

Comment on Screen Australia draft program guidelines from Debra Allanson

As a general comment, building a stronger, more industrial base for the screen sector while raising the bar on individual support is absolutely the right approach for Screen Australia to take. With suitable finessing to fix up some of the gaps and committing the resources keep it real, it should be embraced and supported.

My over arching concern is that it seems only token consideration is being given to the elephant in the room: audience habits are changing fast with the rise of internet and new digital platforms.

People are watching different things now, with more of their time spent consuming grabs of media online than on TV or at the cinema. This change will be exponential over the next 5 years or so, and it affects the kind of content producers develop and how its financed.

Screen Australia needs to plan for this now and stay across it. For starters, there should be flexibility in the production financing guidelines to open the way for projects where the primary or first platform may not be cinema, free-to-air or pay tv.

The draft guidelines also have a catchall provision for budgets to allocate an amount for “marketing and cross platform elements”. These should be as well thought through as other parts of the programme, and should be addressed at the earliest time.

More specifically...

The Innovation Programme

- **Development**

The ceiling of \$30,000 per stage for a project is arbitrary, and could reasonably be increased to \$50,000 per stage per project, with a limit of \$100,000 per project. Recognising the nature of innovation, this should continue to be treated as a grant and not be recoupable.

- **Production**

The ceiling of \$200,000 per project doesn't recognize that this may be only a small percentage of a budget. However, flexibility in the production financing guidelines could support suitably commercial proposals for innovative projects. As an interim step, the ceiling per project should increase to 75% of the budget with a maximum of \$500,000.

Low-budget Television Drama Program

This is an opportunity to support projects where TV may not be the primary or first release platform, and for new formats such as short-form and cross platform scripted drama and comedy. It can actively new encourage partnerships with non-traditional (ie: portals, telcos) as well as traditional partners (ie: broadcasters).

Children's Television

Kids don't differentiate between online and broadcast, making this an area to support cross platform formats that also meet fundamental criteria of strong storytelling.

Two rounds per year is simply too long between financing opportunities; there should be 4 rounds per year.

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