

# Narrative Content Development Funding Guidelines

**Issued 1 July 2025**

Screen Australia reserves the right to change its program guidelines. Applicants should check the website for the latest version. These guidelines should be read in conjunction with Screen Australia's [Terms of Trade](#), [Information for Applicants](#) and [Information for Recipients](#) on Screen Australia's website.

If applicants have questions about this program or accessibility requirements relating to submitting an application contact Screen Australia's Program Operations team at [development.narrativecontent@screenaustralia.gov.au](mailto:development.narrativecontent@screenaustralia.gov.au) or 1800 507 901.

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# 1. Funding Program

## 1.1. Overview

The Narrative Content Development Funding Program supports content makers to develop narrative projects for online/direct-to-audience, television and theatrical feature film platforms.

The aims of the Narrative Content Development Program are to support:

- distinctive **storytelling** for a range of audiences across different platforms and budget levels;
- **talent** at different career stages who reflect the breadth of Australia in service of cultural, creative and economic benefits; and,
- talent and stories with **viable pathways** to market partners and audiences locally and/or globally.

The Narrative Content Development Program replaces the Screen Australia Story Development and Online Development programs and guidelines.

## 1.2. Available Funding

- Applicants may apply for any amount between \$10,000 and \$75,000 per application.
- Applications for development of narrative projects for the following platforms will be accepted:
  - **online/direct-to-audience** (inclusive of VR, XR, AR and social media platforms);
  - episodic or feature length **television** (including SVOD or BVOD); and,
  - theatrical **feature film** (inclusive of VR, XR, and AR).
- There is a limited number of times a project can be supported with a tranche of development funding from Screen Australia, provided that the project can demonstrate significant progression across story, talent, and/or viable pathways to market partners and audience between separate applications.
- The maximum number of times you can be supported is different depending on your first and primary platform. Where your platform is:
  - Direct-to-Audience and Television projects:
    - a maximum of **two tranches** of development funding, totalling up to \$150,000.
  - Theatrical Feature Film projects:
    - a maximum of **three tranches** of development funding, totalling up to \$225,000.

- Theatrical Feature Film projects with third-party funding:
  - if a theatrical feature film project is in receipt of third-party arms-length development funding from a market partner (see section 3.2.1 below) and is awarded one or more tranches of co-development funding, such project is eligible to apply for an additional fourth tranche, up to a maximum aggregate amount of \$300,000.
- The cap on the number and funding value of previous successful development applications from Screen Australia or its predecessor entities, applies to the total number and dollar value awarded for the project that is the subject of the application irrespective of the recipient individual(s) or entity.
- Projects are ineligible to reapply for development funding after receiving two declines under this program and/or previous Story Development and Online Development program guidelines. In exceptional circumstances, Screen Australia may grant a waiver for one final application. A waiver must be requested from the Head of Development and is subject to approval by the Director of Narrative Content, and where required, the COO.
- Should projects be successful in securing funding without a producer or production company attached, any further application must have one attached.

Screen Australia may decide to provide a different amount than that applied for based on the assessment of all projects submitted to each funding round.

## 2. Inclusive Storytelling

For Australian screen content to deliver cultural and economic benefits it must speak to, and be for, all Australians. A range of ideas and a diverse workforce will enhance the Australian screen industry, making it more relevant to Australian audiences and more competitive internationally.

Screen Australia is committed to building equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility into its programs and into our engagement with the community.

Screen Australia encourages applications from applicants from all backgrounds, cultures and experiences. In particular, the agency welcomes applications from under-represented groups.

Screen Australia strives to make its funding programs accessible by removing barriers for people who are d/Deaf, disabled and/or those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

## 3. Eligibility

- Applicants and projects must meet Screen Australia's [Terms of Trade](#), any general eligibility or other requirements listed on the agency's website (see [Information for Applicants](#) and [Information for Recipients](#)), as well as the specific eligibility criteria set out in these guidelines.

- Specific requirements apply to projects which involve [First Nations community participation or content](#).
- Specific requirements apply to projects which involve community participation or content with the following communities: d/Deaf, disabled, culturally and linguistically diverse, LGBTQIA+, or those from other under-represented groups.

### **3.1. Applicant Eligibility**

#### **3.1.1. Eligible Entities**

This program is open to companies and individuals (either alone or as part of a team as co-applicants). To be eligible:

- an applicant company must be an incorporated company carrying on business in Australia, with its central management and control in Australia.
- an individual applicant must be an Australian citizen or Australian permanent resident (holding a permanent visa).
- Applicants must also
  - have an Australian Business Number (ABN).
  - be registered for GST if required by law.
  - demonstrate, with the exception of anticipated Official Co-Productions, that the project is written and directed by Australian citizens or permanent residents and that any non-Australian producers do not prevent the project from meeting the requirements of Screen Australia's other eligibility requirements.

#### **3.1.2. Ineligible Entities**

The following types of entities are not eligible to apply to this program:

- a Commonwealth, state, territory or local government agency or body
- any organisation or individual that is otherwise excluded pursuant to the [Information for Applicants](#).

### **3.2. Project Eligibility**

#### **3.2.1. Eligible Projects and Costs**

To be eligible, the project must:

##### Budget

- The project must not exceed the project production budget threshold of \$AUD30,000,000.

##### Track-Record

- the applicant(s) or for companies, the company or team must have some experience

in developing work for the screen sector and for the platform being applied for.

- if applying to develop a narrative project for a platform for which the applicant (or for companies, the company or team) has no screen credits or no credits in the platform, applicants must supply a writing sample for that platform.

#### Rights

- Applicants must control the rights to the project that is the subject of the application (including by obtaining any relevant copyright and appropriate clearances from all significant participants)
- Applicants must have, or be in a position to acquire on appropriate terms, an assignment of all underlying rights, including copyright, required to develop, produce and commercially exploit the project and any sequels, spinoffs and remakes (including a format).
- where the application is based on an underlying work, Screen Australia will expect, at the least, an appropriate option and purchase agreement (to which the applicant or co-applicants must be party), with an option period of at least 18 months from the date of application to Screen Australia (inclusive of any possible extension period/s).
- where the rights are shared between multiple parties, all such rights-holders should be included as co-applicants (note that this will not apply to anticipated Official Co-Production projects, for which the applicant will be the Australian co-producer).

#### Australia

- the project must be primarily produced in Australia, including pre-production, production and post-production (except for anticipated Official Co-Productions).

#### Anticipated Official Co-Productions

- for anticipated Official Co-Production projects, Screen Australia expects that the ownership and control of the rights be shared between the relevant co-producers, provided that such proportional ownership and control aligns with an existing co-development agreement or heads of agreement between the co-producers.
- during development, Screen Australia generally requires the Australian co-producer in an anticipated Official Co-Production to (i) hold no less than 50% of the rights in and to the development materials; and (ii) have the final say over creative decisions on the project.
- Screen Australia requires applicants (being the Australian co-producer) to identify the proposed co-producer(s)/production company(ies) from the other partner country/ies at the time of a Development application to Screen Australia:
  - applicants must provide supporting documentation (such as a co-development agreement or a heads of agreement between the co-producers) outlining the terms on which the anticipated Official Co-Production will be governed.

#### Theatrical Feature Film Matched Market Co-Funding

Applications for theatrical feature films with matched market co-funding must:

- provide documented evidence of development funding and any terms from a third-party arms-length market entity (not related to the producer or production company).
- meet the minimum threshold of at least 50% of development costs to be provided by the third-party arms-length market entity.

Project Costs must directly relate to the project and can include, where applicable:

- writer, director, producer fees
- impact producer fees
- executive producer fees
- consultant fees
- community manager fees
- game designer fees
- research and travel relevant to research for the development of the project
- writer room and/or workshop costs
- table read costs
- overheads
- audience testing and design costs
- costs for visual documents and design such as pitch decks, bibles, graphic design, look books, director treatments, hero character design or sample animation
- legal fees
- option fees (extension only)
- carer costs
- accessibility costs

For a project that is an anticipated Official Co-Production, only Australian elements can be paid out of any approved development funding from Screen Australia.

Please refer to Screen Australia's contribution guide in the program Frequently Asked Questions FAQ for eligible project costs.

Section 1.2 Available Funding outlines the number of tranches and maximum amount of funding you can apply for. It is recommended that you are strategic in the amount of funding you request based on the platform, scale of project, and development stage.

### **Ineligible Projects and Costs**

The following projects/costs are not eligible for funding:

- narrative projects whose first and primary window is not online/direct-to-audience, television or theatrical feature film
- projects that have been declined twice for the Narrative Content Development

program funding or through any predecessor Screen Australia Story Development and/or Online Development programs

- capital works or purchases
- retrospective costs
- purchase of underlying Intellectual Property
- costs for production of the project or a short form proof of concept of the project
- costs of non-Australian elements, with the exception of script editors, consultants, mentors, and executive producers
- for anticipated Official Co-Productions non-Australian executive producer fees
- 'unofficial' Co-Production projects with international co-producers or rights-holders of the proposed development materials (i.e. not intended to be made under an existing Treaty or Memorandum of Understanding arrangement between Australia and another country)
- non-narrative projects, such as documentary, factual, sporting or entertainment (i.e. panel shows and variety shows)

non-narrative projects created for VR/AR/XR platforms (see Screen Australia's [Documentary](#) programs)

- projects that are currently or have previously been in receipt of funds from or under agreement for development with a commissioning platform (e.g. a broadcaster or streamer)
- educational and training programs and projects

## 4. Application Process

Before applying, applicants must read and understand these guidelines, Screen Australia's [Terms of Trade](#), [Information for Applicants](#), [Information for Recipients](#), and preview the application form on SmartyGrants.

### 4.1. How to Apply

Applications can be made at any time through Screen Australia's [Application Portal](#) on SmartyGrants.

### 4.2. Application Form

Through the application form, applicants must:

- provide all the information requested and answer the application questions;
- meet, where required, all eligibility criteria; and,
- include all required supporting materials.



The application form will require:

- **story development plan** – self-analysis of the current story document, its strengths and weaknesses, and if approved, what development work will be done to progress the project creatively and the rationale behind the development budget being requested;
- **project plan** – a plan that outlines the strategy and explains how the applicant or team, if approved, will progress the project towards market, intended audience, and production partners, where relevant;
- **diversity, equity and inclusion plan** – where there is participation or content from the following specific communities: including d/Deaf and disabled, neurodivergent, culturally and linguistically diverse, LGBTQIA+ or other under-represented groups, the project applicant should provide:
  - a statement setting out how they are approaching the content or participation;
  - applicants must demonstrate that they have a consultation plan covering the full development process and are following it; and,
  - evidence of consultation taken to date

### 4.3. Required Materials

Applicants are required to upload the following supporting materials with their application form:

- **a story document** – an existing document that effectively communicates the story that the applicant wishes to develop i.e. an outline, a treatment, a mini-bible or a draft script;
- **a writing sample** – in addition to the required story document, an applicant with no screen credits or no credits for the platform for which they are applying, must supply a writing sample for the platform (online, television, feature film) (maximum 15 pages). The writing sample does not need to be from the project being applied for;
- **documented evidence of third-party funding** – if applying for co-funding (feature film platform only) with arms-length third-party funding in place, evidence of that development funding and any terms from the third-party arms-length market entity, which may take the form of a dated and executed letter of offer (LOO) on market partner letterhead and/or an agreement between the parties.
- **co-production agreement** – where relevant, applicants must provide supporting documentation (such as a co-development agreement or a heads of agreement between the co-producers) outlining the terms on which the shared rights-holding or anticipated Official Co-Production will be governed.
- **additional materials** - applicants may upload one non-mandatory additional item, which may be a further writing sample, a document that communicates the creative vision of the project, or support for other key areas related to the project such as a

Letter of Interest from market, or audience insights information (maximum 10 pages).

Incomplete applications will not be accepted.

#### **4.3.1. First Nations participation or content**

Where there is First Nations participation or content involved in the project, applicants should provide:

- a statement setting out how they are approaching the First Nations content or participation with regard to appropriate protocols, even if the content is not specific to a particular community or individual. Applicants must demonstrate that they have a consultation plan covering the full development process and are following it. The statement should be based on the checklists available in Screen Australia's guide [Pathways & Protocols: a film maker's guide to working with Indigenous people, culture and concepts](#);
- evidence of consultation to date; and,
- if the project will involve particular First Nations individuals or communities, signed letters of consent confirming their willingness to participate.

#### **4.3.2. Producer Offset**

Screen Australia appreciates that understanding development in relation to Producer Offset is important. If the project is eligible to apply for the Producer Offset, note that not all project costs approved are automatically qualifying Australian production expenditure (QAPE).

- The Producer Offset is administered separately by Screen Australia's Producer Offset and Co-Production Unit (POCU).
- Development funding received may not be eligible for qualifying Australian production expenditure (QAPE).
- In circumstances where Development funding is not repaid to Screen Australia (if the project is produced) this expenditure cannot be claimed as QAPE.
- We strongly recommend that all applicants for Development funding familiarise themselves with the [Producer Offset FAQs](#) and [the Producer Offset Guidelines 2024](#), specifically FAQ No. 26 '*Can I apply for the Producer Offset if I started making the film as an individual or sole trader?*'.

Applicants can contact POCU on [pocu@screenaustralia.gov.au](mailto:pocu@screenaustralia.gov.au) for further information.

#### **4.3.3 Anticipated Official Co-Productions**

- Applicants that are developing projects as anticipated Official Co-Productions (i.e. projects intending to be made under an existing Treaty or Memorandum of Understanding arrangement between Australia and another country) should contact the Producer Offset and Co-Production Unit (POCU) to discuss the proposed Official Co-Production structure and the application and assessment process.

- We strongly recommend, where applicable, that all applicants for Development funding familiarise themselves with the Screen Australia International Co-Production Program [Guidelines](#). Applicants can contact POCU at [pocu@screenaustralia.gov.au](mailto:pocu@screenaustralia.gov.au) for further information.

## 5. Assessment

### 5.1. Process

- Once submitted, the Program Operations team will review each application to determine eligibility and ensure that required materials have been submitted. A member of the team may contact the applicant if there are questions regarding submission materials or eligibility.
- Once eligibility has been confirmed, the applicant will receive an email advising that their application has moved to assessment which will take approximately eight (8) weeks.
- Applications are assessed against the published criteria by Screen Australia staff, with industry specialists consulted as required.
- All projects involving First Nations content or participation will be assessed or co-assessed by First Nations Assessors.
- Some projects involving representation of specific communities and culture may be assessed by Specialist or Cultural Assessors.

### 5.2. Criteria

Applications will be assessed against the following criteria, and in the context of Screen Australia's [Terms of Trade](#):

- **Story (50%):**
  - Is the story strong, distinctive and entertaining and does it demonstrate storytelling craft?
  - Is the story suited to its platform and audience?
  - Does the story contribute to a depth and diversity of Australian stories?
- **Talent & Development (25%):**
  - Is there evidence of the talent's creative potential and/or previous experience and are they positioned to execute the vision?
  - Does the talent and team have authentic connection to the story, the characters and the world they are representing?
  - Do the Story Development Plan, Project Plan, and where applicable, the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan, clearly articulate the strategy to progress the project creatively, and in relation to financing, market and audience?
- **Audience & Budget (25%):**

- Has the audience been clearly and appropriately identified?
- Does the story have potential to connect with Australian and/or global audiences?
- Will the story have impact for audiences and/or reflect the diversity of people and experiences from around Australia?
- Does the talent, team and story have the pathway to reach audience on its intended platform and within its intended budget?

Other factors may be considered including the:

- availability of funds;
- range and diversity of projects in receipt of development funding from Screen Australia inclusive of a project's scale, budget, intended audience, genre and themes;
- range and diversity of applicants in receipt of development funding from Screen Australia inclusive of applicant, applicant company and geographic diversity;
- extent to which a project is likely to effectively and properly increase and amplify equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility.

### **5.3. Decision & Notification**

- Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application within eight (8) weeks of receiving the 'moved to assessment' email.
- Screen Australia will advise applicants in writing of the outcome of their application.
- Where an application is unsuccessful, the applicant will receive a short-written assessment against the assessment criteria which will accompany the decision notification.
- Due to the high volume of applications Screen Australia is unable to provide further feedback to unsuccessful applicants.
- Decisions on applications are final.

## **6. Successful applicants**

### **6.1. Contracting**

- If a project is approved, the applicant will receive an approval email detailing the level of Screen Australia's approved contribution, as well as information about the contracting process and any applicable conditions.
- Successful applicants will enter into a Development Grant Agreement (DGA) with Screen Australia.
- If a project is approved but for a lesser amount than requested, the parties to the DGA warrant that all participants in the funded development activities have agreed to any reduction to activity or fee, prior to executing the DGA.

- Apart from applicants that are developing projects as anticipated Official Co-Productions, where the rights in the development materials are proposed to be held by more than one Australian party as co-applicants, Screen Australia generally requires all such rights-holders to be party to the DGA.
- If successful, the development activities covered by the funding must commence post-contracting with Screen Australia (i.e. retrospective costs cannot be covered by the grant).

## 6.2. Terms of Funding

- Further information about Screen Australia's standard conditions of funding, see Screen Australia's [Terms of Trade](#), [Information for Recipients](#) and the [FAQ](#) for the program.
- Funding will be provided by way of grant, repayable to Screen Australia if the project goes into production, whether such project receives production funding from Screen Australia or not.
- For projects that receive \$100,000 or over in combined Screen Australia funding, a solicitor's opinion letter validating your chain of title agreements will be required. This may also be required if Screen Australia considers there to be exceptional circumstances.

## 7. Other Resources

Further information about Screen Australia funding and resources to assist with submitting an application is available on Screen Australia's website:

- [Terms of Trade](#)
- [Information for Applicants](#)
- [Information for Recipients](#)
- [Program FAQs](#)
- [Producer Offset FAQ document](#)
- [Producer Offset Guidelines 2024](#)
- [Co-Production Guidelines](#)
- [Co-Production Eligibility Tool](#)

## 8. Contact

- If you have any further questions contact Screen Australia's Program Operations on 1800 507 901 or at [development.narrativecontent@screenaustralia.gov.au](mailto:development.narrativecontent@screenaustralia.gov.au)
- Please note that Screen Australia is unable to provide creative advice or suggestions to strengthen an application.

## 9. Privacy

Screen Australia collects personal information from individuals in different ways, including via funding applications, acquittal reports, or supporting material supplied with forms. Screen Australia will handle any personal information provided in connection with a funding application in accordance with its [Privacy Notice](#) relating to funding applications and its [Privacy Policy](#).