



New Zealand  
FILM COMMISSION



Te Tumu Whakaata Taonga

## FEATURE FILM DEVELOPMENT FUNDING DOCUMENTARY

### APPLICATION GUIDELINES as at January 2026

If you have any accessibility requirements or require this information in a different format, please  
contact: [development@nzfilm.co.nz](mailto:development@nzfilm.co.nz)

Te Tumu Whakaata Taonga The New Zealand Film Commission (NZFC) invests in talented filmmakers and exciting New Zealand films to be enjoyed in Aotearoa New Zealand and around the world. NZFC documentary development funding (Fund/Funding) supports our filmmaking community to take the time, care and energy required to craft extraordinary documentary films - and to prepare to make films that will be loved by their intended audiences.

This Fund enables filmmakers to explore, deepen and refine their documentary films in ways appropriate to their unique story and its participants.

Remember, the Fund is contestable, so tell us why you need to make this project now, what you hope its impact will be, and how it is specifically designed for the cinematic experience. We want to know that you have a clear idea of the kind of film you want to make. Identify the one or two most important ambitions for your film at this stage, selecting from the following:

- **Local audience appeal** – the potential to reach a large audience here in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- **Commercial** – the potential to be well supported by market with strong international sales and the ambition to reach international audiences as well as local.
- **Critical** – the potential for critical acclaim and film festival success: a provocative or cathartic cinema experience, reliant on a unique voice, cultural specificity and artistic excellence.
- **Innovation** – the potential to forge new pathways in film: technologies, methodologies, audience experiences and/or filmmaker talent.
- **Impact** – the potential to make a significant social, cultural or political impact.

#### CONTACT THE FUNDING TEAM FOR A PRE-APPLICATION HUI

Before applying to NZFC for Funding, please contact the funding team to discuss your project and eligibility. Email [development@nzfilm.co.nz](mailto:development@nzfilm.co.nz) to arrange a 15-minute hui.



## WHO CAN APPLY

You are eligible to apply for this Fund if you are:

- ☐ a New Zealand citizen or permanent resident; **and**
- ☐ the owner of the rights in the project or have an option to acquire those rights; **and**
- ☐ a writer, director, or producer who has at least 80 minutes of documentary content that has been theatrically, broadcast or screened at one of these listed film [festivals](#).  
Alternatively has had a short film screened at one of these listed [festivals](#); **or**
- ☐ an experienced practitioner who can provide evidence of significant success in a related narrative discipline (e.g. esteemed investigative journalist, published novelist).

If you are applying for a second or subsequent tranche of Funding, you will need to be a producer **or** a writer and/or director who has had two feature films theatrically released. You will still need to meet all other eligibility requirements listed above.

Any individual writer, director or producer may only be attached to a maximum of two applications under consideration at one time.

### Māori Content

If your project has significant [Māori Content](#), you will need Māori involvement commensurate with the level of that content.

For Māori content queries, please email <a href="mailto:development@nzfilm.co.nz">development@nzfilm.co.nz</a> to arrange a discussion.
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## WHAT THIS FUND CAN SUPPORT

- writer, director, producer fees
- writer, director, and/or producers' legal costs
- project development costs, including research, writing, filming, editing and associated fees, travel and expenses
- packaging costs, including creating pitch materials and market attendance
- development costs (as set out above) for official and unofficial co-production projects (New Zealand project costs only).

For fees or costs relating to services provided by, or for the development of, a writer, director, or producer, that writer, director, or producer must be a New Zealand citizen or permanent resident.

Each film project can access a maximum of \$140,000 cumulative Funding (**Cumulative Funding Cap**).

When applying for a tranche of Funding, you can apply for up to \$35,000 each time.

If we agree that your project has undergone significant development and the project needs more Funding to advance to the next stage, you can apply for more than \$35,000 at once (provided the





total Funding for your project won't exceed the Cumulative Funding Cap if the Funding were to be awarded).

The Cumulative Funding Cap includes all NZFC funded development to date, including historical funds such as Documentary Development, Advanced Development, International Co-Development and Boost.

## WHAT MATERIALS YOU MUST SUBMIT

- A **proposal** that articulates your creative vision. As a guide, we suggest approximately 10 pages. This includes:

- **Logline and synopsis** (up to one page)
- **Project Summary** - explain the topic, theme, context, stakes, relevance, or questions that you are exploring.
- **Story Treatment** - give an overview introducing the main participants and anticipated story elements and arc. If your film is not character-driven, what is your concept, and how is it constructed? Please be clear about the elements of your story that remain unknown or unclear and highlight the questions that may steer its direction.
- **Artistic Approach** - describe your artistic vision. How will you use visual, and audio elements to create the overall tone? How is the project a work of cinema, and designed for a theatrical experience, rather than primarily broadcast, or web release?
- **Filmmaker Notes** - explain who you are as a filmmaker, and what your connection is to the story, themes, community, archives. How does your world view shape this story? Why does this story need to be told now? If applicable, how is the project expanding or evolving your creative practice?
- **Producer Notes** - identify one or two key ambitions for the film as listed above (**local audience appeal, commercial, critical**, etc., as listed above) and why these align with your project. Identify your intended audience and the outcomes you hope to achieve. Provide a brief project history, including what stage of development you are in and where you plan to go next. In the case of co-production please include information regarding your partnership and rights in the project, and the proposed split (if you know).
- **Accountability and Community Care** - describe your ethical considerations and practices of accountability in your filmmaking process. What impacts do you expect this project to have (be it cultural, social, historical) and how will you account for these? What are your guiding values, processes of establishing and maintaining ongoing consent, providing transparency, and collecting feedback? If applicable, what plans for duty of care, and cultural safety will be put in place, and when?

### OPTIONAL:

- **Impact Strategy** – Discuss your plans for connecting and engaging with audiences and communities and your anticipated timeline for this.
- **Existing compiled footage** – This could be a selection of footage that illustrates your stage of development and research to date, or shows your characters, and access to material.





- **Visual Reference** – photographs, artworks, inspiration, music, or sound
- **A maximum 4-minute video.** This can be anything – people, pictures, text on screen, music, sound. It could be a key creative talking through the submission, or it could be sheer visual inspiration, or a bit of both. Production values won't be assessed. Ideas will be!
- **Development budget** that includes proposed costs, and separately a budget showing all other sources of development investment and expenditure to date. If your project is intended to be a co-production, you'll also need to provide a global development budget that reflects the spend in each territory.
- **Filmmaker Bios** – a one paragraph bio for the writer(s), director(s) and/or producer(s) attached to your project at this stage. If your project is intended to be a co-production (official or unofficial), you'll also need to include a one paragraph bio for each of your co-producing partners.
- **Prior work** - If a director is attached, **a working link** to a film or other screen story they've made – the one they are most proud of – so our assessors can view.
- If your project is in advanced development and/or you intend it to be a co-production, you may be required to submit additional materials depending on the needs of your project and the experience of your team. You can discuss this with the Funding Team in the pre-application hui.

## HOW TO APPLY

- Arrange a 15-minute pre-application hui with the Funding Team to discuss your project and eligibility. Email: [development@nzfilm.co.nz](mailto:development@nzfilm.co.nz)
- Submit your application using the NZFC Portal at any time after the pre-application hui with the Funding Team.

Please note there is an estimated eight-week turnaround for decisions from receipt of an eligible application.

## ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

We give priority to feature films which contribute to all or some of our Strategic Objectives:

- the potential to be **creatively excellent, commercially excellent** or both, in line with your stated ambitions for the film
- the development of **authentic and diverse** narratives that are **uniquely of Aotearoa and maximise audiences** for New Zealand films
- strategic collaboration which **promotes employment** and **productivity** in the New Zealand film industry
- the development of talent with **diversity, equity and inclusion** at the core.

If your project has Māori content, we will also consider intellectual property ownership and capacity-building in line with the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Te Ao Māori. To assess how a film development project meets these criteria, we ask some or all of the following questions:



- Does the work have thematic depth and does it reflect the central concerns of the film and filmmaker? Is the filmmaker employing subtext and metaphor to convey meaning in their work?
- Does the film have something relevant to say about who, where and when we are in the world?
- Is there evidence that the participants are compelling and interesting?
- Will the film provide an emotional journey for the audience? Is the filmmaker consciously using their tools to affect the audience psychologically/emotionally?
- Is the filmmaker's style original and/or bold? Are they telling the story in a new way or from a new point of view?
- What is the filmmaker's connection to the material and to the theme of the film?
- Is the proposal in line with what the filmmaker has said in their notes they are trying to achieve, and do they have a good sense of where to next?
- Does this filmmaker have the knowledge and experience to tell this story with integrity?
- Is there evidence within the application or from prior work that this team can achieve this vision?
- Does this film offer an enduring contribution to NZ culture?
- Will the film be recognisably of Aotearoa and/or does it reflect New Zealand's place in the world? Will it be made in New Zealand or internationally with a uniquely New Zealand perspective? Does it have the potential to connect with New Zealand audiences?

**How AI Use is Considered in Funding Applications.** In your funding application, please outline any proposed use of AI. This will help to inform our assessment. When AI use is proposed, we will be guided by our [AI Guiding Principles](#) in assessing your application. You should ensure that your materials address at least the following key factors:

- **Cultural authenticity** - Use of AI must respect te ao Māori and mātauranga Māori, avoid misrepresentation, and include appropriate cultural consultation.
- **Creative integrity** - Use of AI should enhance - not replace - human creativity, supporting storytelling while preserving artistic vision.
- **Transparency** - It is essential that you disclose about how AI will be used in the project and consider its impact on audience (particularly for unscripted projects).
- **Ethical implications and industry impact** - It is your responsibility to ensure that the use of AI meets all relevant legal obligations. You should also consider how the use of AI affects the broader sector.

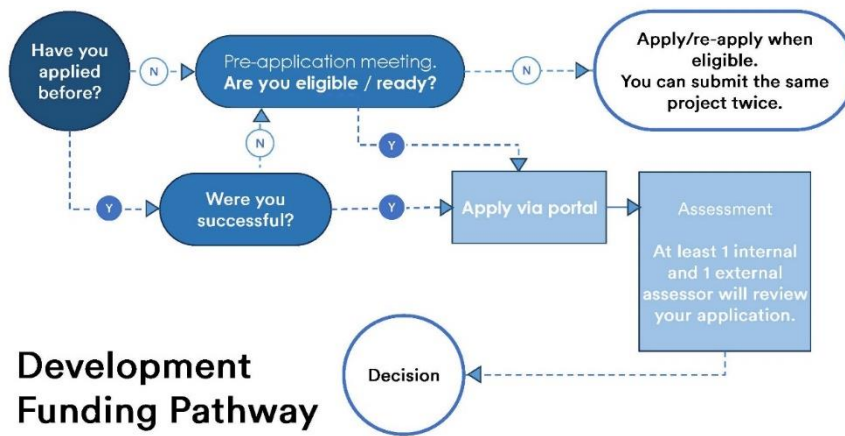
We assess each application taking into account these criteria, the materials provided, your team, your current NZFC-funded slate, the range of projects we are supporting across all funding programmes, and the funding availability at the time you apply.

If your project is intended to be an official co-production using one or more of New Zealand's 18 co-production arrangements, then any application for further tranches of Funding will first be reviewed by the NZFC's Co-Production and Incentives Team. The project's overall viability as an official co-production, based on the co-production guidelines and the relevant co-production arrangement(s), will be a key factor in the funding decision.

By submitting an application for Funding, you agree to these Development Funding Guidelines (except to the extent varied or waived by us) and our [Code of Conduct](#).



## ASSESSMENT PROCESS



## Development Funding Pathway

- Each Funding application is assessed by our Funding Team and at least one external, experienced industry practitioner.
- In the first instance, we will review your written submission materials and up to 15-minutes of provided video footage (if applicable). We will then decide whether we will do a full assessment.
- If we decide to do a full assessment, we will review all submitted materials.
- Our decision to allocate Funding is discretionary. Our decision will be final.
- We will notify you in writing of the outcome of your application. The estimated turnaround for a decision is eight weeks from receipt of an eligible application. Any individual writer, director or producer may only be attached to a maximum of two applications at one time.
- If an application is declined, a subsequent application for the same project can only be made if the application materials have changed significantly. Information about how the project has changed must be included in the subsequent application.
- If a project has been declined two consecutive times, it cannot be submitted again (NZFC reserves the right to waive this in exceptional circumstances).

## CONFIDENTIALITY

We will use reasonable efforts to keep the information you provide confidential. Please note that any information you give us can be requested under the Official Information Act 1982. If we get such a request, we can talk to you before responding.

If you have any further questions, please email us at [development@nzfilm.co.nz](mailto:development@nzfilm.co.nz)

