

Screen Australia announces Story Development funding for 26 new titles

Monday 11 November 2019: Seven television dramas, nine online projects, nine feature films and a podcast will share in almost \$900,000 of Story Development funding.

The slate includes the (alleged) return of the Leyland Brothers; the makers of *Bluey* turning their eye to live-action feature film; and the first podcast the agency has funded as a proof-of-concept device.

Nerida Moore, Screen Australia's Head of Development said, "We're now into the second year of the Generate and Premium Story Development programs, and the industry is fully utilising the opportunity to develop film and episodic content at different budget levels. Bunya Productions made a compelling case to try podcast as a television development tool to explore story, build audiences and create revenue, so we're trialling a new format too."

"With episodic content taking around two years to transition from development to production, and film being anywhere upwards of five years, it's essential we supply a pipeline of new talent and projects into the marketplace for financing, production and ultimately, audiences. To that end, I'm particularly pleased to see so many new names attached to applications, with over half of the successful Generate Fund applicants in this slate having never received Screen Australia development funding before."

The projects funded for development include:

- **50 Shades of Black (Girl):** A six-part online comedy which follows the perpetually anxious Hanna in the aftermath of being mistaken for Maya, a successful black musician, at a gig one evening. The experience sparks Hanna's curiosity as to what else she could get away with by pretending to be another person of colour. With the assistance of her best friend Bonnie, the two women embark on a journey that sees their lives entwine with a number of other women of colour. It's through this experiment that Hanna and Bonnie explore their connection to their identity as black women, and what it means to be black in Australia. This project is written and executive produced by Gemma Bird Matheson ([The Housemate](#)). It is produced by Lizzie Cater ([Birdie](#)), Ratidzo Mambo and executive produced by Alexandra Keddle ([The Housemate](#)).
- **Engineering Consciousness:** A podcast from writer/director Lynette Wallworth ([Awavena](#)), which will investigate what happens to someone's consciousness when they face a near-death experience. Over two episodes Wallworth will interview a range of artists, scientists, neurologists and Indigenous leaders in order to understand new technologies and medical trials that are attempting to activate this psychological state in others. The podcast will be used to develop a television drama series on the same topic, and will be produced by Sophia Zachariou and Greer Simpkin of Bunya Productions, the award-winning production company behind [Sweet Country](#) and [Mystery Road](#).
- **Kara, Infected:** A 10-part vertical series for mobile which follows Kara who, after a deadly plague decimates Sydney, is quarantined at home with only her mobile phone and social media to keep her company. But soon Kara is forced to face the dangers that await her outside, all while the eyes of the world watch on. This science fiction thriller is co-created by producer Taylor Litton-Strain ([Jade of Death](#)) and writer/producer Wendy Hanna ([Dumbotz](#)).
- **Leyland Brothers: Monster Hunters:** A 10-part fictional television series about what went on behind the scenes of the iconic Leyland Brothers' adventures across Australia. Mike and Mal Leyland brought the Australian landscape into lounge rooms across the country with their documentary series in the 1970s, and this new comedy will show the 'real story' of how the brothers hunted monsters in the Outback. This paranormal adventure is created, written and directed by Daina Reid ([Romper Stomper](#), [The Handmaid's Tale](#)). Reid is joined by writers Christiaan and Connor Van Vuuren ([Soul Mates](#)), Kirsty Fisher ([Laid](#)), Kodie Bedford ([Mystery Road](#)) and producer Joanna Werner ([Dance Academy](#)).



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MEDIA RELEASE

- **Lucky Lee:** A six-part detective comedy series centred on Maggie Lee, a Chinese-Australian millennial who is on her third gap year and has no life plan. When amateur detective and conman Charlie enters her life, Maggie teams up with him to search for her missing father. This project will be written by Niki Aken ([The Hunting](#)), Melissa Lee Speyer ([Jadai The Broome Brawler](#)), Lawrence Leung ([The Family Law](#)) and Tristram Baumber ([The Unlisted](#)). They are joined by associate producer and co-creator Ivy Mak ([Sydney Sleuthers](#)) and producers Rob Gibson ([Bloom](#)) and Ian Collie ([Rake](#)) of Easy Tiger Productions.
- **Petey:** A science fiction comedy from Ludo Studio, the multi Emmy Award-winning production company behind [Bluey](#) and [Robbie Hood \(co-produced with Since 1788\)](#). This feature film centres on Petey who, 25 years after a childhood encounter with an alien, is reunited with his extra-terrestrial best friend. The alien has returned to earth with a lot of baggage, and he's ready to start a family. Spun from the world of Steven Spielberg's *ET*, this is the first feature from writer/director Daley Pearson and will poke fun at a generation obsessed with nostalgia. It will be executive produced by Charlie Aspinwall, Pearson and Nick Boshier.
- **Tales from the United Nonsense:** An eight-part television series following the tragi-comic adventures of Australian woman Janey Resnik, posted to South Asia on her first UN assignment in the politically charged years following 9/11. She is thrown in the deep end of the strange, exhilarating world of development aid and gets caught up in a love triangle of her own making. Aided by her acute case of white saviour hero complex, Janey is on a mission to save the world. This project is written by comedian and writer Sami Shah, Tamara Asmar ([On the Ropes](#)), Penny Greenhalgh ([Orange is the New Brown](#)) with Sarah Lambert ([Lambs of God](#)) on board as Story Consultant. They are joined by producers Sally Browning ([Drop Dead Weird](#)) and Katey Grusovin ([The Eulogy](#)) who worked for the UN for over a decade, as well as executive producer Monica O'Brien ([Random & Whacky](#)).
- **The Moogai:** The first feature film from writer/director Jon Bell whose writing credits include [Cleverman](#) and [Redfern Now](#). *The Moogai* is a psychological horror about a young mother, Sarah, who becomes terrorised by a malevolent spirit she believes is trying to take her children. Sarah's husband Matt desperately wants to believe her but as she becomes more unstable, Matt is increasingly concerned for the safety of their family. Bell will team up with producers Mitchell Stanley ([Servant or Slave](#)) and Kristina Ceyton and Samantha Jennings of Causeway Films ([The Nightingale](#), [Cargo](#)).
- **Unwell:** A six-part television series about 33-year-old nurse Carey and her partner Hannah. When Carey finds a suspected suicide note from Hannah, she panics and fakes a brain tumour in order to stop her from harming herself. This lie soon spirals out of control and Carey is forced to push the boundaries to save her relationship. This black comedy is written and directed by Monica Zanetti whose credits include [My Life is Murder](#) and [Skin Deep](#), and produced by Geraldine Hakewill. The creative team also features writers Vanessa Alexander ([Love Child](#)), Erica Harrison ([A Cautionary Tale](#)), Nick Coyle ([Sarah's Channel](#)), Gemma Bird Matheson ([The Housemate](#)) and Clare Cavanagh ([Tonightly](#)).

For the complete list of development funding approvals, refer to [television](#), [online](#) and [feature film](#) breakdowns.

ABOUT STORY DEVELOPMENT FUNDING

In July 2018 Screen Australia announced [changes to the Story Development guidelines](#) to make it easier for emerging creators to obtain funding. Projects for any platform including TV, film and online, can apply for development funding from one of two program strands - the Generate Fund or the Premium Fund.

The [Generate Fund](#) is for lower budget projects with an emphasis on new and emerging talent, or experienced talent wanting to take creative risks. The [Premium Fund](#) is for higher budget projects of ambition and scale from successful screen content makers.

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Development funding decisions are made on an ongoing basis rather than rounds.

In the first year of the program (2018/19), 59% of successful applicants for the Generate Fund had never received Screen Australia Story Development funding before. Historically Screen Australia development had focused on feature films, however the new guidelines drastically changed this landscape, with 57.5% of 2018/19 projects funded across Generate and Premium having a television or online release in mind.

ABOUT DEVELOPMENT

‘Development’ refers to any stage of a project’s creation as it travels towards production. It can take many years for a project to reach the screen, and each project’s timeline from development to release is different due to many unpredictable factors including financing, cast, locations and festival timing.

On average, Australian television dramas take one to three years to go from development to production. For example [Lambs of God](#) took two years from development to broadcast, and [Total Control](#) was relatively quick at 18 months. Online projects also have a shorter timeline, at around 12 to 18 months.

Feature film development is much more unpredictable, and can take anywhere from two to 10 years (and even longer in some instances) from the inception of an idea, through to development, production and then release. For example, [The Dressmaker](#) began active development in 2008 (after the rights to the book became available) and was released in 2015. Lower budget features may be quicker to develop and finance, for example [Acute Misfortune](#) which took two years to go from development to release.

[Ride Like A Girl](#) which received development funding through [Screen Australia’s Gender Matters initiative](#) in 2016, moved quickly into production and became the number one Australian film of 2019 with over \$10 million at the box office. Allen Palmer, the writer of Official-Coproduction *Falling for Figaro* which is shooting now, started work on the film in 1993.

Development may also begin before a filmmaker is attached, for instance in the [latest Screen Australia podcast](#), Mirrah Foulkes talks about the idea of a live-action Punch and Judy film originally being developed by VICE in 2015, before she was brought on to create the [Judy & Punch](#) which premiered at Sundance earlier this year and is in cinemas from 21 November 2019.

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