



HE KAUAHI CATALYST FUND

APPLICATION GUIDELINES

He Aratohu mā ngā Kaitono

January 2026

He kauahi – creating the spark to ignite the flame

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. He Kauahi Catalyst Funding supports filmmakers to make exceptional short films. This Fund is open to narrative short films for the big screen, including animation.

Remember, the Fund is contestable, so tell us why you need to make this short film project now. We want to know that you have a clear idea of the kind of short film you want to make. The key objectives of He Kauahi Catalyst are:

- **Invest in talent** - by supporting the progression of New Zealand writers, directors, and producers through creating exceptional short films.
- **Critical** – the potential for 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, film methodologies, audience experiences and/or filmmaker talent.

These guidelines are intended to help you deliver the strongest application possible. Please note we cannot read your scripts or applications prior to submission. You may contact development@nzfilm.co.nz if you have any questions.

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 your short film project and/or you have the option to acquire the rights for developing your short film project into a feature film; **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 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. published novelist, esteemed playwright); **and**

- you have no overdue deliverables to the NZFC, **and**
- where applicable, you have reviewed and met the [Māori Content](#) requirements.

Any individual director may only be attached to **one** application per funding round.

Māori Content

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

Īmēra mai, mēnā he pātai āu. For Māori content queries, please email development@nzfilm.co.nz to arrange a discussion.

WHAT THIS FUND CAN SUPPORT

You may apply for a grant of up to \$90,000 to produce and deliver:

- a narrative short film (live action or animation); or
- an animated short film that is intended as a proof of concept for an animated feature (see below for additional submission requirements).

You cannot apply if your short film is in an episodic or documentary format.

Your short film must have significant New Zealand content. Please read the [New Zealand content information](#) sheet for more detail.

Retrospective applications will not be considered; that is, you cannot apply for Funding to cover costs you have already incurred.

MATERIALS YOU MUST SUBMIT

- A short film **script**
 - **For animated shorts**, we will accept a script **or** a story outline that lays out the plot, including character journeys **and** 2-5 pages of sample dialogue (if your short film has dialogue).
 - A **proposal** that articulates your creative vision and information about your team. This includes:
 - **Logline and 1-page synopsis**
 - **Filmmaker notes**: why do you want to tell this story, why are you and your team the right people to tell this story, and why is now the right time to tell it?
 - **Director's treatment** – the techniques and elements the director intends to use through casting, shooting, art department, sound design, music, editing etc. that will bring this script or story to life as a cinematic piece. Explain how you will achieve this film and include visual references.
 - Link to **director's best work** – please ensure the password is provided
- 



- **Producer statement** – speaking to key aspirations and any major challenges with making the film at this budget level. Address any elements that may require particular planning such as Health and Safety and/or accessibility requirements.
- **Key creatives bios** (writer, director, producer)
- (OPTIONAL) **Other collaborators** - you can also list and provide brief information about anyone else involved in the project, including consultants and HoDs.
- **Project history** – a brief history of the short film project and its development
- **Animated shorts:** please also submit any additional materials that convey the story and the world of the film. This can include character design, background sketches, world building sketches, animatics and storyboards.
- A production **budget top-sheet** and full production budget for the short film, including provision for insurance and legal costs.
- A proposed **production schedule** for all relevant stages leading up to and including delivery of the short film.

For animated proof of concept shorts

If you are submitting an animated short film that is a proof of concept for a feature film, you must also provide:

- Feature film title, logline and synopsis
- Treatment for the feature film (visual and/or written, showing story, theme, character arcs/relationships, and tone)
- 10–20 pages of sample script for the feature film
- Statement outlining the purpose of the proof of concept and how it will advance the feature film’s development.

HOW TO APPLY

- Submit your application using NZFC’s [application portal](#).
- Please see the NZFC [website](#) for application deadlines.
- If you have a feature film at an advanced stage of development with NZFC, we may consider an application outside our usual funding rounds.

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

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

We give priority to short films that contribute to all or some of our strategic objectives:

- the potential to be **creatively excellent**.
- the development of **authentic and diverse** narratives that are **uniquely of Aotearoa**.
- supporting capability development with **diversity, equity and inclusion** at the core.

If your short film 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 short film project meets these criteria, we ask some or all of the following questions:

- Does the director have a distinctive voice / vision?
- Does the work have thematic depth? Will the short film have something relevant to say about who, where and when we are in the world?
- Is the script well crafted? If the animated short film is intended as a proof of concept for an animated feature film, it should still have a strong narrative arc.
- Does the writer / director 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 their vision?
- Does the team have a clear achievable plan (including budget) for production?

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 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 based on these criteria, the materials provided, your team, and the funding availability at the time you apply.

By submitting an application for Funding, you agree to these He Kauahi Catalyst 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 is final.
 - We will notify you in writing of the outcome of your application. The estimated turnaround for a decision is six to eight weeks from receipt of an eligible application.
 - Any individual director may only be attached to one application per Funding round.
- 
- 

- If an application is declined, a subsequent application for the same short film 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 short film project are declined, no further applications will be accepted for that project. In exceptional circumstances this can be waived, at our sole discretion.

BRANDING AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

If your application is successful, you will be required to comply with the NZFC's [Style and Accreditation Guidelines](#) as part of your short film's release (or as otherwise agreed by the NZFC).

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

CHANGE LOG: January 2026 updated to include application info for Animated proof of concepts.

Introduction	None
Who can apply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Festival eligibility now references NZFC's recommended list.
What this fund can support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animated feature proof-of-concept applications now eligible (extra requirements). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animated shorts can submit a story outline instead of a full script. • Submission materials clarified for Animation proof of concepts. • Feature rights/option required for animated proof-of-concept.
How To Apply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New AI use disclosure and assessment guidance. • Resource links updated. • Branding and acknowledgement