



Emerging
Doco-makers
Network of
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STATEMENT OF RESPONSE TO SCREEN AUSTRALIA

RE: DRAFT GUIDELINES PUBLISHED MONDAY 27 OCTOBER 2008

SUBMISSION BY **EDNA**

The following is an official response to the draft guidelines published by Screen Australia on the 27th October 2008, put forward by members of EDNA (Emerging Doco-makers Network of Australia).

EDNA was created in 2007 by a group of emerging doco-makers interested in uniting the interests of emerging doco-makers throughout Australia. In 2008, EDNA became incorporated and launched a website - emergingdoco.com.au. Presently, EDNA has over a hundred members with Jesse Cox as Public Officer, Loosie Craig as Treasurer, and Nick Agafonoff as Secretary. EDNA has held industry events, including EDNA-Uncut (July 2008).

INTRODUCTION

We thank Screen Australia for the opportunity to provide feedback in relation to the Draft Guidelines. There are positives as well as negatives we have identified in the new guidelines, which impact emerging doco-makers specifically. In raising concerns about different aspects of the proposed guidelines we are also keen to offer solutions.

1. PROJECT BY PROJECT PROGRAMS – DOCUMENTARY DEVELOPMENT

Based on the draft guidelines, we assume one of the goals of Screen Australia is to ensure existing production companies operate out of an environment that is more stable. Our assumption is predicated on a number of the proposals in the draft guidelines, chief among them the changed criteria for development and production funding that would have an inherent bias in favour of established practitioners.

This bias will severely impact emerging doco-makers in the following ways:

- i. Emerging Producer/Director teams are jeopardised because of the eligibility criteria requiring applicants to have attained three broadcast credits in the role they are applying for.
 - o This prevents the pooling of experience by not recognising teams who between them may have achieved the relevant number of broadcast credits
 - o This prevents practitioners applying for funding who may have developed as far as having achieved 1-2 broadcast credits.

- Without the necessary broadcast credits, emerging filmmakers will be forced to approach established practitioners to establish a joint venture.
- ii. These guidelines will create a funding and creative bias towards a small percentage of documentary practitioners.
 - The 3 broadcast credits criteria in effect creates a new set of 'commissioning editors' in a way that the few people with 3 broadcast credits to their name will be deciding what gets made / what they will be involved with. Without the support of one of these practitioners the project will be ineligible to apply for funding.
 - Because few companies or practitioners have the requisite number of credits, this will create a concentrated number of companies who will have access to funding, creating a virtual monopoly amongst the ranks of established companies.
 - With all levels of funding (including development) requiring the attachment of a practitioner with 3 broadcast credits, emerging practitioners may lose creative control of their projects because of the need to force a marriage with an eligible filmmaker.
- iii. These guidelines cut out many documentary filmmakers who have made extremely good, well-recognised films in the past, but do not possess three broadcast credits. Under the new guidelines, many of these filmmakers will not have been able to make the films they have made in the past.
- iv. There will not be enough opportunities for new/emerging practitioners to gain the right experience to be able to 'step up' to an established level as producer/ director. Even people with years of experience as production manager/ researchers/ etc will find it extremely difficult to step over to a key creative role.
- v. The new guidelines encourage producers with three broadcast credits or more to discriminate against emerging doco-makers in favour of more established directors, whom have a better chance of attracting funding.
- vi. In any event, there are not enough 'established' producers/ directors to be able to support emerging filmmakers.
- vii. The guidelines will develop a 'black hole' for producers/directors who have 1-2 broadcast credits, and are suddenly cut out of the market.
- viii. Broadcasters and established practitioners could offer less (or no) funding for content produced by emerging doco-makers knowing the value of a broadcast credit to an emerging documentary practitioner, which is a form of market exploitation.

Whilst we agree it is beneficial to be encouraging emerging filmmakers to attach a mentor to their films in the form of an experienced producer or director, these guidelines go considerably too far, and will make it prohibitive for the next generation of filmmakers to develop a career. The guidelines pursue the interests and security of a handful of experienced practitioners. They not only send a negative message to emerging practitioners, the proposed guidelines systematically threaten the development of future professional practitioners, thereby putting the future of our industry in jeopardy.

The solutions we present to the problems we have identified:

We suggest instead of the 3 broadcast credit limitation on eligibility for funding, two proposals:

- i. There is a points system, whereby one broadcast credit would account for a certain number of points. A number of points maybe obtained in several ways:
 - a. Distribution deals (including a DVD release through a recognised distributor);
 - b. Educational credit (degrees, short courses and practitioner training certificates related to documentary production);
 - c. Non-broadcast video and documentary production (including online documentaries);
 - d. Film festival credits;
 - e. Industry awards & recognition, broadcast credits in other roles;
 - f. Self-distribution with a minimum number of sales.
- ii. The term “successful track record” used in the documentary production guidelines seems more flexible and allows for merit and equivalent experience to be considered. We are happy to concede that a consulting established producer/director must be procured with development funding if deemed necessary.

2. SPECIAL DOCUMENTARY PROJECT

We applaud the merit based approach to the assessment criteria / eligibility but the limitation of being able to only apply for post-production funding with a secure broadcast credit seems to contradict the intention of the fund and again limits the emerging filmmaker especially from applying.

When a merit based approach is indicated in the assessment criteria / eligibility we request transparency with respect to the criteria that will be used to judge merit. We recommend criteria identical to the points based system we have articulated.



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3. WORKSHOPS

We strongly request that a percentage of the money put aside for high-level workshops and master classes in the past now be put towards a program specifically for the emerging doco-maker at the research/development stage. We envisage a system similar to Headlands, but focussed on the emerging practitioner. In this case established practitioners could mentor for an intensive period on a particular project.

4. FURTHER SUGGESTION

Ensuring that the Strand N funding from the AFC budget and the money that used to be available for mentorships (some of which at least used to go to doco-makers) is kept, as documentary funding, is very important to us.

5. PROPOSING AN EMERGING DOCO-MAKERS STRAND

We request that a new documentary funding strand be established specifically to cater for emerging practitioners. This strand will contain 200k in finance for 'guerrilla projects'. Up to 20 emerging filmmaker projects will be targeted by the fund each year. Projects that will be funded will include extremely innovative and ambitious projects, projects that promise commercial returns or are highly cost-effective, and projects that have the potential to move the genre forward in some way. Emerging practitioners with 'original ideas' (not necessarily with market interest), and also the 'biggest ideas' (in terms of distribution to audiences and social, cultural or political significance) will be privileged, as well as projects that have the potential to launch an extremely talented emerging filmmaker (or group of emerging filmmakers), as a recognised auteur in the documentary genre. The fund will be able to be accessed by emerging filmmakers for development, production and post-production funding. Hence, some projects will be funded only for a specific phase of filmmaking e.g. development, production or post-production.

The eligibility for this strand is the following:

- 1-2 broadcast credit or equivalent (according to our proposed points system)
- Both director/producer must by less than 3 broadcast credits
- Consultant producer/director attached to the project in a mentor role with 3 or more broadcast credits (or equivalent)

We acknowledge that a 'guerrilla' funding strand has been considered and knocked back in the past as it was deemed unfeasible due to the need to maintain industry standards with respect to legal fees, crew payments, etcetera.



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Yet, we believe that the benefits of such a funding strand far outweigh the complications. Such a strand will inject optimism, enterprise and opportunity into the emerging doco-maker community, potentially doubling or even tripling the output of emerging practitioners in Australia.

Through trial and error solutions to teething problems for the strand will be found. For instance, it might be that completion guarantor partners can be established for the fund that handle expensive line items, such as insurance costs. Unless we first try to make guerrilla funding work, however, solutions will never be found.

IN SUMMARY

Emerging documentary filmmakers are the life-blood of our industry. Developing their skills, knowledge and experience is important for the sustainability of documentary filmmaking culture in Australia and every country. Further, as innovators, emerging doco-makers represent a unique asset for established filmmakers. They learn to apply new technologies faster, and they consume storytelling in new formats and across new distribution platforms, before they are mainstream. Their vitality can be inspiring, and their resourcefulness can lead to big savings in film budgets. The conundrum for our industry is how best to harness the energy and creativity of emerging doco-makers and nurture their development in core documentary disciplines, without denying established filmmakers their traditional entitlements?

A poll of emerging doco-makers by EDNA recently discovered that almost all emerging doco-makers do not feel like there is an industry plan, or strategy, in place for their generation. Their frustrations include, no national cadetship or mentorship programs, limited, exclusive or highly competitive funding options for emerging filmmakers, and no incentives in place for established documentary filmmakers to draw on the energy and creativity of emerging ones (other than the market). Given the evidence that emerging filmmakers are an asset and not a liability to our industry, what can we do to develop an industry strategy, which is not only equitable, but works for emerging and established filmmakers alike? We ask that Screen Australia seriously consider the suggestions that EDNA has made in this document. We would also like to offer an open dialogue with Screen Australia policy developers moving forward.

Yours faithfully,

Nick Agafonoff
Secretary, EDNA

Other contributors: Jesse Cox (Public Officer), Loosie Craig (Treasurer), Matthew Pond (Board), and Imogen Semmler (Board)