



Australian Government



Documentary Development Program Guidelines

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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](#), and the [Information for Applicants](#) and [Information for Recipients](#) on the agency's website.

If applicants have questions about this program or any accessibility requirements relating to submitting an application, contact Screen Australia's Program Operations team at documentary@screenaustralia.gov.au or on 1800 507 901.

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1. Funding Program

1.1. Overview

The Documentary Development Program supports content makers to develop documentary projects for Theatrical, Television and Direct-to-Audience release (e.g. YouTube, Facebook, Virtual Reality (VR), Extended Reality (XR) and Augmented Reality (AR) platforms). Screen Australia recognises that Direct-to-Audience pathways are rapidly evolving, so additional release platforms may also be eligible.

The aims of the Documentary Development Program are to support:

- distinctive storytelling for a range of budgets and audiences across local and global platforms; and
- content makers at different career stages who reflect the breadth of Australia in service of cultural, creative and economic outcomes.

1.2. Available Funding

- Applicants may apply for any amount up to \$30,000 per application.
- Funding for development will be provided by way of grant, repayable to Screen Australia if the project is produced, with or without Screen Australia production funding.
- Development funding costs for anticipated Official Co-Productions will only be provided by Screen Australia for Australian citizens, permanent residents or companies.
- Screen Australia may decide to provide a different amount of funding than that applied for based on the assessment of all projects submitted to each funding round.

Please note: Screen Australia development funding cannot cover costs already incurred.

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 set out on Screen Australia'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 participation or content](#).
- Specific requirements may apply to projects which involve 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

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

- An individual applicant must be an Australian citizen or Australian permanent resident (holding a permanent visa).
- An applicant company must be an incorporated company conducting business in Australia, with its central management and control in Australia.
- For international co-productions, applications must be made by the Australian applicant.

Applicants must also:

- have an Australian Business Number (ABN); and
- 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.
- control the rights to the project that is the subject of the application (including any relevant copyright and appropriate clearances from all significant participants). This means that:
 - 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).
- 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.

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

- Commonwealth, state, territory or local government agencies or bodies;
- organisations or individuals that are otherwise excluded pursuant to the [Information for Applicants](#).

3.2. Project Eligibility

To be eligible, the project must:

- be a documentary. Please refer to the [ACMA Guidelines](#) for the definition of a documentary;
- have been developed by Australian production companies/producers and creatives, not sub-contracted from a commissioning platform nor include staff from a commissioning platform;
- be intended to be primarily produced in Australia, including pre-production, production and post-production (except for anticipated Official Co-Productions);

If an applicant's first application for a project is not approved, they can make a further application for the same project if significant changes have been made. Changes will generally be in relation to creative, team, pathway to audience, marketplace and/or budget. The applicant will need to outline these in a statement of changes and discuss it with an Investment Manager before submitting. Screen Australia will not consider more than two funding applications for the one project.

Project costs must directly relate to the project and can include:

- Writer fees
- Director fees
- Producer fees
- Impact Producer fees including any Impact Plan

- Executive Producer fees
- Consultant fees
- Community manager fees
- Research and travel relevant to research
- Audience testing and design
- Synopsis, outline or treatment
- Visual documents and design such as pitch decks, bibles, teaser/mood reels, sizzles, sample scenes or animation
- Time critical shooting
- Carer costs
- Accessibility costs
- Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Plan
- First Nations Statement

The following projects/costs are **not eligible** for funding:

- capital works or purchases
- retrospective costs
- purchase of underlying Intellectual Property
- payment of non-Australian elements, with the exception of consultants
- ‘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)
- projects that are currently or have previously been in receipt of funds from under agreement for development with a marketplace commissioner
- educational and training projects
- digital or online extensions to an Online, Feature or TV program or ancillary content where the primary purpose is campaign or marketing

3.3. Additional Eligibility Criteria - Credit Requirements

For a theatrical release, feature, series or single documentary for release on television, BVOD (Broadcast Video on Demand) or SVOD (Subscription Video on Demand) with a proposed budget above \$500,000 (including anticipated Official Co-Productions):

- Individuals or teams must have a key creative with at least two ‘eligible credits’ in the role of producer and/or director.
- An ‘eligible credit’ must be a documentary that is 30 minutes or longer in duration, and has:
 - been broadcast by a recognised broadcaster or commissioning platform;
 - had a commercial theatrical release;
 - been invited to screen at a major Australian festival such as Sydney Film Festival, Melbourne Film Festival, Adelaide Film Festival, Darwin International Film Festival, Brisbane Film Festival or Antenna Documentary Film Festival; or

- been invited to screen at a major international festival / screening event such as Sundance, Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), SXSW, International Documentary Film Festival (IDFA), Hot Docs, CPH:Dox, Sunny Side of the Doc, Sheffield or equivalent.

For a theatrical release, feature, series or a single for release on BVOD or SVOD with a budget between \$125,000 and \$500,000 (including anticipated Official Co-Productions):

- The producer or director should have at least one eligible credit (as defined above) in respective roles on an equivalent project which has been publicly released.

For Direct-to-Audience applications:

- There are no minimum credits to apply.
- Applications can be made by individuals or creative teams; however individual applicants must demonstrate the ability to attract other team members.

For Virtual Reality (VR), Extended Reality (XR) or Augmented Reality (AR) documentaries intended for public access on a screen-based device:

- Individuals or teams must have a key creative with at least one 'eligible credit' on a comparable project in the role of producer and/or director.

An 'eligible credit' for a VR, XR, AR documentary project has:

- been publicly released on a commercially recognised platform;
- been viewed by a significant audience; or
- been invited to screen at IDFA, CPH:DOX, SXSW, Hot Docs or equivalent.

4. Application Process

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

4.1. How to Apply

Complete and submit the online application form through Screen Australia's [Application Portal](#) on SmartyGrants.

4.2. Application Form

Through the application form, applicants must:

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

4.3. Required Materials

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

Creative

- Proposal (maximum five (5) pages including images)
- Project Bible or pitch deck, where applicable

Budget

- Development budget

Production

- Schedule, where applicable

Market and Audience

- Direct-to-Audience applications need to include potential viewership metrics, subscribers, comparable titles or other relevant indicators of reach.

Rights

- Chain of Title

4.3.1. First Nations involvement

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 production process and are following it. The statement should be based on the checklists available in Screen Australia's [Pathways and Protocols: A Filmmakers Guide To Working with Indigenous People, Culture and Concepts](#)
- evidence of consultation undertaken to date; and
- if the project will involve particular First Nations individuals or communities, signed letters of consent and any relevant access agreements.

4.3.2. Producer Offset

The Producer Offset is administered separately by the Producer Offset and Co Production Unit (POCU) within Screen Australia.

If the project is eligible to apply for the Producer Offset, not all project costs approved are automatically Qualifying Australian Production Expenditure (QAPE).

Development funding received may not be eligible for qualifying Australian production expenditure (QAPE).

We strongly recommend that all applicants for Development funding familiarise themselves with the [Producer Offset Guidelines](#) including 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 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 POCU to discuss the proposed Official Co-Production structure and the application and assessment process.

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.

Applicants must provide supporting documentation (such as a co-development agreement or a head of agreement between the co-producers) outlining the terms on which the anticipated Official Co-Production will be governed.

We strongly recommend that all applicants for Development funding familiarise themselves with Screen Australia's [Co Production Guidelines](#)

Applicants can contact POCU on 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 the required application materials have been provided. 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.
- If all application material has not been received, a 'missing materials' email will be sent, and the applicant is required to supply the 'missing materials' in the provided timeframe (usually 48 hours).
- On provision of 'missing materials', the applicant will receive an email advising that their application has moved to assessment.
- Applications are assessed on their merits against the assessment criteria by Screen Australia delegates, with industry specialists consulted as required.
- Applicants may be required to have a meeting with Screen Australia delegates and industry specialists during the assessment process at mutually agreed times, either in person or online/phone.
- 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 cultural groups may be assessed by Specialist or Cultural Assessors.

5.2. Assessment criteria

Applications will be assessed against the following equally weighted criteria:

Story:

- Is the story strong, distinctive and entertaining and does it demonstrate storytelling craft?
- Is the story suited to its platform and proposed audience?
- Does the story contribute to the depth and diversity of Australian stories?

Strength of the team:

- Does the previous experience of the team position them to execute the vision?
- Does the team have authentic connection to the content of the story, contributors and the subject that they are exploring?

Audience & Budget:

- Has the audience been clearly and appropriately identified?
- Does the story have potential to resonate 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 project have the potential to reach the intended audience on its platform/s?
- Are the level of funds requested appropriate in relation to the proposed development strategy and budget?

Other factors that may be considered during the decision-making process include:

- Availability of funds;
- Range of projects in receipt of development funding from Screen Australia inclusive of scale, budget, intended audience, genre and themes;
- Range of applicants in receipt of development funding from Screen Australia inclusive of applicant, applicant company and geographic diversity; and
- Extent to which a project is likely to effectively amplify equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility.

Preference will be given to:

- Projects based on intellectual property created by Australians; and
- Australian original formats over international formats.

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.

Where an application is successful, Screen Australia will advise the applicant of the decision verbally (including details of any special conditions of funding), after which the decision will be notified in writing.

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 application outcomes are final.

6. Successful applicants

6.1. Contracting

When a project is approved, the applicant will receive an approval email detailing the level and type of Screen Australia's contribution, information about the contracting process and any conditions.

Successful applicants will enter into a Development Grant Agreement (DGA) with Screen Australia.

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 Development Grant Agreement.

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

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 further information about Screen Australia's standard conditions of funding, see Screen Australia's [Terms of Trade](#), [Information for Recipients](#) and the [FAQs](#) for this funding program.

7. Other Resources

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

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

8. Contact

If applicants have any further questions after reviewing these guidelines, the application form, and other available resources, contact Screen Australia's Program Operations at documentary@screenaustralia.gov.au, or on 1800 507 901.

Please note that Screen Australia is unable to provide creative advice or review any materials prior to the applicant submitting their 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](#).