



Australian Government



Documentary Production: Producer Program Guidelines

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Screen Australia reserves the right to change its program guidelines. Please ensure you check the website for the latest version. These guidelines should be read in conjunction with Screen Australia's [Terms of Trade](#).

Accessibility

If you have accessibility requirements relating to submitting an application, please contact our Program Operations team via email at documentary@screenaustralia.gov.au, or phone 1800 507 901, so we can assist.

Contact an Investment Manager

Before applying to Screen Australia for Producer Program funding, it is essential that you contact an Investment Manager to discuss the needs and parameters of your project. Contact the Program Operations team if you are unsure who to speak with: 1800 507 901 or documentary@screenaustralia.gov.au

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1. About this funding program

1.1. Overview

The Producer Program supports the production and completion of one-off documentaries and series for distribution across broadcast, festival, theatrical, digital, XR and online platforms. Projects must have a minimum budget of \$125,000 in total and Screen Australia's maximum contribution is \$500,000. Finance does not have to be confirmed at application. While marketplace commitment is not required at application, expressions of interest from marketplace are encouraged. Screen Australia can be 'first in'.

All projects will need to demonstrate a highly developed understanding of how they will reach and engage their target market and audience. See '[Pathways to audience](#)'

Please Note: It is a condition of this funding program that successful applications will have all finance in place within four months from the date of confirmation of Screen Australia approval. This means that some funding approvals will lapse because they cannot confirm finance within this time frame.

For Social Media first release content please refer to Screen Australia's [Online Production Guidelines](#)

For the purpose of these Guidelines the term **Commissioning Platform** includes a free-to-air or subscription television broadcaster and/or streaming platforms such as subscription video on demand (SVOD) and other varieties of video on demand.

The aim of the Producer Program is to provide producers with the flexibility to drive projects both creatively and commercially, with Screen Australia funding as the foundation for growing and securing deals.

The program is designed to support innovative, distinctive and engaging documentaries with a strong creative vision in the context of today's evolving media and distribution landscape and the commercial realities of increasingly fragmented sources of finance.

1.2. Available funding

Subject to the paragraph below, any amount up to \$500,000 may be requested. Applications for Screen Australia funding of more than \$500,000 will only be considered with prior approval from the Head of Documentary.

Generally, federal government funds should account for no more than:

- i) 35% of the budget for projects with a budget of \$500,000 or less; or

- ii) 65% of the budget (including producer offset) for projects with a budget of more than \$500,000.'

Other sources of finance are encouraged and the assessment process will take into account the level of Screen Australia funding requested as a proportion of the overall budget. Contributions might come from marketplace entities, as well as from state agencies, other government organisations, cultural institutions, international sources, private investors, philanthropy or other partners.

Screen Australia may decide to provide funding at a different level than that applied for based on the assessment of the project.

A minimum of 20 per cent of program funds will be reserved for projects with international funding in their finance plans.

2. Inclusive Storytelling

For Australian screen content to effectively deliver cultural and economic benefits it must speak to, and be for, all Australians. Ultimately a diversity of ideas and a diverse workforce will grow the Australian screen industry, make it more relevant to Australian audiences and more competitive internationally.

Screen Australia is committed to building diversity, equity and inclusion into its programs and into our engagement with the community. Authentic storytelling, from and about under-represented groups is a priority for Screen Australia.

Screen Australia therefore encourages applications from applicants from all backgrounds, cultures and experiences. In particular, the agency welcomes applications from applicants who are First Nations, d/Deaf and disabled, culturally and linguistically diverse, LGBTQIA+, regionally based, or those from other under-represented groups.

We expect that any experiences portrayed through the narrative and contributors which are aimed at illustrating diverse perspectives are reflected within the key creative team with appropriate representation and lived experience. It is vital the creative team has the cultural authorship to tell the story so that telling of the story is authentic. This will be taken into account when assessing applications.

3. Eligibility

In order to be competitively assessed for funding through this program, applicant companies and projects must meet the general eligibility requirements under Screen Australia's [Terms of Trade](#), as well as the specific requirements of these guidelines.

3.1. Applicant eligibility

To be eligible, applicants:

- must be an incorporated association or company and carrying on business in Australia, and have its central management and control in Australia
- have an Australian Business Number (ABN)
- be registered for the purposes of GST.

3.2. Project eligibility

3.2.1. Eligible Projects

The project that is the subject of the application must:

- be a documentary: Please refer to the [Australian Communications and Media Authority \(ACMA\) guidelines](#) for the definition of a documentary.
- be intended for public release
- have a total budget of at least \$125,000
- be written and directed by Australian citizens or residents (with the exception of official Co-Productions)

Both one-off documentaries and series are eligible.

Foreign formats are eligible but Australian original formats will be prioritised at assessment.

The program is open to applications for production and post-production.

Screen Australia expects key creatives including the producer, writer, director, director of photography and editor to be sourced from the freelance market.

3.2.2. Ineligible Projects

The project that is the subject of the application must not be:

- reality or magazine television, light entertainment, panel or travel shows, infotainment, branded content, current affairs, cooking, 'how to', sports, corporate, training, games, extensions to film or TV programs, or community access programs or projects whose primary market is the education sector
- more than 15 commercial hours of any one project, which may include multiple series. Projects longer than 15 commercial hours will not be eligible for funding unless exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated.

Unless invited to reapply (in the context of managing available funds), projects can only be submitted more than once if substantial changes have been made, and any more than two applications for the same project will not be accepted.

Screen Australia will not finance programs where the project has been developed by a Commissioning Platform and sub-contracted at a later stage to a producer, except where chain of title resides with the producer. For the avoidance of doubt, Screen Australia will not finance programs where the producer is not independent of the nominated local Commissioning Platform for the first release of a program in Australia. Key creatives must not be sourced from the staff of the Commissioning Platform.

3.2.3. Projects with budgets over \$500,000

For **one-off or series documentaries** with a budget of over \$500,000, the **creative team** responsible for the project (excluding online and interactive) must include one producer, director or writer who has at least two ‘eligible credits’ across different projects in their respective role.

An ‘eligible credit’ is a documentary that is 30 minutes or longer in duration, and has:

- been broadcast by a recognised Commissioning Platform or channel; or
- had a commercial theatrical release; or
- been invited to screen at an internationally recognised festival such as IDFA, Sundance, TIFF, Sheffield, Cannes, Hot Docs or equivalent

For **online and interactive documentaries** with a budget of over \$500,000, the producer or director should have at least one credit in their respective roles on an equivalent project which has been publicly released.

Less experienced practitioners may be part of the team, as long as at least one key creative is eligible as above. The intention is not to exclude new talent, but to encourage them to team up with more experienced practitioners and form a genuine collaboration.

3.2.4. Projects with budgets between \$125,000 and \$500,000

For documentaries with a budget between \$125,000 and \$500,000 (including (a) one-off or series documentaries intended for significant audience reach such as a recognised Commissioning Platform or commercial theatrical release; or (b) online and interactive projects):

- the producer or director should have at least one credit in respective roles on an equivalent project which has been publicly released; or

- if there is confirmed, arms-length market attachment with a licence fee and/or distribution guarantee as a part of the finance plan, then there will be no prior credit requirements

3.2.5. Official co-productions

Projects approved as official co-productions are eligible for, but not automatically guaranteed, Screen Australia support.

As co-productions have access to more than one domestic market, they must bring a higher level of genuine market attachment to the budget.

IMPORTANT: The Australian co-producer must lodge an application for provisional approval as a co-production with Screen Australia before applying for production funding.

See [Co-productions](#).

3.2.6. Producer Offset

IMPORTANT: You do not need to have lodged an application for your Producer Offset Provisional Certificate at the time of applying to the funding round. In most cases producers will be able to wait to see whether or not their project has been successful for funding before applying for a certificate, saving time and application fees. However, if you are approved for funding you will need to lodge your application and receive your certification prior to contract execution.

4. Application Process

4.1. How to apply

Applications can be made via Screen Australia's online [Application Portal](#). Applications must be made on the relevant application form, and include all required materials listed on that form.

4.2. Application Form

Through the application form, you must:

- provide all the information requested and answer the application questions
- address all eligibility criteria and assessment criteria
- include all required supporting materials

You must list all of your Chain of Title documents in the application.

4.3. Required Materials

Applicants must upload the following materials with their application form:

- up to a ten page proposal including:
 - an outline or treatment of the proposed documentary
 - the key creatives' vision for the project
 - See [What is a synopsis? An outline? A treatment?](#)
- a draft [finance plan](#) using the Screen Australia template, indicating which sources of financing are confirmed by placing an 'X' in the column on the left.
- A draft A-Z budget. Budgets must be presented in the [A-Z Budget format](#), using the Screen Australia template. Fees should comply with industry norms. They will be considered in the context of the budget and track record of the key creatives and crew. Production budgets must include:
 - **Contingency:** Contingency is set at 10 per cent
 - **Completion Guarantor:** Screen Australia reserves the right to require a completion guarantor
 - **Delivery items:** Allowance must be made for delivery items specified for Screen Australia, the Commissioning Platform and NFSA, as well as for sales company deliverables and other delivery items as required. See [Terms of Trade](#) for details
 - **Study guides:**
 - The costs of producing such materials should be included in the budget as a line item
 - A minimum spend of \$3,750 per hour is required
 - The producer must seek Screen Australia's approval of the choice of publisher - ATOM is pre-approved
 - **Promotions and marketing:** Budgets should allocate an appropriate marketing spend fit for purpose.
- if available, evidence of any confirmed sources of finance or marketplace commitment / interest
- if available, letters of interest from organisations that might be key to enabling production of the film
- 200-word bios and CVs (no more than 3 pages) for the creative team - the producer, writer and director, or equivalent key roles relevant to the project, and any other confirmed Heads of Department i.e. DOP, editor, etc.
- sample footage or sizzle reel maximum five minutes. Vimeo link preferred.
- optional: a simple talk-to-camera 'video pitch' of no more than two minutes, where key creatives present their vision for the project. The pitch must be downloadable and password protected with the same password as the sample footage or sizzle reel. Vimeo link preferred
- Pathway to audience and marketing strategy (1 to 3 pages)

4.3.1. First Nations community participation or content

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

- a statement setting out how you are approaching the Indigenous content or participation with regard to appropriate protocols, even if the content is not specific to a particular community or individual. You must demonstrate that you have a consultation plan covering the full production 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
- if the project will involve particular Indigenous individuals or communities, signed letters of consent confirming their willingness to participate.

Incomplete applications will not be accepted. This includes those without finalised finance plans in place with associated letters of offer.

5. Assessment

5.1. Assessment Process

The Program Operations team will review each application to check eligibility and ensure the required application materials have been provided. Once confirmed, the applicant will receive an email advising that their application has moved to assessment and an estimated timeframe of the outcome.

Applications will be considered by Screen Australia executives and/or industry specialists as required. [Industry specialists](#) are listed on the Screen Australia website.

5.2. Assessment Criteria

Applications will be considered against the following equally weighted criteria:

- **Creative team.** Track record and capacity of the creative team
- **Creativity.** Creative strength of the project, including:
 - the concept/idea: its distinctiveness and clarity of objectives
 - the proposed realisation: level of boldness or innovation
 - cultural impact: its potential to create an impact beyond the first viewing, i.e. to inspire debate, insight or reflection, and/or create an enduring legacy for future generations with local and where appropriate international audiences.
- **Viability.** Viability of the project, including:
 - understanding of audience, release plan and demonstrated pathway to viewers
 - viability of the budget

- strength of the finance plan, including the amount requested from Screen Australia as a proportion of the total budget, and the international component where relevant revenue potential.

Additional factors, including availability of funds, the diversity of the slate as well as the diversity of the team, and the project's themes may also be taken into account, reflecting Screen Australia's aim to support Australian content across a variety of subjects, styles and approaches and viewpoints.

Priority will be given to:

- projects based on intellectual property created by Australians
- Australian original formats over international formats

5.3. Decision & Notification

Applicants will normally be notified in writing approximately 8 weeks after the closing date as to whether their application has been successful. Decisions are final.

Due to the number of applications we receive we do not have the resources to provide extensive feedback to unsuccessful applicants.

Unless invited to reapply, projects can only be submitted more than once if substantial changes have been made, and any more than two applications for the same project will not be accepted.

6. Successful applicants

6.1. Contracting

Screen Australia will send an approval via email to successful applicants, to allow producers to complete the project's finance plan. This will set out the amount of Screen Australia's contribution, which will not be varied other than in exceptional circumstances. The producer needs to secure the total finance plan, or have a revised and achievable finance plan and budget approved by Screen Australia, **within four months** from the date of confirmation of approval.

On occasions, Screen Australia may set conditions of approval which must be satisfied in order to proceed to contracting.

Note that Screen Australia will not be able to give unlimited extensions to producers to secure their finance and it's expected that some funding approvals will lapse.

6.2. Terms of funding

Where relevant, Provisional Producer Offset certification will also need to be obtained before funds can be released.

If successful, a Solicitor's Opinion letter will be required as a condition of funding.

6.2.1. Funding \$500,000 or under

Where Screen Australia's total contribution (including any development funds) is **\$500,000 or under**, funding will be in the form of a grant:

- Screen Australia does not take a share of receipts from projects funded under a grant, which means the funds do not have to be repaid other than in circumstances set out in the [Terms of Trade](#)
- The amount of the Screen Australia grant will be agreed upfront and not varied, other than in exceptional circumstances
- Screen Australia does not require a share of copyright in productions that it funds under a grant

6.2.2. Funding over \$500,000

Where Screen Australia's total contribution including any development funds is **more than \$500,000**, funding will normally be in the form of recoupable equity investment, with copyright terms in accordance with the agency's [Terms of Trade](#).

Recoupment - For all projects covered by these guidelines in which Screen Australia contributes a recoupable equity investment, Screen Australia will generally require the appointment of a disbursement administrator for all territories and Screen Australia's approval is required over the terms of any disbursement agreement entered into. Screen Australia will consider a waiver of the requirement to appoint a disbursement administrator depending on the experience and track record of the producer and on the nature of the project. The recoupment terms shall otherwise be in accordance with the agency's [Terms of Trade](#).

7. Contact

If you have any further questions after reviewing these guidelines, the application form, please contact Program Operations on 1800 507 901 or via email at documentary@screenaustralia.gov.au.

Please note that we are unable to provide creative advice or suggestions to strengthen your application

8. 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](#).