



Short-Form Digital Series Guidelines

2021

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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 \$246 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 operating at arm's length from Bell TV and has offices in Toronto and Montreal.

General Policies

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.

Bell Fund recipients are expected to support an inclusive and respectful workplace climate; free of discrimination, bullying and harassment.

The Bell Fund is committed to supporting a more inclusive industry across Canada. This means supporting screen-based creators from underrepresented groups and continuing to work towards gender parity and regional representation. One of the goals therefore, for developing this program was to create opportunities for emerging and established creators and producers, underserved by the screen-based Industry.

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

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.**

NEW Financing is limited to two seasons of a series.

2. Definitions

Short-Form Digital Series: 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.

Independent production company: a Canadian company carrying on business in Canada, with a Canadian business address, owned and controlled by Canadians, whose business is the production of film, videotape or live programs for distribution and in which the licensee or any company related to the licensee owns or controls, directly or indirectly, in aggregate, less than 30% of the equity. (Referenced in 2011 Group-based licensing decisions) (source: CRTC)

Broadcaster Affiliated production company: a Canadian company carrying on business in Canada, with a Canadian business address, owned and controlled by Canadians, whose business is the production of film, videotape or live programs for distribution and, in which, the licensee, or any company related to the licensee owns, in aggregate, a 30% or greater (voting) equity interest. (Referenced in Guide to the CRTC Canadian Program Certification Application Process) (source: CRTC)

3. Application Requirements *(please read carefully)*

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
- A minimum of 10% of the total budget is required as a cash contribution and must be confirmed, at time of application from a source other than 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.
- **NEW** First-time applicants must book a one-on-one information session, via email, at info@bellfund.ca and are encouraged to have a previous Bell Fund applicant review their application before submission.
- **NEW** Emerging producers are encouraged to partner with a mentor (see pg 9 Eligible Applicants).
- **NEW** Applicants applying for production financing for a short-form digital series that also received slate development financing must complete and deliver the development prior to applying.
- **NEW** A preliminary audience development plan (see section d).

Digital Platform/Channel, Streaming Service (“platform”)

a) Pre-Approval of Platform

All non-broadcaster, digital platforms must be pre-approved by Bell Fund prior to application. Producers are encouraged to seek pre-approval before beginning their application. The Digital Platform Pre-Approval Form must be filled out by the platform and co-signed by the Producer.

Bell Fund will review requests and try to provide an answer within two business days. The form must reflect a current commitment from the platform.

A platform need only be pre-approved once by Bell Fund and retains its approved status unless otherwise advised by Bell Fund. A producer submitting an application involving an approved platform does not need to seek further approval, however, must still obtain a current commitment letter from the platform,

Bell Fund reserves the right to determine the acceptability of the service.

b) Platform Requirements

At time of application, applicant must have a licence agreement or meaningful commitment letter from:

1. A digital platform owned, controlled and operated by a Canadian, licensed programming undertaking (eg. OUTtvGo, APTN's Lumi, Savoir media) including operating as a Hybrid VOD service (eg. Crave, Club illico) **or**,
2. A pre-approved digital platform.

Note: The platform must:

- Be available to Canadians and demonstrate that it markets to Canadian audiences (platform may be Canadian or foreign owned).
- Feature premium quality entertainment content.
- Feature short-form digital series that are comparable with short-form digital series financed by Bell Fund.
- Feature original content and not exclusively acquired content.

While eligible productions must initially be created for online/digital distribution on platforms available to Canadian audiences, projects may subsequently be exploited on other platforms such as linear broadcast, either in their original format or through the exploitation of derivative rights (adapted from the CMF Experimental Stream-Digital Linear Series Program Guidelines 2020-2021).

c) Financing Commitments:

1. **Minimum of 10% third party financing** must be confirmed in writing, from a source other than Bell Fund or the Producer. Third parties include (but are not limited to) digital platform/channel licence fees, provincial or federal tax credits, (if eligible), other funding agencies, crowdfunding, Patreon (crowdfunding and Patreon financing must be in place at time of application), sponsorships, and distributors.

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.

***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 production of the series. The budget must be submitted on the template provided by Bell Fund. All financing* must be in place at time of application, minimally with signed and dated commitment letters from each source.

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

You may apply to Bell Fund with unconfirmed financing from other Canadian independent production funds/provincial/federal agencies (such as IPF, Creative B.C., Quebecor, Ontario Creates, CMF, Telus, etc.), provided that all your financing is confirmed **within 60 days of the Bell Fund notification** of financing.

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 indicate whether they intend to submit applications to other funding agencies. Applications that fail to disclose this information will be deemed incomplete. Applicants that have higher or lower budgets under review with other funding agencies must submit the alternate finance scenarios to Bell Fund as part of their application (adapted from the Ontario Creates IDM Fund guidelines). Applicants must inform 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 60 days of Bell Fund notification.

d) Audience Development Plan (previously Discoverability Plan):

NEW - Audience Development Pilot Project 2021

The Bell Fund, Shaw Rocket Fund and Telus Fund are partnering on an Audience Development Pilot Project to provide new tools for producers to plan, measure and increase audiences for their Canadian screen-based content. The Funds have standardized their requirements for an Audience Development Plan. There are 2 phases:

1. **An Audience Development Preliminary Plan** (approx two pages) must be submitted at application. Please refer to the [template](#) for guidance in preparing your plan.
2. **An Audience Development Comprehensive Plan & budget - In the event that your application is approved, a detailed plan will be required within 30 days** from notification of financing. In addition, a budget must be submitted using the audience development [budget template](#) provided by Bell Fund. Note: principal photography must be timed appropriately to align with the plan. Please refer to the [template](#) for guidance in preparing your plan.

NEW - Audience Reporting

The Bell Fund, Shaw Rocket Fund and TELUS Fund will be piloting Magnify Digital's new audience analytics platform **ViewerCentric™**. This will allow for the standardization of audience data collection, measurement and analysis and reporting requirements. Successful applicants who receive financing will be required to set up an account with ViewerCentric.

e) Series Trailer:

1. 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.
2. **Trailers for subsequent Season:** You may not submit the original trailer, but the new trailer can include footage from the previous season. The trailer should have updated text and audio pertaining to the new season.

f) Subsequent Season:

NEW - As of 2021 financing is limited to a total two seasons of a series.

If applying for a 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](#)).

4. Eligible Applicants

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

NEW First-time applicants must book a one-on-one information session, via email, at info@bellfund.ca and are encouraged to have a previous Bell Fund applicant review their application before submission.

NEW For those less experienced producers and emerging creators/producers, it is recommended that an experienced mentor be engaged for the application process. The applicant is encouraged to demonstrate the involvement of the mentor with a brief letter of support.

NEW - Broadcaster-affiliated companies are limited to a maximum of 15% 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:

- 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 Comprehensive Audience Development Plan are captured in the Audience Development Budget) (see below).
- b. **Audience Development Plan for Digital Series** – If series is Board approved for financing, an additional amount, up to a maximum of \$50,000, can be requested for the cost of implementing the Audience Development Plan. Applicants are encouraged to increase the budget for audience development by securing financing from an additional source.

6. Eligible Content

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 have described video.
- Have a meaningful Covid-19 safety production plan.
- 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.
- **The Bell Fund encourages all Applicants to respect the guiding principles and best practices set out in the [On-Screen Protocols & Pathways Media Production Guide](#).**

7. Ineligible Content

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).

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

8. Evaluation Process

1. Applications are reviewed to ensure that eligibility criteria are met and that the required documentation is complete.
2. Eligible applications are evaluated by an independent jury.
3. It is the intent that funding decisions are made by the Board of Directors six to ten weeks after the application deadline.
4. An application may be submitted a total of two times. Re-submissions must address any notes provided from the previous application.

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](#).