



Short-Form Digital Series Guidelines

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Bell Fund Offices:

Toronto:
2 Carlton Street
Suite 1709
Toronto, Ontario M5B 1J3
Telephone: (416) 977-8154
Email: info@bellfund.ca
Web: www.bellfund.ca

Montréal:
4200, boulevard Saint-Laurent,
Bureau 503
Montréal, Québec H2W 2R2
Telephone: (514) 845-4418
Email: info@fondsbell.ca
Web: www.fondsbell.ca

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

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.

These guidelines are for Producers intending to make an application to the short-form digital series program.

1. Definitions

Discoverability Plan Is a document detailing the strategy and tactics and measurement methods for how the Producer will find, retain and build an audience for the series.

Please refer to the documents available at bellfund.ca before submitting your plan and budget.

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), 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.

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.

Distributor:

Canadian Distributor – is Canadian owned within the meaning of the Investment Canada Act. The distributor generally distributes third party content in addition to its own content and has the experience necessary to negotiate terms, marketing and promotion spends and other promotional activities in favour of the Producer.

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. 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.

2. Application Requirements *(please read carefully)*

The purpose of the Program is to fund premium, 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).

The following conditions must be met in order for your application to be considered

- a. Only series will be supported, with a maximum length of 15 minutes per episode and a **minimum** of 6 episodes. The number of episodes should be appropriate for the genre, budget, distribution platform and the level of funding requested.
- b. The series cannot be broadcast as part of a scheduled linear service before 12 months after its initial launch on a digital platform.
- c. Principal photography cannot have begun prior to the application deadline.
- d. The copyright of the project must be owned, optioned or controlled by the applicant.
- e. **Producer must have one of the following:**
 - (i) A license agreement (commitment letter may be sufficient) with a CRTC licensed, Canadian broadcaster-owned, digital platform or hybrid VOD service.
 - (ii) A license agreement with a digital platform accessible to Canadians (Canadian or foreign-owned).
 - (iii) An agreement with an eligible Canadian distributor with a commitment to make the program available on a digital platform within 12 months of completion.

IMPORTANT: Where there is no eligible distributor or license agreement available, AND your channel/platform is not already listed as an acceptable online service pursuant to CAVCO (as outlined in Public Notice 2017-01) Producer must seek approval for its channel/distribution platform from the Bell Fund *prior* to application.

f. **Producer must provide the following:**

(i) A series trailer (max. 2 minutes) that reflects the look and feel of the proposed series.

(ii) Evidence that at least 10% of the budget is financed in cash by a third party.

(Third Party Sources: may include but are not limited to sponsorship funding, public and private funding agencies, provincial agencies, and a distribution advance. 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 qualify as the 10% cash contribution provided that applications are submitted in advance of the Bell Fund Board decisions for that particular deadline. Tax credits are also eligible. The Bell Fund may request 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 policy for more information.

(iii) A Discoverability Plan (see definitions) Evaluation of this plan will take place alongside evaluation of the series.

3. Eligible Applicants

3.1 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.

3.2 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

In the event that the applicant is a broadcaster-affiliated company (See definition of CRTC independent production company in Section 3.1), only up to 25% of the available funds in a program can be accessed by these companies.

4. Eligible Content

Funding is available for production of audiovisual content (referred to in this document as Short-form Digital Series) including funding for discoverability of this content.

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

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 content is to be closed-captioned and provided with described video where there is a regulatory requirement.

All 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.

5. Ineligible Content

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.

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) are not eligible.

If in doubt, applicants are encouraged to read the faq's and may contact the Bell Fund to determine eligibility before applying.

6. Funding Streams

Amount of Funding Contribution:

- a. 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).
- b. **At the time of application Producer will provide evidence that at least 10% of the budget is financed in cash by a third party.**
- c. 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 that the applications are submitted in advance of the Bell Fund Board's decisions for that particular deadline. The copyright of the project(s) being developed must be owned, optioned or controlled by the applicant.
- d. 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.

7. Evaluation Process

1. Applications are reviewed to ensure that all eligibility criteria are met and that the required documentation is complete.
2. Eligible applications are assessed by industry consultants who evaluate the creative, business, financial, technical, marketing plan, Discoverability Plan, and audience engagement potential.
3. Recommendations for funding are given to the Board and final decisions are made within 6-8 weeks of the application deadline
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).