



## Short-Form Digital Series Guidelines

2020

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# 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 Canadian Independent Producers in the development and production of great Canadian 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.

## 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.

## General Information – Important to Read

The Board of the Bell Fund has complete discretion in the administration of Bell Fund programs including, without limitation, determination of eligibility of applicants and projects and all 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.

**Failure to Comply and Misrepresentation:** Any failure to comply with the terms and conditions of the guidelines and or any misrepresentation of information in connection with an application, as determined by Bell Fund, may result in the application being deemed ineligible and repayment of any advanced funds (with interest) may be demanded. It might also affect the eligibility of future applications.

Bell Fund reserves the right to deem ineligible any application considered incomplete. Applicants should ensure they meet all eligibility requirements prior to applying. This is a highly competitive fund and requests for funding will exceed the amount of funding available.

# 1. Introduction

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The purpose of the Short-Form Digital Series Program is to fund premium, original, digital video **series** for online distribution, specifically the production of fiction (drama, comedy, and children's and youth programming) and non-fiction (documentary and lifestyle/factual programming). Note: Animated series are not eligible.

## 2. Definitions

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**Discoverability:** Putting content where audiences can find it and then letting audiences know your content exists.

**Discoverability Plan:** A document detailing the strategy, activities, timelines and measurement methods planned to identify and build an audience and monetize (if applicable) the series.

Please refer to the [documents](#) available at [Bellfund.ca](http://Bellfund.ca) and to the Discoverability Section of these guidelines, before submitting your plan and budget.

**Short-Form Digital Series:** Linear video, English or French language, fiction and non-fiction, up to a maximum episode length of 20 minutes, with a minimum of 6 episodes. Sometimes referred to as "web series." See Eligible Content.

### **3. Application Requirements** *(please read carefully)*

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**The following conditions must be met for an application to be considered.**

**For a full list of required documentation see the [Document Checklist](#).**

- The digital platform must be acceptable to Bell Fund (see below) and the appropriate commitment in place; Non-broadcaster channels must be pre-approved.
- The request for production financing from Bell Fund may not exceed 75% of the series budget
- 10% financing must be confirmed in cash, at time of application from a source other than the producer or Bell Fund
- Principal photography may not start prior to the Bell Fund deadline.
- All associated documents must be signed and dated by appropriate parties.
- The copyright of the project must be owned, optioned or controlled by the applicant.
- Broadcaster licence agreement (or meaningful commitment) must include a 12-month broadcast holdback from date of launch on the digital service.

#### **a. Digital Platform**

##### **Pre-Approval of Digital Platform/Channel**

All non-broadcaster, digital platforms must be pre-approved by Bell Fund prior to application. Producers are encouraged to seek pre-approval early in the application process. Bell Fund will review requests and provide an answer within two business days.

**Refer to Bell Fund Digital Platform [Pre-Approval Form](#).**

##### **Platform/Channel Requirements**

At time of application, Producer must have a license agreement or meaningful commitment letter from one of the following digital platforms. Bell Fund reserves the right to determine the acceptability of the service.

1. An online service owned, controlled and operated by a Canadian, licensed programming undertaking (eg. OUTtvGo, APTN lumi, Savoir média) including operating as a Hybrid VOD service (eg. Crave, Club illico).
2. A digital platform that features Entertainment Programming and is accessible to Canadians (Canadian or Foreign owned).

## **b) Financing Commitments:**

1. **10% financing** must be confirmed in writing, from a source other than Bell Fund or the Producer. While in-kind and deferred costs are not eligible as the (10%) cash contribution, these may be included in the finance structure if necessary and reasonable.

Third parties include (but are not limited to) provincial or federal agencies (\*including tax credits, if eligible), other funding agencies, crowdfunding, patreon (crowdfunding and patreon financing must be in place at time of application), sponsorships, and distribution advances.

**\*For provincial and federal tax credits** applicant must demonstrate eligibility, provide calculations and estimate a maximum of 90%, of anticipated tax credits, in the finance structure. Federal tax credits require a Canadian distributor and streaming on a CAVCO approved digital channel. Requirements for provincial tax credits vary by province and applicant must clearly demonstrate eligibility. Note: Bell Fund's non-repayable contribution is considered assistance and will grind tax credits; ensure this is included in your calculations.

2. A **finance plan and budget** must be submitted for both the production of the series and for the discoverability activities. All financing\* must be in place at time of application, minimally with signed commitment letters from each source.

**\*Note: Financing from other Funding/Provincial Agencies (including 10% 'third party' financing)**

You may apply to the Bell Fund with unconfirmed financing from other Canadian independent production funds/provincial agencies (such as IPF, Creative B.C. Quebecor, Telus, etc.), provided that notification is received within 90 days of the Bell Fund notification.

Details must be uploaded with your Bell Fund application including name of funder, name of funding program, amount pending, deadline date and expected date of notification.

Applicants must inform the Bell Fund of the decisions of other funders as soon as they are notified and if applicant must seek alternative financing, they must inform the Bell Fund of the plan and have the confirmed financing in place within 90 days of Bell Fund notification.

**c) Discoverability Plan and Budget:**

A Discoverability Plan and discoverability budget must be submitted. Please refer to the discoverability [documents](#) available at [bellfund.ca](http://bellfund.ca) before submitting your plan and budget.

**A discoverability plan** includes the strategy, activities, timelines and measurement methods planned to identify and build an audience and monetize (if applicable) the series. Activities should include, but are not limited to social media strategy, paid and organic digital marketing, and the implementation of structured data

**A discoverability budget** includes costs for all of the activities in the discoverability plan. Traditional marketing (eg. publicity kits and launch events) are not eligible for discoverability funding but may be included, if reasonable and appropriate, in the production budget.

**d) Series Trailer:**

Maximum two (2) minutes reflecting the look and feel of the proposed series. The trailer must be comprised of original footage from the applicant company. See below for subsequent seasons.

**e) Second or Subsequent Seasons:**

1. **If applying for a second or subsequent season**, the previous season must have streamed in its entirety and the key performance indicators (including but not limited to audience analytics) must be shared with Bell Fund. (Complete the *subsequent season* section of the [Project Details Form](#).)
2. **Trailers for Subsequent Seasons** may contain footage from previous season, however, unless the new season is 'an uninterrupted continuation' of a previous season, minimally the trailer should have updated text and audio pertaining to the new season.

## 4. Eligible Applicants

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Applicant Company does not need to be incorporated at the time of application but must be prepared to be incorporated (described below) if application is successful.

### 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

### Please Note

Broadcaster-affiliated companies are limited to a maximum of 25% of the available funds in a program.

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. Amount of Funding Contribution:

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- a. **Digital Series Production** - Funding, in the form of a non-repayable contribution, may be requested for up to 75% of the cost of series production to a maximum of \$150,000. Eligible costs include standard digital video production. (Costs to implement the Discoverability Plan are captured in the Discoverability Budget.) (see below).
- b. **Discoverability for Digital Series** - Funding, in the form of a non-repayable contribution, may be requested for the cost of implementing the Discoverability Plan to a maximum of \$50,000. While the Bell Fund contribution may constitute the full \$50,000 applicants are encouraged to increase the budget for discoverability by securing financing from an additional source.



## 6. Eligible Content

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Funding is available for production of English and French language 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.

### Eligible genres of programming:

**Fiction:** Eligible genres of programming include scripted drama, comedy and children and youth programming (excluding animated series), being produced as an ongoing series.

**Non-Fiction:** 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), and children and youth programming (excluding animated series), being produced as an ongoing series.

### All content must:

- 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.
- Be closed-captioned and provided with described video.
- Achieve a minimum of 6 out of 10 Canadian certification points under CRTC or be certified, by Telefilm, as an official Canadian treaty co-production or be certified as per the CRTC's requirements as a co-venture.

## 7. Ineligible Content

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The following types of content are not eligible:

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.

Content that is industrial, corporate, or primarily promotional or informational.

Interstitial programs, wraparound segments or filler content, commonly used by broadcasters as television programs.

Animated series, news, current/public affairs, talk shows, sports and content that has a primary mission of providing a public service.

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.

A subsequent season is ineligible if the previous season has not yet streamed in its entirety. (See Subsequent Seasons Section)

If in doubt, applicants are encouraged to read the [FAQ's](#) and contact the Bell Fund to determine eligibility before applying.

## 8. Evaluation Process

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1. **Prior to Application:** All non-broadcaster, digital platforms must be pre-approved by Bell Fund prior to application. Producers are encouraged to seek pre-approval early in the application process. Bell Fund will review requests and provide an answer within two business days.
2. **Application:** Applications are reviewed to ensure that eligibility criteria are met and that the required documentation is complete.
3. Eligible applications are evaluated by an independent jury.
4. It is the intent that funding decisions are made by the Board of Directors six to ten weeks after the application deadline.
5. Projects may be submitted a total of two times. Re-submissions must address any notes provided from the previous application. These changes should be clearly outlined.

The Bell Fund Short-Form Digital Series [Assessment Criteria](#) contains the key criteria that are examined in the evaluation process.

For a full list of required documentation refer to the [Document Checklist](#).