



New Zealand
FILM COMMISSION



Te Tumu Whakaata Taonga

FEATURE FILM DEVELOPMENT FUNDING SCRIPTED

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

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 feature film development funding (Fund/Funding) supports our filmmaking community to take the time, care and energy required to craft extraordinary scripts – and to prepare to make films that will be loved by their intended audiences.

First and foremost, the Fund enables screenwriters to explore, deepen and refine their script in a broad variety of ways relevant to them, their unique story and their team. As a script advances, the Fund supports the project towards production in other ways, too – including director's preparation, casting and packaging.

Remember, the Fund is contestable, so tell us why you need to make this project now, and what you hope its impact will be. 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.

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 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 and/or producer who has at least 80-minutes of cumulative scripted content that has been released theatrically, broadcast or screened at one of these listed [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. published novelist, esteemed playwright); **or**
- ☐ applying with a project that has previously received devolved NZFC development funding (e.g. Seed).

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 development@nzfilm.co.nz to arrange a discussion.

WHAT THIS FUND CAN SUPPORT

- scriptwriting fees
- director fees
- producer fees
- writers, directors and/or producers' legal costs
- other script development costs, including script research (and associated travel), workshoping/wānanga/residency costs, story consultants
- director preparation and/or skills development
- casting costs
- location scouting costs
- packaging costs, including market attendance, pitch materials
- for animation, costs such as: key concept artwork, illustrations, modelling, animatic costs and/or storyboarding costs
- 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 script has undergone significant development and your project needs more Funding to be ready for production, 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 Early Development, Advanced Development, International Co-Development, Boost, as well as any devolved funding, such as the NZ Writers' Guild administered Seed and Seed Advanced Grants.

WHAT MATERIALS YOU MUST SUBMIT

- Feature film **script** (NB: live action film treatments will only be accepted in exceptional circumstances or when the project is based on existing intellectual property, eg. a published book).
 - For animated feature films we will accept a feature film script OR treatment alongside 10-20 pages of sample script. The treatment could be visual and/or written but should communicate the story, and a strong sense of theme, character (i.e. arcs and relationships) and tone.
 - A **proposal** that articulates your creative vision. This includes:
 - **Logline and 1-page synopsis.**
 - **Writer's Notes** - which speak to your vision, why you are telling this story now, and where the script needs to go next. As a guide, we suggest 1-2 pages.
 - **Producer's Notes** - identify one or two key ambitions for the film as listed above (local audience appeal, commercial, critical, etc.) 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).
 - **Development Plan** - As a guide, we suggest up to 1-page.
 - **For animation projects** - artwork that communicates your intended vision for the film, such as concept art, storyboards, animatics.
 - **OPTIONAL:** Any creative materials you think support your unique vision. For example, you could submit existing footage, storyboards, artwork, images, underlying IP, music or sound. You will know what best represents your idea.
 - **OPTIONAL:** A maximum 4-minute video. This can be anything – people, pictures, text on screen, music, sound. It could be a key creative talking through your application, 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
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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.
- 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 that 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? Will the film have something relevant to say about who, where and when we are in the world, and will the film's elements work to surface this with nuance/complexity?
 - Does the story take the reader on an emotional journey? Are the characters well developed and is the story driven by their wants? Do we want to know what's going to happen next and are we propelled to keep reading?
 - Is the writer's style original and/or bold? Does the writer have an angle on the material – are they telling the story in a new way or from a new point of view?
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- Is the script in line with the stated ambitions for the film in the applicant's proposal, and do they have a good sense of who the audience for the film might be? Do they know where to next?
- 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?
- Does the team bring lived experience to the story? Do they have the knowledge and experience to tell this story with authenticity and integrity?
- Is there evidence within the application, or from prior work, that this team can achieve their vision?

How AI Use is Considered in Funding Applications. In your funding application, please outline any proposed use of AI. This will help 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:

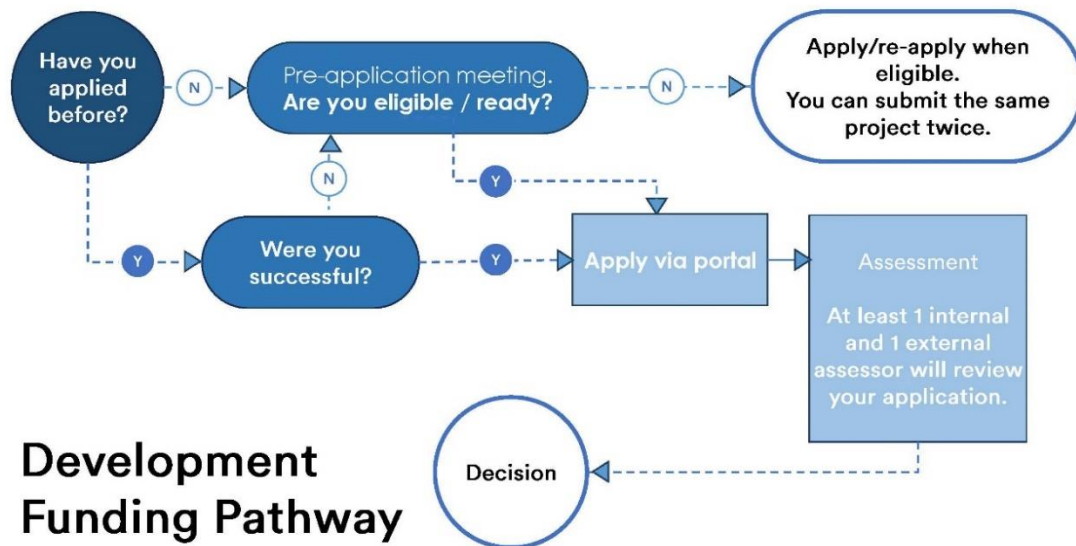
- **Cultural authenticity** - Use of AI must respect te ao Māori and mātauranga Māori, avoid misrepresentation, and include appropriate cultural consultation.
- **Creative integrity** - Use of AI should enhance - not replace - human creativity, supporting storytelling while preserving artistic vision.
- **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 will 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 you on 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



- Each Funding application is assessed by our Funding Team and at least one external, experienced industry practitioner.
- 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 be made only if the application materials have changed significantly. Information about how the project has changed must be included in the subsequent application.
- If two successive applications for Funding for the same project are declined, no further applications will be accepted for that project. In exceptional circumstances this can be waived, at our sole discretion.

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