



Australian Government



# Documentary Production: Commissioned Program Guidelines

Issued 1 July 2017

Updated 15 August 2024

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](mailto:documentary@screenaustralia.gov.au), or phone 1800 507 901, so we can assist.

## Contact an Investment Manager

Before applying to Screen Australia for Commissioned 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](mailto:documentary@screenaustralia.gov.au)

# Table of Contents

<b>1. About this funding program</b> .....	<b>3</b>
1.1. Overview .....	3
1.2. Available funding .....	3
<b>2. Inclusive Storytelling</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>3. Eligibility</b> .....	<b>4</b>
3.1. Applicant eligibility.....	4
3.2. Project eligibility .....	4
3.2.1. Eligible Projects.....	4
3.2.2. Ineligible Projects .....	5
3.2.3. Other sources of funding.....	5
3.2.4. Presale requirements.....	5
3.2.5. Use of new pathways .....	6
3.2.6. Official Co-Productions .....	6
3.2.7. Producer Offset .....	7
<b>4. Application Process</b> .....	<b>7</b>
4.1. How to apply .....	7
4.2. Application Form.....	7
4.3. Required Materials.....	7
4.3.1. First Nations community participation or content .....	8
<b>5. Assessment</b> .....	<b>9</b>
5.1. Assessment Process.....	9
5.2. Assessment Criteria.....	9
5.3. Decision & Notification .....	10
<b>6. Successful applicants</b> .....	<b>10</b>
6.1. Contracting .....	10
6.2. Terms of funding.....	10
6.2.1. Inclusive Attachment Scheme.....	10
6.2.2. Funding \$500,000 or under .....	11
6.2.3. Funding over \$500,000 .....	11
<b>7. Contact</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>8. Privacy</b> .....	<b>11</b>

# 1. About this funding program

## 1.1. Overview

The Commissioned Program supports one-off documentaries and series productions - for Commissioning Platforms. The program targets projects of at least a commercial half-hour in duration, with a minimum budget of \$250,000 per hour, and a confirmed domestic commission. Screen Australia's maximum contribution is \$1 million. Minimum licence fees apply. All finance must be in place at application. Screen Australia is 'last in'.

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 Commissioned Program is designed to support the production of a diverse range of quality documentaries made primarily for free-to-air or subscription television broadcast, SVOD platforms or similar (i.e. Commissioning Platforms), that offer a compelling vision and have clear enduring cultural value.

## 1.2. Available funding

Any amount up to \$750,000 may be requested per project. Requests of amounts in excess of \$750,000 up to a maximum of \$1 million require Head of Documentary approval prior to application. The amount of direct Screen Australia support is limited so that total Federal Government funds, including the Producer Offset where relevant, do not account for more than 65 per cent of the project's total budget.

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

**Post-production funding:** Applications for matched post-production funding will be considered up to a maximum of \$100,000, provided that the project has a post-production presale to a domestic Commissioning Platform with a licence fee of at least \$50,000 per commercial hour. SA does not fund the costs of re-versioning already finished content for additional market sales, i.e. where a distributor wants program length or number of episodes changed.

# 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**

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 one-off documentary of at least a commercial half hour in duration, or a series of any number of episodes at least a commercial half hour in total duration. Please refer to the [Australian Communications and Media Authority \(ACMA\) guidelines](#) for the definition of a documentary
- have an approved budget/finance plan of at least \$250,000 per hour;
- be intended for distribution via a Commissioning Platform with the required presale confirmed

- be written and directed by Australian citizens or residents (with the exception of official Co-Productions)

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

Screen Australia expects key creatives (producer, writer, director, director of photography, 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, brand funded content, infotainment, current affairs, cooking, 'how to', sports, corporate, training, games, extensions to film or TV, 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
- a pilot or standalone episode for a longer series

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. Other sources of funding**

Co-funding with state agencies, other government organisations, cultural institutions, private investors or other partners is encouraged.

We also encourage international sources of finance. The Commissioned Program incentivises international projects through a reduced domestic minimum licence fee.

### **3.2.4. Presale requirements**

The domestic presale for an Australian Commissioning Platform must have a minimum licence fee as follows:

- \$180,000 per hour, where Screen Australia funding is more than \$500,000
- \$150,000 per hour, where Screen Australia funding is \$500,000 or less
- \$100,000 per hour, where at least 10 per cent of the budget comprises:
  - advances from sales agents for the international market, and/or international territory presales irrespective of the level of the Screen Australia funding.

**A presale at the minimum licence fee must be allocated towards the primary right for the program being the platform on which the program premieres, and must not include:**

- any equity component for the Commissioning Platform; Broadcast or streaming rights for New Zealand or another Rest of World (ROW) territory
- any secondary rights, for example, any VOD rights (if the primary right is free-to-air or subscription television), or free-to-air or subscription television rights (if the primary right is a VOD right)
- distribution rights for Australia or a ROW territory
- any ancillary rights

Producers should be aware that Screen Australia requires additional licence payments to be made by Commissioning Broadcasters for any additional rights licensed. These licence fees should be reasonable having regard to the circumstances of the project.

Producers must not enter into agreements with Commissioning Platforms that have the effect of undermining the minimum licence fee requirement.

### **3.2.5. Use of new pathways**

Enhancing audience reach through new pathways is also encouraged. This could involve:

- demonstrated community of interest in topic
- access to an existing database and promotional channels
- existing and potential partnerships with organisations tied to significant communities of interest
- analytics of audience engagement in existing related content and platforms (e.g. websites, social media channels and trailers)

Pathway to audience and marketing strategies can demonstrate how these new pathways will enhance the project's audience - and ongoing revenue potential where relevant - by providing detail on audience analytics, and/or any existing partnerships

### **3.2.6. 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](#).

### 3.2.7. 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 submitted at any time 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:

- A complete [finance plan](#) using the Screen Australia template
- All relevant deal memos and agreements in relation to marketing and distribution finance. Please note: a signed & dated deal memo or signed &

dated term sheets must be attached for ALL marketplace or equity attachments for every line of the finance plan including offset lender

- A detailed budget using the standard Screen Australia [A-Z Budget format](#) that matches the finance plan. 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
- An outline, treatment or script
- A creative vision statement
- All relevant cast, presenter, interviewee, access deal memos and/or agreements
- ASIC company extract no more than 28 days old
- Pathway to audience and marketing strategy (1 to 3 pages)

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

#### 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 First Nations 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/collaboration 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 filmmaker's guide to working with Indigenous people, culture and concepts



- evidence of consultation to date
- signed letters of consent confirming their willingness to participate if the project will involve particular First Nations individuals or communities

## 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 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**

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

Where an application is not successful, the applicant will be advised of the reason.

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.

As a 'last in' investor to a Commissioned Program project, Screen Australia acknowledges that other parties, including the Commissioning Platform, have already committed funds to the project. Nonetheless, Screen Australia's resources are limited, and not all projects can be supported.

## **6. Successful applicants**

### **6.1. Contracting**

Screen Australia will send an approval via email to successful applicants. This will set out the amount of Screen Australia's contribution, which will not be varied other than in exceptional circumstances.

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

### **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. Inclusive Attachment Scheme**

As a condition of Screen Australia production support, an above or below the line attachment must be allocated to each project: for example, an attachment to a Director, Producer, DOP, Editor or Composer.

The attachment should identify with one or more of the following groups: First Nations, Deaf/deaf or disabled, women, non-binary or gender diverse, LGBTIQ+, culturally or linguistically diverse or located in regional or remote areas; and it is expected that the attachment should be targeted at providing experience to emerging practitioners. The costs must be included within your production budget

and potential attachments should be discussed with your Investment Manager.

### 6.2.2. 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

### 6.2.3. 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](mailto: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](#).