Content Development – Guidelines for Applicants

A. Purpose

This paper sets out our approach to allocating funding for content development within the Creation stream of NZ On Air's Investment Model.

B. Introduction

Content development is funded within NZ On Air's Creation stream. Our priority is on supporting the development of strong and distinctive local content across a range of platforms and formats with a focus on diverse voices, cultural authenticity and excellence.

Development pūtea gives a creative project the necessary time to evolve and innovate before it is ready to seek production financing.

In the face of intensive demand, we want to be clear about the development work we will support and simplify documentation to help applicants.

C. What we will fund

We recognise the diverse needs of projects and creators seeking development funding and encourage applicants to design a tailored development process that effectively prepares their project for production. Most projects will apply for a single stage of development funding at a time and we expect to fund up to $25k – $50k per project.

Supported Development

Development applications supported by a commissioning platform or market partner have an enhanced business case for funding as they present a confirmed level of market attachment with a pathway to an intended audience. In these cases, there is the expectation that the development budget will be funded 50/50 between the supporting platform or market partner, and NZ On Air.

In situations where a producer has secured a market partner (such as an international platform) but does not yet have a local platform attached, we will prioritise projects that demonstrate strong New Zealand cultural themes and representation, and that have a clear likelihood of attracting local platform support at a later stage.

Unsupported development

We will also fund development projects without a platform attached. The purpose of unsupported development funding is to help projects to progress to a point where they can secure market and platform support and eventually move into production. Projects that have a high level of cultural specificity, creative risk and/or secured finance partners will be prioritised.

Unsupported development applications will need to meet specific criteria, including credit requirements for the core creative team and include early draft materials to demonstrate the level of work already done

on the project. There will be limitations on the number of applications accepted per production company and we will generally only fund one round of unsupported development per project.

It is likely we will only accept unsupported development applications to one round per year. Please check the latest funding round guidelines to see if unsupported development applications will be considered and the specific criteria that needs to be met. You can contact the Funding team to discuss your project at any time.

Scripted projects

Due to financial constraints, we will primarily fund the development of Scripted (drama, comedy, animation) projects because these are high cost, high risk genres where more certainty is required before production funding can be considered. Development funding can afford a project the time to structure a concept and, for example, develop a treatment and scripts.

We accept development projects with anticipated production budgets within any of our three Scripted tiers:

- Tier 1: Projects seeking ~$3m
- Tier 2: Projects seeking $1m - $3m
- Tier 3: Projects seeking <$1m

We are also open to funding development of larger-scale complex **Non-fiction projects** that require significant research to test whether there is adequate material available to tell the story.

Our support for local games is primarily to fund their full completion and delivery to audiences, but we may occasionally support the development of game concepts. Please check the latest funding round guidelines to see if games applications will be considered.

We are likely to commit around $1 million each year to content development proposals under the Creation stream of our Investment Model.

Multi-stage development funding

In response to our evolving role in larger-scale, scripted series production, we will consider funding development projects with larger budgets and comprehensive deliverable materials. For exceptional projects with significant - ideally match-funded - platform co-investment and clear creative vision, we may fund multiple development phases simultaneously, enabling continuity for writing teams and reducing delays between stages. Applicants must demonstrate established credentials, detailed development plans and clear paths to production readiness, with limitations of one project per company. We will only fund a very small number of these projects per year.

Sync Licensing

We're committed to seeing more New Zealand music integrated into local scripted screen productions. However, we know there are often barriers to achieving this effectively – from understanding licensing costs to identifying the right music for your story.

To help overcome these challenges, we encourage producers to include a music supervisor early in the development process. A music supervisor can map out how music will enhance your narrative, ensure your sync licensing budget is accurately scoped, and identify creative opportunities to showcase local artists.

When submitting production funding proposals to NZ On Air that include sync licensing funding, having a music supervisor involved from the development stage means your application will be better positioned with realistic budgets and a clear creative vision for how New Zealand music will elevate your project. Please see our website for more information about sync licensing funding.

D. Applying for Funding

Applications must be made through our online portal here. Decisions will be made by NZ On Air's Staff Investment Committee and Board on advice from staff.

Applications should be made to one of our three funding rounds each year. Content Development applications are generally accepted to any round but do read the current round guidelines before applying in case there are limitations to the types of applications we will consider.

E. What to include in your Content Development Proposal

When applying through our funding portal you will be asked to provide key information about your project (i.e. synopsis, format, key personnel, finance plan) and upload some key documents: content proposal, development budget and, if applicable, any completed draft scripts to date.

Development funding is relatively modest so we do not expect your application to be lengthy. The content proposal you upload should include the following:

- Project description: An overview of your project and what you want to do
- Proposed format: Is this a one-off or series? What duration?
- What is the proposed style/treatment of the content? You might already have episode outlines and/or character backgrounds to include in this application
- Who are the key development personnel? Producer, researchers, writers, others?
- Who is the primary target audience, how is this content relevant to them, how will they access it?
- What are the deliverable materials: e.g. treatment, scripts, story arcs, character backgrounds etc.
- What is the planned schedule for delivering these materials?
- Budget. How much do you need, for what, and who else is contributing (if applicable)?

F. Assessment Criteria

Content development applications are assessed against slightly different criteria to production applications, reflecting the earlier stage of the project's life. Our nine investment principles are still reflected in the assessment pātai.

The full criteria by which content development applications will be assessed are below.

- Is the idea/concept original and does it take a high level of creative risk and/or embrace diverse forms of storytelling, utilising new and emerging media formats?
- Will it resonate with an audience?
- Is the team experienced making this type (genre/format) of content?
- Is the budget reasonable for the development work planned and are there additional sources of finance contributing to the development?
- Do the proposed development deliverables match the current progress of the project?
- Does the project tell an engaging NZ social, cultural, political or historical story?
- Does the content have a high level of cultural specificity, and is there a strong correlation between the team, the content and a priority audience?
- Does the development stage proposed offer the creative team professional development opportunities, through internal mentorships and/or an increase in creative ambition?
- Will the project be distributed across a diverse range of media, including a confirmed, contributing, local free-to-air platform, to reach its intended audience and does it have the potential to engage that audience?
- Does the project leverage other aspects of NZ On Air's work, improving their combined discoverability?