience engagement strategy should be a key element to the demonstration of a pathway to audience.

Funding partners can also lead to communities of interest through funded non profit partners.

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