

2025-26 Funding Priorities: Advance Planning Guide for Scripted and Non-fiction content

23 April 2025

Purpose

This document provides early access to our key priorities and projected funding allocations in the Scripted and Non-fiction content streams, to assist producers and platforms to plan for the year. Our [Investment Strategy](#) continues to guide our investment decisions and this document should be read in conjunction with it.

Our thinking has been informed by discussions with stakeholders including producers, guilds and platforms. The figures below represent proposed targeted investments in critical areas rather than our complete annual content creation funding allocation. It is important to note that the projected funding allocations are based the funding we received in Budget 2024/2025, on the assumption that this may remain the same in Budget 2025/26. Following Budget 2025/26 being released, any changes to our funding will be considered and funding allocations will be updated accordingly. This document does not confirm or pre-empt any potential changes to funding levels under Budget 2025/26.

Projected funding allocations

Category	Allocation
Scripted	24.5m
Non-fiction	18.5m
Journalism	7.8m
Content Development	1.75m
Children and Youth	16m
Te Māngai Pāho Co-Fund	4m

While this overview establishes our priorities, please note that the official round guidelines for each of the three funding rounds will contain finalised requirements and parameters for applications. We'll host webinars prior to each round's submission deadline where we'll address specific questions.

Rounds	Applications open	Applications close	Decisions
Round Tahī	1/5/2025 9:00 a.m.	22/5/2025 4:00 p.m.	1/8/2025
Round Rua	21/8/2025 9:00 a.m.	11/9/2025 4:00 p.m.	21/11/2025
Round Toru	11/12/2025 9.00 a.m.	29/1/2026 4.00 p.m.	10/4/2026

The projected allocations aim to broadly maintain our historical funding approach while deliberately evolving to address critical sector challenges. By preserving our commitment to public media while responding to the sector's economic and advertising downturn, this approach ensures diverse Aotearoa New Zealand stories reach the widest possible audiences and maintains our cultural voice during these challenging times.

Scripted

Scripted content includes drama, comedy and part-financing of feature films with NZ Film Commission funding and platform support. We have a three-tiered investment approach to funding Scripted content:

Tier 1: Premium Drama (up to \$3.5m)

Our strategy is focused on supporting higher-impact drama projects that are very well developed, with strong business cases that can achieve strong audience reach and recognition. Acknowledging the increasing call on our funds, we will seek to make funds go further through co-investment alongside the New Zealand Screen Production Rebate (NZSPR) and international finance. Although we acknowledge that these projects are difficult to pull together in the current economic landscape, we have continued to witness these types of projects submitted for funding and remain hopeful this will continue.

We expect strong platform support with appropriate platform contribution fees that reflect the complex co-financing requirements of getting these types of productions off the ground. We will retain our position of being 'last-in' or gap funders, with offers of funding valid for six months to allow for financial close. This tier:

- Represents ambitious storytelling initiatives, broad reach and creative excellence
- Requires strong creative vision and business case
- Assumes significant platform commitment
- Expects applications to be from experienced teams
- Utilises the NZSPR
- Is unlikely to see us contribute more than \$3.5m to a single project. Productions seeking over \$3m require approval from the Associate Head of Funding or Head of Funding prior to submission.

Tier 2: Mid-Scale Drama and Comedy (\$1m-\$3m)

This tier provides drama and comedy funding and offers creative opportunities and experimentation with form and formats with a focus on both broad reach and targeted audience content. Whilst we intend to prioritise well-developed projects seeking part-funding alongside the NZSPR with secured market co-investment, we accept that there may be projects submitted for majority funding at this tier. This tier:

- Represents quality local storytelling initiatives, with broad reach or clear s.36(c) audience objectives
- Strong platform commitment
- Experienced team
- NZSPR utilisation is encouraged but not required.

Tier 3: Developing Drama and Comedy (<\$1m)

This tier provides a nod towards experimentation and development and may include shorter-form content, early-career opportunities for creatives, and innovative formats for hard-to-reach youth audiences. This tier may also consider applications seeking gap funding for NZSPR projects.

Non-fiction

Non-fiction content is a cornerstone of strong public media. This is an area of our funding that continues to be pressured, with more quality applications than available funding. We will continue to place importance on a wide slate of content at various funding levels delivering broad reach and s.36(c) audience outcomes.

Our Non-fiction funding is available for general factual, documentaries, podcasts, national event coverage, comedy panel shows, unscripted comedy shows, reality shows, and partial financing of documentary feature films supported by NZFC.

We encourage factual series and documentaries to explore NZSPR funding opportunities and will prioritise New Zealand IP series with strong local audience focus but also with global export potential.

This year, our Non-fiction funding will focus on:

- Broad-reach general factual series with compelling public media themes
- Documentaries with clearly defined target audiences and local platform distribution strategies
- Applications that have meaningful platform co-investment for larger-scale series and/or utilise the NZSPR and present a strong business case.

Broad audience Non-fiction projects

We are witnessing a growth in applications for content that was previously commercially funded by platforms, placing even greater pressure on our funds. That said, we understand that this content may deliver strong audience and important public media outcomes. Accordingly, we may consider reality or previously commercially funded series, with priority given to local intellectual property, if they can demonstrate:

- Clear public media merit alongside strong audience engagement, and
- A strong business case that includes a significant platform contribution, and
- Ideally a plan to utilise the NZSPR.

Podcasts

In response to growing audience demand, we are looking to fund slightly more podcasts than in previous years, however – given our general funding constraint - we will need to be highly selective and will only be able to support a limited number this financial year.

Journalism

Journalism applications will be considered in Round Rua only. We will have limited funding to support journalism projects, and we will concentrate primarily on two key areas:

- **Specialist current affairs and investigative projects** responding to current events
- **Reporting on public institutions**

Priority will be given to returning projects that can demonstrate strong audience engagement.

Projects that don't fit our primary focus areas can still be considered for our other two funding rounds if they are primarily factual or documentary in nature. If you're unsure whether your journalism project qualifies, please [contact the funding team](#) prior to submission.

Reporting on public institutions

This limited funding pool supports journalism covering New Zealand's key democratic and judicial institutions. We seek projects that:

- Embed dedicated reporters within established newsrooms, and
- Follow rigorous editorial guidelines, and
- Distribute reporting through media partnerships for maximum public access.

Coverage should focus on institutions that:

- Exercise significant public authority, and
- Make decisions affecting local or regional communities, and
- Use or oversee public funds, and
- Serve essential democratic or judicial functions, and
- Require specialist knowledge to report effectively.

Projects must demonstrate:

- A commitment to systematic coverage of regular institutional proceedings, and
- Clear editorial oversight and quality control measures, and
- Content sharing arrangements with media partners, and
- Training and support for specialist reporters, and
- Nationwide coverage of New Zealand stories and communities.

Important: Coverage of national politics is excluded from this funding, as this type of journalism is already well served.

Application Process: The eligibility bar is high. All applicants for this strand of funding must [consult with our funding team](#) before submission and receive confirmation from the Associate Head of Funding or Head of Funding that their project is eligible to apply.

Content development

In response to our increasing role in the evolving landscape of premium scripted series production, we are prepared to consider different approaches to development funding. We acknowledge that development is fundamental to the delivery of quality, ambitious content and even more so when seeking international finance and distribution alongside local audience outcomes.

While our standard practice has been to fund separate stages of development through individual applications, we recognise that high-quality, ambitious productions sometimes require a different model. For projects with significant co-producer and/or platform support and clear creative vision, we will consider funding multiple phases of development in a single application. This approach enables continuity for writing teams, reduces delays between development stages, and provides the foundation needed to fully realise complex stories with the potential to deliver higher-quality productions.

We are especially interested in co-funding development and are willing to consider significant contributions if these are match funded with market money. While we will still consider some unsupported development (development funding without the support of a platform), these opportunities will be limited.

These changes reflect our recognition that larger-scale premium scripted series often require substantial investment in development to achieve their full potential. While this may result in fewer projects receiving development funding, it will enable deeper investment in productions with the strongest potential for success. We believe this approach will better serve the sector's needs in creating world-class New Zealand content.

Our development priorities

- Increasing our strategic co-investment in content development, including projects with market money attached
- Open to supporting fewer projects with larger allocations
- Will consider funding multiple phases of development in a single application for projects with significant platform support
- Limited opportunities for unsupported development (without platform backing).

Children's content

We face significant challenges in reaching tamariki with local content as market pressures undermine local platforms' ability to support a strong slate of children's programming. To address this, we have been working closely with the children's production sector to create a dedicated space for local children's content on YouTube, as an additional platform for this audience to discover and enjoy local stories and songs.

Unless an exemption has been granted by the Associate Head of Funding or Head of Funding, projects for tamariki will still require local platform support as we believe passionately in the importance of our local platform ecosystem championing homegrown content that speaks directly to our youngest viewers.

We remain committed to supporting ambitious children's projects with NZSPR goals. Projects seeking over \$3m require exceptional creative/business cases and pre-submission approval from the Associate Head of Funding or Head of Funding. Read more about our [Children's content strategy here](#).

Youth content

Our [youth content strategy, *Within My Reach*](#), aims to:

- Fund bold, innovative local projects for 15-24-year-old audiences
- Target content on platforms where youth find their content
- Focus on digital-first, social media native video content.

Projects for these audiences will be accepted in any of the three funding rounds. Applications should have the support of a relevant local platform and a strong marketing plan. Projects looking to release on YouTube and/or social media platforms without a local platform attached must demonstrate that robust plans are in place to manage legal compliance and creative oversight with appropriate accountability.

Content requirements

- Must be free to access for New Zealand audiences
- Horizontal release strategy across multiple platforms (TikTok shouldn't be primary distribution platform)
- Local audience viewership/engagement data reporting.

What we're looking for

- Bold, edgy concepts with distinctive voices
- Bite-sized content that flows across multiple platforms
- Content by youth, for youth - projects with key personnel aged 18-34 prioritised
- Breakthrough ideas with potential to generate social currency
- Projects informed by research on youth media habits
- Clear understanding of platform algorithms and marketing strategies
- Appropriate scaffolding and support to ensure legal, health and safety and compliance matters will be managed appropriately.

Te Māngai Pāho Co-fund

In accordance with our [Rautaki Māori](#), we will continue to partner with Te Māngai Pāho on our annual co-funding initiative. Each agency will contribute 50% of the funding, with a total of \$8m available in the round.

The emphasis of the fund will once again be on ambitious, high-quality content with strong te reo and te ao Māori outcomes for broad audiences. We expect the co-fund will be aligned with our Round Rua.