



**New Zealand
FILM COMMISSION**



Te Tumu Whakaata Taonga

SCRIPT TO

SCREEN

TE TARI TUHI KUPU A WHAKAAHUA

Script to Screen and New Zealand Film Commission

Fresh Shorts– Pointers for Applicants

June 2019

We encourage you to read these pointers carefully as they are related to the Criteria and intended to help you deliver the strongest application possible. Please also read the relevant information sheets on the Script to Screen or NZFC websites.

Please get in touch with Script to Screen well before making a formal application for financing, as they can offer helpful advice and guidance.

Fresh Shorts Facilitator at Script to Screen: fsfacilitator@script-to-screen.co.nz or ph: 09 360 5400.



Application Submission Pointers

Standout films have some of the following in common:

- **Exceptional story**
- **Originality**
- **Authentic voice**
- **Unique point of view**
- **Extremes**

It's important to remember that individual applications are as different as the stories they tell. There is no right way. The application form is the same; everyone fills out the same sections

- however the content is always dependent on the story.

This document is a guide to support filmmakers in their understanding of the principles of putting together a clear application – as opposed to a “what you must do” approach.

It also pays to remember that Fresh Shorts is a limited, contestable fund

- Approx. 5-9% of applications per year get funded
- Never take it personally if you don't make it through in that round
- Take feedback on board and utilise it and keep developing your project for your own learning

A good thing to note - when assessing applications experienced industry members consider the information applicants supply about their vision of what the film will look and sound like and how they intend to make the film. They look at the budget and what's in the script, see if all these things match up and identify if it's realistic and achievable to make the film.



Applications

Make it clear

- Show your thinking –particularly about script development, the producer’s statement and the budget notes.
- Be real – we know how hard it is to make stuff. It’s OK to name the challenges and how you intend to deal with them. Show plans and contingencies.
- Indicate your research especially in documentary applications but also character or production aspects.
- Balance detail with being concise.
- Use images in the reference sections, and also if appropriate to your project in the director’s vision and treatment – readers are visual. Demonstrate your unique vision through your supporting materials – make sure they reflect the film you want to make.
- Use a conversational tone in the application.
- Say it once – repetition isn’t useful, it makes applications hard to read.
- Formatting – make it easy for the reader, with the text boxes for the online application use clear headings and guide the eye. Remember assessors may read a large number of applications.







What we are looking for

- fresh directorial voices with distinctive, original styles;
- fresh ideas not seen before in short film, or new and original takes on familiar ideas;
- big screen potential – story and visual ideas that will work in cinematic release;
- narrative films with impact. They could be emotional, humorous or political, or designed to scare an audience. You should aim to reach audiences and move them;
- films that take risks, provoke and challenge audiences; and
- films that have something to say

Your application will be assessed against the following criteria:

- quality of the script;
 - the idea and strength of the project;
 - point of difference;
 - director's voice/vision;
 - filmmaking talent involved; and
 - ability to deliver the project.
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What to provide

Your Fresh Shorts application will include the following sections:

Story: Genre, logline, synopsis, script, writer's notes;

Vision: Director's vision, director's treatment, director's best work, locations (optional) visual reference;

Producer: Producer's statement, Stunts/VFX/SFX (optional), Health and Safety plan, marketing plan, festival strategy, schedule overview;

Budget: Budget, budget notes, Financial plan;

Team: Key people's bios, mentors and support.

All applications will be filled out online and read electronically.

The following pointers correspond to the assessment criteria and are intended to give applicants an insight into what the assessors are looking for in applications.

Story

Genre

Each genre (and cross genres) have conventions and patterns that set up expectations for the reader. Make sure your genre is well-defined and simple to help the assessor understand and absorb the story. One clear genre, or a cross of two genres is useful but more can confuse the story and the reader.

If you are submitting a cross genre story make sure that the dominant genre is the one listed first. Genre's like horror have very clear conventions so it's important that you are aware of the conventions before labelling your project. There are numerous resources online to assist in identifying genre.





Logline

Along with the script, loglines are the piece of writing referred to most often in the application by assessors. It's the sales tool for your story and should be a strong, pithy pitch for your film. It's a one or two-line summary of the film's essential storyline in its most dramatic form - make every word count. Write the logline "hooky" i.e. it entices the reader to want to know more.

The logline should convey your idea clearly and answer four basic questions:

1. Who is your main character?
2. What is she or he trying to accomplish?
3. Who is trying to stop her or him?
4. What happens if she or he fails?

Loglines take time to write; allow a few days to develop it and hone the drafts. There are numerous resources online to assist in writing loglines. Keep in mind that this will be published if you get a grant, so don't include anything confidential.

Synopsis

Written in prose, telling the story in a succinct form, the synopsis should flow and be a good read. It should include the beginning and middle of the story, character journey and shows how the story will end – *no* cliff hangers.

Like the logline, it should make the assessor want to know more about the story. Again, allow time to draft and edit. Read it out loud to yourself to make sure it's written for the ear. Ensure it tells the same story as the script and makes sense. Get a trusted reader who has read the script to give feedback about whether the synopsis and script match. There are numerous online resources writers can utilise to write the synopsis.







Script

Assessors are looking for exceptional, original narrative stories. The submitted draft should be the most dramatic telling of your story possible, developed to the best level you can at the time of the application.

The story should have a clear beginning, middle and end (not necessarily in that order). It's important that your story hooks the reader in quickly, builds the dramatic tension to a climactic moment (relevant to the world of the story) and finishes with a memorable, strong ending. This is as true for comedy as drama. If your script is a genre piece it's useful for your story to embrace the tropes of the genre and if possible subvert or create surprises.

Ask an experienced reader to give you some constructive feedback prior to submitting the application with time to make changes. If you know the script requires further development at the application deadline, include your notes in the *Writer's Notes* section of the application.

For documentary, script outline/ script-ment/ treatment is an important way to show what the dramatic story is, the emotional beats, the action of the documentary character(s) and how you intend to capture it. The outline can give an indication of the story arcs and dramatic tension of the story, like narrative fiction.





Writer's Notes

Film script development is an iterative process and can take many, many drafts. The script is always a work in progress (WIP). It can be useful to utilise the *Narrative Script Basic Checklist* to identify and examine what might be further developed. Then outline in your notes what those things are and identify how you might tackle the changes.

Narrative Script Basic Check List:

- Is the central dramatic question of the story clear?
- Is there enough dramatic conflict?
- Large enough obstacles?
- Do we enter the story as close to the inciting incident as possible and get to the heart of the story as soon as possible?
- Does the story end in a satisfying way?
- Is it clear whose story it is?
- Do characters change from the beginning to the end of the story?
- Are the stakes high enough for characters and the story?
- Does the dialogue create the illusion of reality?
- Is the story written visually?
- Does the story affect the reader emotionally?

Vision

Directors Vision

It's OK to go deep and talk about personal experiences that have brought you to this point. Assessors want to understand a bit about who you are and why you want to tell stories, why this one particularly and why now? It's a place to indicate what your director's 'voice' and vision is, what makes you unique?

It's useful to know if you intend to make feature films. If so, what kinds of stories do you want to tell? You can also discuss what other kinds of work you want to make.





Director's Treatment

Assessors want to know what your film will look, sound and feel like. What makes it unique? How will it stand out? How will it move an audience?

Indicate *how* you will make an original film and how you will work with the producer, writer and team of creative collaborators to craft your unique vision e.g. cast and casting, cinematographer, editor, sound design, art department, wardrobe, composer, VFX, SFX etc.

It's a section to indicate what the world of the story is like. Who the characters are and their journeys in the story. Indicate how you intend to work with actors to create the characters and elicit performances.

Director's treatment leads to the Visual Reference section.


Director's Best Work

It's important to show the most dramatic and emotionally engaging, *best* piece or pieces of work to the maximum of 10 minutes that demonstrate your director's 'voice'. One good film is sometimes a better guide for the assessor than too many pieces in a 'show reel'.

Corporate videos are not useful in demonstrating an ability to get dramatic performances and make a cinematic piece. It's not useful for the director to screen other people's work that they have contributed to.

If a new director has not yet made a film it's OK to upload a rehearsal piece of their own work that has *excellent* performances. But they should be outstanding. Good framing and clear sound would be important for a rehearsal piece.





Locations (optional)

Is your location another character? If so, how will you use the location to help tell the story? Why is this location so essential? Will it make the film or break the budget? Show plans and contingencies if the key location is not available. Use sample visual references to help the reader understand why this location is so central to tell the story.

Visual material photos, plans etc. can be uploaded as a PDF.

Visual Reference

Visual references are where directors can indicate their aesthetic choices and inspiration. Directors can use images, mood boards, stills from films and links to trailers to indicate aesthetic and stylistic choices and influences. It's important to *explain* how these references relate to your director's vision, or how they inspire aspects of this film and how this inspiration will be reflected in the film.

The piece can be graphically designed, saved as a PDF and uploaded.

Producer



Producer's Statement


Assessors are wanting to understand how you and your team will overcome challenges and make an amazing, original film for the budget. What are your plans and contingencies for essential parts of the production and post-production that can make or break the film?

Look at the script and find the things that might trigger a question in the assessor's mind of "How will they deal with that?" Show your thinking and intended options.

As a creative producer, it's important to show *your* understanding of the story and the ways you intend to realise it. The assessor also wants to know how the producer will work with other creative collaborators to make the film. It's good to indicate plans for team communication specifically things like dual directors, co-producers, EPs, experienced HODs etc.

It's useful to show how you will support the director to work with actors to elicit performances e.g. casting, rehearsal and workshopping, acting coaches, mentoring etc.





If there are any elements of *Māori* culture in your story, or te reo it would be important to indicate adequate time and appropriate consultation has been spent to appropriately represent this in your story and proposal. It would be important to provide reference in the proposal and perhaps letters of support to indicate this.

Producers may need to consult the document to ensure they hold the rights to the story of the film. And the [NZFC New Zealand Content](#) documents to ensure that their film meets the criteria.

If your film is a documentary it would be important to indicate what your plans and contingencies are if your intended story/ character journey changes, to ensure a cracking story is told.

Stunts and VFX/SFX (Optional)

With stunts, it's useful to indicate any logistical challenges and how the sequences are intended to be filmed. Which trained professionals will be present, how they will operate and how they will train or assist cast and crew. And to indicate Health and Safety plans and contingencies.

With VFX and/or animation it's important to give an indication of your style and approach to the effects or animation, realistic timeline estimates for completion and who you are intending to work with. It's useful to indicate plans for workflow and contingencies for the possibility that work may be delayed by other projects or if people become unavailable.

As indicated story boards are useful for stunts, VFX or animation sequences. Do your best to get someone with some decent level of skill in storyboarding – stick figures are not useful. Story board essential scenes only as necessary to visually explain the approach, no need to do the whole film.





Health and Safety Plan

Read the Screensafe site thoroughly and use common sense. Identify anything in your script that may require Health and Safety (H&S) plans - be it remote location, working with children hazards or stunts etc. If unsure, seek advice from H&S specialists to review your initial plans. If you have an H&S Officer on your shoot give an indication of what they will be doing (not just that they will be present).

Marketing plan

Even though the first port of call for your film is the festival circuit it's important to encourage people to be interested in your filmmaking.

Include a brief social media strategy for engaging people who would be interested in the type of film you intend to make. Think about where people who like this kind of film hang out/interact, both online and in the community? How do they take in their information e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr, Blog sites, e-newsletters? Are there data bases of people you can reach through organisations, or newsletters?

Indicate a plan of what materials /collateral/assets you may collect on your main unit shoot. Things like still images, images of props, graphic artwork, cast interviews, GIFs, small trailers etc. And which social media channels you might be using – a good rule of thumb is minimum of three and platforms or channels where members of your team are comfortable.

It's also useful to indicate a rough a timeline for the roll out of your marketing plan. There are numerous useful websites and resources to find information about Digital marketing schedules.





Festival Strategy

What is the tone of your film? What films is it 'like'? Which film festivals show that kind of film? Visit some of the film festival websites you think might be a match for your film. Find trailers from previous winning films to see if the tone of films screened at the festival are like the film you intend to make.

Start by examining the top tier international festivals like TIFF(Toronto), Berlin, Sundance, Venice, Cannes and see if your film is a fit for one of these. Then investigate some next tier specific short film festivals, or genre or Indigenous festivals – depending on your film. Again, choose festivals that seem to screen films like the one you intend to make. We suggest you work from international to New Zealand national and local.

Schedule Overview Plan

Timelines will be different for each individual film. A suggested rule of thumb would be to work backwards from the first top tier festival you'd like to screen at, then estimate how much time before that you would need to deliver to NZFC if funded (it may be weeks or months).

Then estimate how much time your total post might take including offline editing and time for feedback and changes to the fine cut. Plus, include the final post-production and export for delivery (in number of days/weeks).

Estimate how long your shoot might be (days) and how long your pre- production schedule might be – (days/weeks/ months). Take these estimates and plot them on the timeline provided. Add or delete categories as required.

Remember these estimates are expected to shift. Be sure to include 'wiggle' or contingency room if things don't go quite to plan. Also, a note, if you are casting non-actors or children allow a decent amount of time to cast, rehearse and build trust and rapport.





Budget

Budget

It can be helpful to think first about what items you will spend the cash grant on, what services or items you can do deals for or an exchange - or items or services that people will give 'in kind' or gratis towards the project.

Analyse your script; what are the things that the production can't do without? What are the things that can be minimized or dropped e.g. fewer locations, or cast, removal or limiting night shoots, stunts and effects etc.

Budget Notes

As well as covering off how you will deal with the cost challenges of the budget, if your project's budget figure is over the \$15,000 grant, show the final budget figure as it is and indicate how you will cover the gap between the grant and your final figure, in your budget notes.

You could include a second budget that shows how the team would make the film for the flat rate of the grant or indicate this in your budget notes e.g. you may choose to reduce the scope of the project or number of shoot days to reduce the budget to the grant flat rate level.





Finance Plan

Optional – to be filled out by those projects with budget totals over the designated grant cap of \$15,000. Assessors are interested to understand where additional resources and non NZFC money contributing to the production will come from? And when the money is intended to be used during the project. It would be important to indicate if there are any agreements or expectations of what is being exchanged for this money by the donor. And how that money will be paid back (if at all).

Team

Key People Bios

The CVs should be screen focused and indicate who is intending to contribute to your film, and what each team member brings to the mix, the expertise and experience they will provide to the project.

Mentors and Support

Indicate mentoring or support you are seeking in areas you're unsure or not experienced in. No one can be all things – know your strengths and be aware of what requires further development. Create a plan and seek support.

Letters of support from experienced industry members who are part of or actively mentoring or supporting your team are welcome.

If any of those in the role of writer, director or producer are experienced in some areas but not in others indicate how you will ensure they are supported across the board. Specify possible mentors, workshops or plans and contingencies. You can also upload any PDFs of industry or creative collaborators letters of support.





Other NZFC financing or support

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 or any other NZFC grants, loans or equity, they should be delivered before, or alongside, this application. Note that you may be considered ineligible for funding if you have outstanding reports or deliverables or you are in breach of any contract with the NZFC.

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

What happens to your application

Applications are assessed by industry readers, to create a shortlist of projects that fit the criteria and best reflect the intentions of the scheme. This shortlist will be approved by NZFC staff.

All shortlisted teams are notified and invited to a three-day, fully funded residential Fresh Shorts Development Lab. Applicants are required to be available to attend the three-day lab to be eligible for funding.

Following the lab, applicants are mentored by experienced industry members over a one-month period to further develop scripts, budgets and applications. After this period, revised applications are resubmitted. Industry mentors make recommendations to a funding panel made up of staff from Script to Screen and the NZFC.

A final assessment is made and up to six films will be selected in each round and approved for funding by the NZFC CEO and Head of Talent Development.

Next steps

If you are successful we will be in touch to discuss details.

Whether you are successful or not, you will receive an email letting you know.

A final reminder that if you have any questions please contact the Fresh Shorts Facilitator at Script to Screen: fsfacilitator@script-to-screen.co.nz or ph: 09 360 5400.

