



**New Zealand  
FILM COMMISSION**



Te Tumu Whakaata Taonga

# New Zealand Film Commission

## Documentary Development Financing

### Guidelines for Applicants

July 2020

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We encourage you to read these guidelines carefully as they are intended to help you deliver the strongest application possible. Please also read the relevant information sheets on our website.

Please get in touch well before making a formal application for financing, as we can offer helpful advice and guidance.

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## Introduction

Our mission at the New Zealand Film Commission (the NZFC) is to champion the New Zealand film industry. We are here to help people in the industry make films that are culturally significant, amazing, original and exciting.

Documentaries are an important way of bringing New Zealand stories and experiences to the screen. The wide range of subjects and budgets we have supported in recent years includes documentaries such as *Hip Hop-eration*, *Ever the Land*, *Flickering Truth*, *Gardening With Soul*, *The Ground We Won* and *Beyond the Edge*.

We are keen to support a diverse range of theatrical documentary projects that will attract audiences to the cinema, here and overseas and that have the ability to attract other funding as well as NZFC support. Please note that Documentary Development Financing is not available for television documentaries.

Keep in mind that the amount of financial support filmmakers apply for is far greater than the amount of money available. When deciding which documentary projects to support, we look for great ideas with the potential to become compelling cinematic releases.

## Documentary Development Financing overview

Documentary Development Financing provides non-recoupable grants for the development of feature-length theatrical documentaries up to a total of \$40,000 per project. Grants may be applied as additional Producer Equity when the project goes into production.


There are two main stages:

1. **Early** - up to \$20,000 per project for fundamental development (treatment writing, research, consents, creation of sample footage/interviews/proof of concept reel etc).
2. **Advanced** - up to \$20,000 per project towards getting the film financed, attaching market partners and early pre-production considerations.
3. **The CEO Delegation (CEOD)** is an option for projects where there is an urgent need for Development Financing and the project falls outside DDF criteria. CEOD is only available in exceptional circumstances and the NZFC will advise whether this may be an option for you. Please contact us if you think your circumstances may qualify for this financing. You cannot apply without talking to us first and you should not count on CEOD funds as part of your development plan.

You can get a maximum of one \$20,000 grant per project per stage. The processing time for applications is six weeks.

This financing is for documentary films that have a cinematic aesthetic and are of a significant enough scale (in terms of audience reach, story content, intended execution etc) to command a theatrical release. This financing is not available for television documentaries.





NZFC does back documentary films that contain offshore story elements, however, you should be aware that at production level any support will be in proportion to the amount of NZ content.

In exceptional circumstances, for established producers who have already had a feature documentary in commercial release in New Zealand, you can apply for more than \$20,000 in the early stage of Documentary Development Financing, but only with our agreement. Please contact the Development Coordinator at [development@nzfilm.co.nz](mailto:development@nzfilm.co.nz) if you think you may qualify for this option.

## **Documentary Development Financing conditions**

NZFC Documentary Development Financing is provided as a grant, which does not need to be repaid unless you breach certain terms of the Development Grant Agreement. Because grants are subject to GST, if you are GST registered, we will add GST to the grant when we pay it. For more information see our *Grant Agreements information sheet*.

The Documentary Development Financing will be paid when the Development Grant Agreement is signed and we receive an invoice from you, and, where applicable, the NZFC has reviewed and approved your chain of title documentation. *See our Chain of Title Information Sheet*. You will specify in your application when you can supply your deliverables to the NZFC. This will be a number of months (6 for example) after you receive the Development Grant.

Certain reports and updated documentation will be required, in particular you will be required to report back to us on what you have done with the money. It is important for you to meet your reporting obligations.

You will be considered ineligible for funding if you have outstanding reports or deliverables relating to other NZFC funding or are in breach of any contract with NZFC.

Please note that your project does not have to get Documentary Development Financing for it to be eligible for NZFC Production Financing.

We advise you to keep your development spend in proportion to the intended budget of your film. We also expect that you will have other sources of funding for development and production.

While a Documentary Development grant is a mark of recognition of the potential of your project, it does not imply an ongoing commitment to future development financing. Projects that get a development grant cannot count on further grants and each application is considered on its own merits.

Our investment is discretionary, and our decisions are final. The criteria we apply when making financing decisions may change from time to time, but our decisions will be consistent with the New Zealand Film Commission Act 1978.





## Other development opportunities

Keep in mind that there are other options for assistance from the NZFC that may be more relevant to your project:

- [He Ara](#) is a devolved development scheme aimed at assisting established New Zealand writers, producers and directors of Māori and/or Pasifika heritage to express authentic Māori and Pasifika film perspectives. Eligible producers and creator teams can apply for support towards developing a slate of projects;
- From time to time the NZFC will devolve development funds through schemes such as the Business Development Scheme (BDS), Boost and He Ara. Individual writers and directors may consider contacting successful recipients of these schemes to see if a project is of interest to them.
- There is also career development support not related to specific projects. Check out the career section on our website [www.nzfilm.co.nz](http://www.nzfilm.co.nz).

You may also be interested in our [career development support and short film funding](#). Details are on our [website](#).

## We are here to help

These guidelines are intended to help you deliver the strongest application possible. We recommend you discuss your project with our Development and Production Team as you work on your application.

To contact us email [development@nzfilm.co.nz](mailto:development@nzfilm.co.nz) or phone 0800 659 754

## Who can apply

To be eligible for Documentary Development Financing, you must be a New Zealand citizen or permanent resident and your film must have significant New Zealand content. Read the *New Zealand Content information sheet* for more detail.

The lead applicant is usually the producer of the project in development (see *Producer attachment* below).

If the application is being made in the name of a company, it must be a New Zealand company; that is, the company must be incorporated and carrying out business in New Zealand, and its central management and control must be held by New Zealand citizens or permanent residents.

If your project is a proposed co-production, it must still have a proportion of significant New Zealand content and an experienced producer who is a New Zealand citizen or permanent





resident. We will generally only provide Documentary Development Financing for New Zealand-based and/or New Zealander-specific development costs. Find out more about co-productions on our website [www.nzfilm.co.nz/international-productions/co-productions](http://www.nzfilm.co.nz/international-productions/co-productions).

You must hold or share intellectual property rights for your project. Documentary Development Financing is not available for initial option fees. Read the *Chain of Title information sheet* to ensure you have the necessary rights.

You cannot apply for DDF if you have outstanding obligations under the Business Development Scheme (BDS).

## **Producer attachment**

You must have a New Zealand producer attached to the project, and the producer must be the person making the application for Documentary Development Financing. This recognises the need for one person to take overall responsibility for the project and the producer's critical role in providing creative guidance, film financing expertise and an overall strategy for the project. The person named as the lead producer in your application cannot be the same person as the writer or director.

It is best practice for the producer to have a limited liability company that is incorporated and carrying out business in New Zealand, though at the development stage this does not need to be a SPV (special purpose vehicle).

Keep in mind that the NZFC will be looking at the strengths and experience of the team as well as the potential of the idea. If your team is relatively inexperienced in feature film development and production, you may want to think about attaching another, more experienced, producer or executive producer to strengthen your application. You may want to discuss this with our Development and Production Team.


## **Repeat applications**

Please note that if you've applied for Documentary Development Financing for a project once and been unsuccessful, you can reapply after six months has passed and the project has been substantially changed, developed or reworked. If you have re-applied and been unsuccessful twice with the same project, you cannot apply for Documentary Development Financing for that project again.

## **What you can apply for**

You can apply for Documentary Development Financing up to a maximum of \$40,000 per project in two stages – early (up to \$20,000) and advanced (up to \$20,000).





If you think you are facing exceptional circumstances and want to apply for more than \$20,000, talk to our Development Coordinator first.

You can only apply for actual and reasonable costs involved in the development of your project. There's a detailed list in the section on *What to include in your application* below.

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## What you cannot apply for

Documentary Development Financing is not available for the following:

- initial option payments;
- short film development;
- television programme development or production;
- development or production of any film intended to run at a duration of less than 90 minutes;
- capital works or acquisitions;
- equipment purchases; or
- projects that are part of formal academic assessment.

We will not consider retrospective applications; you cannot apply for funding to cover costs you have already incurred.





## How to apply

Apply through the online application portal at <https://funding.nzfilm.co.nz/>.

Allow time to complete your application.

**EDF** deadlines are on our website [www.nzfilm.co.nz/funding/feature-films/early-development/early-development-fund](http://www.nzfilm.co.nz/funding/feature-films/early-development/early-development-fund). Applications must be received by **9 am** on the deadline day.

**ADF** applications can be made at any time but please call our Development and Production Team to discuss timing first.

Wherever possible, we encourage you to test the strength of both your application and script with an external reviewer before you send it to us. Services such as the NZ Writers Guild's (NZWG) script reader service and virtual writer groups (Huddles) are a great way to strength-test your project in a supportive environment.

We also recommend getting a fresh pair of eyes to review and proofread your application. You only get one chance to make a first impression.

It's important you provide as much information as you can to help us make a full and fair assessment. We are unable to consider late or incomplete applications.

In the next section, we will walk you through the information required in your application.

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Applications for Documentary Development are considered in 'rounds' – about once every seven weeks. You can find out the deadline for the next round on our website <http://www.nzfilm.co.nz/funding/feature-films/early-development/early-development-fund>.

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## What we are looking for

Keep in mind we read a lot of applications every year. Your application needs to make the best case for your project.

Serious consideration is given to the following questions:

- Does the project have a cinematic aesthetic, and is it of a significant enough scale to command a theatrical release?
- Does it have at least one of the following three elements:
  - A compelling dramatic narrative and emotional journey
  - Access to places or individuals never before seen on screen
  - A compelling argument or a view of the world presented by a charismatic and/or famous individual?

## What to include in your application

Your application has to make it easy for us to see that you are developing an exciting idea into a great documentary that will contribute to a successful New Zealand film industry.

Here we set out the information to include in your application and below each section we set out what we will be looking for as we assess your application. The evaluation of applications is an inexact science, but we aim to be open and transparent about what we take into account when making decisions.

### What to include

Your application will include the following sections:

1. Vision
2. Audience engagement plan
3. Project Background
4. Budget and timeline
5. Key personnel
6. Warranty of copyright, access, and clearances.





# 1. Vision

## Producer's overview

This is your opportunity to show why the NZFC should support your project ahead of others.

Your written statement will set out the following:

- the producer's vision for the film;
- who the intended audience is;
- what the expected scale of production is, along with some indication of a production financing strategy;
- the producer's assessment of the current stage of development; and
- the next steps required to move the project forward, including how the intended development process will work between the parties involved.

## Synopsis

The synopsis is a highly condensed story outline of no more than one page that clearly reflects the dramatic spine of the film. It must touch on the documentary's tone, genre, emotional journey and key characters, and must include your anticipated conclusion.

## Creative material

The reality is that you will have done a certain amount of 'spec' work before making an application. We expect your creative material to demonstrate that your great idea will become a compelling documentary story suitable for the cinema. This financing is not available for applicants still finding the idea.

Your creative material should be 5 to 15 pages in industry standard 12pt courier. Shorter applications must be just as compelling as those taking more pages.





Your creative material should expand on your synopsis and tell us:

- what the story is as far as you know at this stage e.g. history of event, person's life to date, etc.;
- who the key characters are;
- what is happening now that means making a feature-length documentary of this subject is possible;
- what flexibility is there within the plan to follow unexpected opportunities as they arise;
- the central question you wish to explore; and
- the genre that best suits the story of your documentary e.g. thriller, mystery, comedy, social issue.

Please identify who has written the creative material.

### **Director's vision**

You must have a director attached to your project. Provide a written statement from the director demonstrating her/his understanding of the current stage of development, the project's strengths and weaknesses, and intentions for moving the project towards production readiness. The director's notes should also provide a sense of the director's creative vision for the film and how this story will engage with the intended audience.

### **Development notes**


The development notes are a critical part of your application. These notes are where the director/writer critically evaluates both the current strengths and weaknesses of the project and presents a plan to address the weaknesses in order to advance the project. If preliminary shooting is intended, a rationale needs to be made.

### **Visual material**

Provide a link to an online screener with password where we can access previous work by the filmmaker, and (if available) other visual material such as a teaser, or footage already shot with an explanation of how it supports the application.

## **2. Audience engagement plan**





These are notes on the target audience for the film, both local and international, and the proposed means of achieving that audience including, where appropriate, written evidence of both domestic distributor interest and overseas market interest. See our *Audience Engagement information sheet* for more information.

### **3. Background**

#### **Project history**

The project history should be no more than two pages. It might include, among other things, the origins of the project, history of creative development, any other past creative participants, and/or information about any underlying options.

#### **Other NZFC financing or support**

To be accountable for the taxpayers' money entrusted to us, we have to be able to verify what has happened as a result of any loan or grant.

Please list any other projects you as the applicant have in active development with the NZFC. If there are any outstanding reports or deliverables relating to those other projects, they should be delivered before, or alongside, this application. Note that you will be considered ineligible for funding if you have outstanding reports or deliverables or you are in breach of any contract with the NZFC.

### **4. Budget and timeline**


#### **Detailed development budget**

You are applying for a grant to cover the actual and reasonable development costs of your project. Your budget is where you set out what you expect these costs to be. Please remember that you cannot apply for funding to cover costs you have already incurred.

The costs that you can include in your budget are:

- research and travel costs;
- creative material development costs (including shoot elements or proof of concept reels);
- producer fees;
- director fees;



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- legal costs;
  - story consultant; and
  - other relevant consultants.

### **Proposed development timeline**

This should set out your proposed timeline including the start and finish dates of the development work you are seeking support for, and any other milestones or dates you feel are relevant.

It should also include a planned report-back date (see our *Grant Agreements information sheet* for more on reporting requirements).

### **Expenditure to date**

You should provide details of all the money you have spent on developing your project so far, whether self-funded or not, including any previously received NZFC development financing or, in the case of a proposed co-production, money from other financing bodies.

## **5. Key personnel**

Please provide a CV or bio (no more than one page each) for all individuals mentioned in the application including producer, director and any writer, consultants and other personnel who may be attached to the project.

If you mention any individual as providing support or advice, you must explain what they will bring to the project, how they intend to work with you, and provide their letter of interest or a copy of their notes.

## **6. Warranty of copyright, access, and clearances**

Written confirmation (by email or letter) of the willingness of the key subject(s) to participate in filming, including copies of any relevant releases, or access agreements already held.

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For further information, or to clarify our requirements, please contact our Development and Production Team by email [development@nzfc.co.nz](mailto:development@nzfc.co.nz) or phone 0800 659 754.

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## What happens to your application

When we receive your application, we will check you are eligible and that all relevant information is included. Once your application is confirmed as being eligible, you will be advised of our decision within six weeks.

Documentary Development Financing decisions are made collectively by NZFC Development Team members.

The NZFC engages a range of local and international individuals who have various specialisations across the areas of development, finance, production and/or film licencing of screen content (External Assessors).

While some of these individuals specialise in specific areas (for example documentary, animation, interactive projects), all External Assessors provide a useful and an independent perspective on funding applications to NZFC staff.

Where relevant, an additional assessor with appropriate cultural knowledge and/or experience associated with an under-represented community may be engaged to provide valuable objective insight (Cultural Assessor). For example, if your project has Māori content or characters, the NZFC will seek an independent perspective considering our Te Rautaki Māori guidelines.

Please note that by submitting your application for funding from the NZFC, you acknowledge and agree that your application may be reviewed by external assessors, and you also accept that the identify of any particular assessor(s) used to assess your application will be kept strictly confidential to the NZFC and will not be released.

For the current list of External Assessors please visit our [website](#) and declare any Conflicts of Interest you may have.

If unsuccessful you are able to reapply after six months has passed and your project has been substantially changed, developed or reworked. You are not able to reapply for a project that has been declined twice.

## Next steps

Applicants will be contacted as soon as possible after a decision is made.

You will receive an email notification with the decision.

If your application is not successful a decision letter will be attached. Unfortunately, we are not able to provide headline feedback on the reasons for our decision.

If your application is successful your letter will outline any conditions attached to the development financing and provide some feedback for the next stage of development.

We recommend you have a limited liability company as we will enter into a development grant agreement with your company.



See our *Grant Agreements information sheet* for more on the terms and conditions.

Remember that in your timeline you have committed to a report-back date that fits into your schedule. We are looking for a short, simple report.

It is important to note that if you don't meet your commitment to report, you will rule yourself out of further funding from NZFC. If things change and you need to shift your report-back date, please contact us at [development@nzfilm.co.nz](mailto:development@nzfilm.co.nz).

The *Grant Agreements information sheet* contains more about reporting obligations.

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A final reminder that if you have any questions please contact our Development and Production Team by email [development@nzfc.co.nz](mailto:development@nzfc.co.nz) or phone 0800 659 754.

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