



# Development and Short-Form Digital Series Guidelines

April 2018<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 2 footnotes added to guidelines jan 2018  
and 3 footnotes added in April 2018(for updates made to 10% cash requirement for short-form digital series and updates to waiver requirements for short-form digital series fiction.)

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The Board of the Bell Fund has complete discretion in the administration of Bell Fund programs including, without limitation, determination of eligibility of applicants or projects and funding decisions. All Board decisions are final. Program guidelines may be changed at any time, provided that guidelines publicly posted at the time of a Program

deadline will be the applicable guidelines for that application. Producers are encouraged to ensure that they have reviewed the most current guidelines, templates and policies available on the Bell Fund website prior to submitting their application.

## Overview of the Bell Fund

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### Mission

To support Canadian media content makers in creating for and connecting with, audiences here and everywhere.

Since 1997 the Bell Fund has received over \$200 million in financial contributions from Bell TV to support the development and production of cross-platform digital media and TV content. In 2001 the Bell Fund was awarded an endowment of \$10 million from Bell TV, as a result of a tangible benefits package. The revenues generated by this endowment are made available for development funding.

In 2017, in order to implement the [CRTC's Revised Policy Framework for Certified Independent Funds](#), the Bell Fund retired its convergent production and development programs, as well as its performance accelerator and TV Development Online programs.

### Background

The Bell Fund is a not-for-profit organization. It has been certified by the CRTC as an independent production fund eligible to receive and administer contributions from broadcast distribution undertakings under section 29(2) of the Broadcasting Distribution Regulations.

The Fund is governed by a nine member Board of Directors which operates as an arm's length corporation with representatives from broadcasting, television and digital media sectors and from Bell TV.

The Fund has offices in Toronto and Montreal.

# 1. Definitions

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**Discoverability Plan:** Where required, the Producer will demonstrate how the discoverability plan, when implemented, will help enhance the project being funded under the appropriate program, as well as attracting an audience and/or engaging with fans.

Eligible costs include programming content such as short form content for social media platforms and non-programming content such as interactive or customizable web content. Production costs for non-programming content must be separately identified in the budget to allow Bell Fund to report on those costs.

Ineligible costs are those already committed by the broadcaster/platform as part of the production budget of the project. These may include but are not limited to – press kits, publicist, OOH ad buys, lower-third advertising, one sheets.

**Market Interest:** Evidence of market interest can include but is not limited to a letter of interest from a Canadian CRTC-licensed broadcaster, a digital platform accessible to Canadians or a distributor. In some cases, at Bell Fund's discretion, sufficient audience research and/or audience analytics that affirms the intended audience, may be acceptable. Refer to a specific program to determine acceptable evidence of market interest.<sup>2</sup>

**Non-programming digital content:** innovative projects such as story-driven videogames, interactive or customizable web content, apps and other similar types of non-programming content. Customizable content is content where end-users have an individual one-on-one experience through the creation of their own uniquely tailored content.

**Platform:**

**Canadian broadcaster-owned digital platform or Hybrid VOD service:** licensed to operate by the CRTC and/ or hybrid video-on-demand service (ex. aptn.ca, CTV GO, tva.ca, Club illico, Crave TV).

**Digital platform accessible to Canadians (Canadian or foreign-owned):** includes but not limited to AVOD (advertising-based video on demand, ex. Crackle), TVOD (transactional video on demand, ex. iTunes Canada), SVOD services (subscription video on demand, ex. ICI Tou.tv Amazon Prime Canada, Netflix Canada), or social media platforms (ex. YouTube or Facebook).

**For each of these digital platforms to be eligible Producer must be able to demonstrate the Platform's ability to effectively reach the appropriate targeted Canadian audience.**

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<sup>2</sup> Market Interest Definition updated jan 2018 for clarity.

According to CAVCO, digital platforms accessible to Canadians “is a service where Canadians would likely look for linear audio-visual content, as opposed to a service primarily intended for foreign territories”. In addition, the Fund requires that this service also be one where Canadians would likely go to view a particular type of content – i.e scripted drama, scripted comedy, non-fiction/factual series. The fund reserves the right to determine the acceptability of the service.

**Bell Fund Waiver: Where there is no agreement possible between the applicant and the digital platform**, the Bell Fund, at its sole discretion, **may consider** waiving this requirement subject to the applicant being able to provide some or all of the following **additional** requirements to the Bell Fund for review and assessment of eligibility at the time of application: one completed episode to a maximum of seven minutes (this requirement is waived for the short-form digital series **fiction** program<sup>3</sup>); the proposed platform (please see above for adherence to Digital Platform Acceptable to Canadians); ability to demonstrate the completion and commercialization of at least one other original audio-visual programming project for an online platform; an ability to execute and commercialize the concept (i.e. if required, retention of outside expertise that are experienced in delivering and commercializing the project).

Note: If the Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit is included in the financing structure, the producer should review [the list of acceptable online services](#).

### **Short-Form Digital Series:**

Video programming up to a maximum length of 15 minutes per episode and a minimum of 6 episodes. This programming is sometimes referred to as “short-form or web series”. (For clarity, filler content or a segmented version of a 30 minute program is ineligible).

All series can be submitted within the eligible genres of programming categories (see below):

**Fiction scripted:** eligible genres of programming include drama, comedy and children and youth programming (excluding animated series), provided that each program is scripted and, is being developed or produced to be part of an ongoing series.

**Non-Fiction scripted:** eligible genres of programming include factual, (commonly understood to include but not limited to science, history, art, religion), documentaries and lifestyle programming (commonly understood to include but not limited to cooking, decorating, finance, real estate) provided that each program is scripted and is being produced to be part of an ongoing series.

Ineligible content includes content that is primarily vlogs, user-generated content, including but not limited to content such as product review videos, how-to-videos, advice, tutorials, gaming videos, unboxing videos or other forms of unscripted programming. If in doubt, applicants may contact the Bell Fund to determine eligibility before applying.

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<sup>3</sup> Requirement waived for fiction series April 2018

**Third Party Sources:** may include but not be limited to sponsorship funding, public and private funding agencies, provincial agencies, and a distribution advance. However, the 10% cash financing must be committed in writing at the time of application. Projects that are under review with another industry funding program (OMDC, SODEC IPF, Shaw Rocket Fund, CMF etc) will be considered as financing and qualify as the 10% cash contribution, provided the financing is confirmed in advance of the Bell Fund Board's decisions for that particular deadline.<sup>4</sup> Tax credits are eligible provided there is written confirmation from the provincial/federal agency (where applicable) that confirms the eligibility of the production, submission of tax calculations, and evidence that tax credits can be financed or cash flowed.

While in kind and deferred costs are not eligible as the cash contribution, these can be included in the budget as long as they are necessary and reasonable. Please see the Budgeting and Financing Policies for more information.

## **2. Eligible Applicants**

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### **2.1 Canadian Production Company**

- a. Is a for profit company carrying on business in Canada and a resident of Canada for the purposes of the Income Tax Act - owned and controlled by Canadians as determined in sections 26-28 of Investment Canada Act
- b. Is incorporated in Canada
- c. Has a Canadian business address as its head office

*The CRTC defines an independent production company as a production company in which a television licensee owns or controls, directly or indirectly, less than 30% of the equity. This definition will apply to broadcaster-affiliated companies as well.*

### **2.2 Independent Producer**

- a. Whose primary business is developing, producing and distributing professional content including (but not limited to) linear video, interactive digital media, and social media content, and has sufficient experience to undertake the project
- b. Must be able to demonstrate a sound financial position and the required expertise within the team to successfully produce the program. A less experienced producer is encouraged to ensure that other members of the team are more experienced either as individual talent (i.e. screenwriter, director) or as a co-producing or executive producing company. Applicants are encouraged to contact the Bell Fund in advance of the deadline to obtain assistance in determining the experience level of their team.
- c. Is directly responsible for the financial and creative control of the production
- d. Is the central decision maker
- e. Rights must be owned, optioned or controlled (including the underlying rights to the program) sufficient to produce and exploit the program throughout the world
- f. Retain a reasonable share of the financial backend

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<sup>4</sup> Updated April 2018

*In the event that the applicant is a broadcaster-affiliated company (See definition of CRTC independent production company in Section 2.1), only up to 25% of the available funds in a program can be accessed by these companies.*

### **3. Eligible Content**

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Funding is available for development (referred to in this document as Slate Development and Webdocs Development), and the production of audiovisual programming content (referred to in this document as Short-form Digital Series) including funding for discoverability of this content.

All content to be developed or produced under these programs must be of a professional quality and intended for commercial exploitation.

Where applicable, all content is to be compliant with all standards and policies applicable to broadcasting and to intellectual property laws and will not infringe upon any public or private rights and will not otherwise contravene any civil and criminal laws in effect in Canada.

All digital video content to be produced under these programs is to be closed captioned and provided with described video where there is a regulatory requirement.

All short-form digital video content must achieve a minimum of 6 out of 10 Canadian certification points under CRTC or be certified as a Canadian treaty co-production or co-venture.

#### **Ineligible Content**

Content may not be an industrial, corporate, or primarily promotional project. For greater clarity, infomercials, promotional and corporate videos are not eligible.

Animated series are not eligible.

Interstitial programs, wraparound segments or filler content, commonly used by broadcasters as television programs are not eligible.

Film and Television convergent projects (i.e. short-form digital series associated with a TV program for the sole purpose of driving audience to the TV program) is not eligible.

### **4. Distribution: Eligible Platforms**

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Any of the following may be considered as an eligible platform (as defined in Section 1) to trigger funding:

- a. CRTC licensed Canadian broadcaster or broadcaster-owned digital platform, or Canadian hybrid video-on-demand service
- b. Any digital platform accessible to Canadians which may be either Canadian or foreign - owned (*see Section 1 definitions – for more detailed descriptions*).

## 5. Funding Streams

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### 5.1 Development

#### 5.1.1. Slate Development

- a. The purpose of the Slate Development program is to help independent production companies diversify their development slate both in terms of numbers of projects and variety of platforms and media by offering financial support for the planning and development of original intellectual property (“IP”). Preference will therefore be given to applications that support multiple projects (no more than three), which can be multi-platform. For clarity, multi-platform projects must develop video as at least one offering
- b. While no broadcast license or development agreement is required, at application, there needs to be evidence of **market interest** (see *definitions Section 1*).
- c. The projects must all be intended for release on any one of the following platforms: (1) any CRTC licensed Canadian broadcaster or broadcaster-owned digital platform, (2) Canadian hybrid VOD or (3) digital platform accessible to Canadians which may be either -Canadian or foreign-owned (see *definitions section 1*).
- d. Producers may apply with projects in varying stages of development.
- e. Development should be considered for proof/ feasibility of the project,
- f. **Eligible costs** may include but not limited to research including audience research, option payments, scriptwriting (including outlines and treatments), the production of a short presentation demo, business, marketing and promotional plans, discoverability plan and the creation of plans for worldwide exploitation.
- g. IP must be original though it may be an adaptation of an existing licensed property. Ineligible content includes feature films, MOW's and primarily re-purposed content.
- h. All rights and underlying rights must be owned, optioned or controlled sufficient to develop, produce and exploit the program throughout the world.

#### Amount of Funding Contribution:

Funding is available as a non-interest bearing advance of **75% of eligible costs up to a maximum of \$100,000**, repayable from production financing (on a per project basis).

- i. Minimum funding that can be requested is **\$25,000**

**At the time of application Producer will provide evidence that at least 10% of the budget is financed in cash by a third party.**

This financing must be committed in writing at the time of application. Projects that are under review with another industry funding program (OMDC, SODEC IPF, Shaw Rocket Fund, CMF etc) can qualify as the 10% cash contribution, provided the financing is confirmed in advance of the Bell Fund Board's decisions for that particular deadline.<sup>5</sup>

- j. Producer must provide evidence that all costs are Canadian (unless the Producer can establish the need for non-Canadian development costs, which in no event shall be more than 25% of the budget).
- k. Costs incurred prior to the application are not eligible.
- l. Administration costs (including Producer fees) must be capped at 20%
- m. Budgets submitted shall be for the entire slate to allow producers to amortize costs where appropriate (e.g. producer fees, costs of developing the discoverability plan etc.).
- n. All funds must be spent consistent with the application for funding, unless otherwise approved in writing by the Bell Fund.
- o. Funding can be used to leverage other Funds like CMF, OMDC, or SODEC. Producer will have 3 months from approval to provide evidence of commitment.

**Please Note** – Given the limited funds available, a Company comprised of and/or exercising common control over, several production companies is only entitled to one application per deadline.

## 5.1. 2. Webdocs Development

The purpose of the Webdocs Development Fund is to support the development of original digital non-fiction. "Such content is primarily designed to inform but may also educate and entertain, providing an in-depth critical analysis of a specific subject or point of view"<sup>6</sup> through the integration of interactive digital technologies and platforms. Users will navigate through and interact with the components of the project autonomously. A webdoc could include traditional video elements.

- a. At application, applicants must demonstrate **market interest** for the proposed final webdoc (*See Section 1 definitions*).
- b. **Eligible costs** for funding can include – subject matter research, interviews, shooting video as well as various other media such as images, photos, animatics, text, audio, hyperlinks and user generated content, storyboarding, prototype development, detailed production planning, content and technology design, design documentation, user testing plan, budgeting and financing, production scheduling, business and marketing planning, research and testing, and project proposal development.

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<sup>5</sup> Updated April 2018

<sup>6</sup> CAVCO definition for documentary

- c. At the end of this stage of development Producers will have a prototype and supporting documentation which will be viable to attract production financing but cannot yet be commercialized or presented as a monetizable Minimum Viable Product (MVP).
- d. Producers must also provide as part of the development deliverables<sup>7</sup> a **Phase 1 Discoverability Plan** that will leverage an audience's insights to improve the webdoc as well as grow the audience including the Canadian audience throughout all phases, i.e. pre-launch, launch and post-launch. Producer may but is not obligated to include the cost of implementing a Phase 1 Discoverability Plan in this development phase.
- e. The copyright of the project(s) being developed must be owned, optioned or controlled by the applicant.

### **Amount of Funding Contribution:**

- f. Funding is available as a non-repayable grant of **75% of the eligible costs up to a maximum of \$100,000**
- g. Applicants are encouraged to build collaborative partnerships that can serve to strengthen the overall success of the development and the ultimate financing of the production of the webdoc.

## **5.2 Production**

### **5.2.1 Short-Form Digital Series**

The purpose of the Program is to fund original digital video for online distribution, specifically the production of scripted fiction (drama, comedy, and children's and youth programming, excluding animated series) and scripted non-fiction (i.e. documentary and lifestyle/factual programming). Only series will be supported, with a maximum length of 15 minutes per episode and a minimum of 6 episodes.

To qualify as a short-form digital series, the programming cannot be broadcast before 12 months after its initial launch on a digital platform.

Please note: It is expected that the number of episodes be appropriate for the genre, budget, distribution platform and the level of funding requested.

This premium content should have the potential for commercial success, and while there is no requirement to do so, the content may also act as a talent incubator for Canadian licensed broadcaster channels or digital platforms.

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<sup>7</sup> updated jan 2018 from an application deliverable to a development deliverable

Principal photography cannot have begun prior to the application deadline.

A teaser (max two minutes)<sup>8</sup> is required at time of application.

Producer at the time of application must have one of the following:

- a. A license agreement (commitment letter may be sufficient) with a CRTC licensed Canadian broadcaster-owned, digital platform or hybrid VOD service.
- b. A license agreement with a digital platform accessible to Canadians (Canadian or foreign-owned).
- c. An agreement with a Canadian distributor with a commitment to make the program available on a platform within 12 months of completion.
- d. **Where there is no agreement**, the Bell Fund, at its sole discretion, may consider waiving this requirement (See Section 1 for details).

## Amount of Funding Contribution:

- e. Funding is available as a non-repayable grant of **75% of the costs of production up to a maximum of \$150,000**. Eligible costs shall include standard digital video production costs but not the costs of implementing the Discoverability Plan (see below).
- f. **At the time of application Producer will provide evidence that at least 10% of the budget is financed in cash by a third party.**

This financing must be committed in writing at the time of application. Projects that are under review with another industry funding program (OMDC, SODEC IPF, Shaw Rocket Fund, CMF etc) can qualify as the 10% cash contribution, provided the financing is confirmed in advance of the Bell Fund Board's decisions for that particular deadline.<sup>9</sup>

- g. The copyright of the project(s) being developed must be owned, optioned or controlled by the applicant.
- h. As part of the application process, Producer must submit a **Discoverability Plan** (see definitions). Evaluation of this plan will take place alongside evaluation of the series and provided the series is approved for funding, Producer may be eligible to receive up to **\$50,000** towards the implementation of the Discoverability Plan based on an approved budget.

## 6. Evaluation Process

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1. Applications are reviewed to ensure that all eligibility criteria are met and that the required documentation is complete.

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<sup>8</sup> Changed from one minute max length to maximum two minutes April 2018

<sup>9</sup> Updated April 2018

2. Eligible applications are assessed by industry consultants who evaluate the creative, business, financial, technical, marketing plan, Discoverability Plan, and audience engagement potential.
3. It is the intent that funding decisions are made by the Board of Directors six to ten weeks after the deadline for application.
4. Projects that do not receive funding may only be resubmitted if the resubmission addresses any notes provided from the previous application and there are clear changes to the application. These changes should be outlined in a separate document or in the cover letter. An unsuccessful project may only resubmit one additional time in the applicable program.
5. Successful applicants must finalize financing of their projects within 90 days or the Bell Fund's commitment may be cancelled at the Board's discretion.
6. The Bell Fund Evaluation Grid contains the key criteria that are examined in the evaluation process (see [www.bellfund.ca](http://www.bellfund.ca)).