



2025 SHORT-FORM DIGITAL SERIES
PRODUCTION PROGRAM
GUIDELINES

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ABOUT 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 \$300 million in financial contributions from Bell TV to support Canadian 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. The Fund is governed by a nine-member Board of Directors (Board) operating at arm's length from Bell TV and has offices in Toronto and Montreal.

Guiding Principles

The Bell Fund is committed to supporting a more equitable, diverse, inclusive and accessible industry across Canada. This means supporting screen-based producers/creators who are Indigenous and/or identify as being from an Equity-deserving Community such as Black, racialized, women and gender-diverse, 2SLGBTQIA+, persons with disabilities, regional and Official Language Minority Community (OLMC), and/or emerging screen-based producers/creators and teams.

Please consider how you engage with individuals and communities as you proceed with your Projects. Applicants and production teams are encouraged to refer to resources and respect the guiding principles and best practices set out in:

- the Indigenous Screen Office [On-Screen Protocols & Pathways: A Media Production Guide](#);
- the Black Screen Office [Being Seen: Directives for Creating Authentic and Inclusive Content](#); and
- Reelworld [#HerFrameMatters Protocol Guidelines](#).

INTERPRETATION AND OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

These Guidelines are for the information and convenience of Applicants. They provide an overview of the objectives of the Bell Fund, the manner in which the Bell Fund is administered, and information on typical administrative practices of the Bell Fund. Compliance with these Guidelines is a prerequisite for funding eligibility.

Interpretation

The Board 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.

All Applicants must also abide by the [Program Policies](#) of the Bell Fund.

Projects that receive Bell Fund funding in a given year are subject to the Guidelines and Bell Fund policies in effect for that fiscal year. To be clear, changes to Bell Fund Guidelines and/or Policies made in a subsequent fiscal year will not apply retroactively, unless specifically stated. The Bell Fund fiscal year is January 1 to December 31.

Please note: These Guidelines may be changed or modified as required, without notice. Please consult the Bell Fund website at www.bellfund.ca for the latest Guideline news and documentation.

Provision of Documentation

It is the responsibility of the Applicant to ensure the Bell Fund receives all relevant documentation and to update such documentation and information after a material change. The Bell Fund may request other documentation and information to conduct an assessment and evaluation of the Project and, once assessed, to complete file reviews. For the purposes of Project assessment and evaluation, the Bell Fund reserves the right to rely solely on the written and audiovisual materials initially submitted by the Applicant.

Failure to Comply

If an Applicant fails to comply with these Guidelines, as determined by the Bell Fund, then the Bell Fund may refuse the application, revoke the eligibility status of the Applicant's Project and may demand repayment of any sums paid to the Applicant.

Misrepresentation

If at any time, an Applicant as required by the Guidelines or as requested by the Bell Fund, provides false information or omits material information in connection with an Application, the Applicant may suffer serious consequences. These may include, among other outcomes:

- Loss of eligibility for funding of the current Project;
- Loss of eligibility for funding of future Projects;
- Repayment of any funds already advanced, with interest; and/or
- Criminal prosecution, in the case of fraud.

These measures may be imposed not only on the Applicant but also on related, associated and affiliated companies and individuals (as determined by the Bell Fund at its sole discretion). Any Applicant receiving approval for funding will be required to sign a legally enforceable Financing Agreement, which includes further provisions concerning misrepresentations, defaults, and related matters.

Program Policies

These Guidelines are to be read in conjunction with the [Bell Fund Program Policies](#).

GENERAL POLICIES

Bell Fund Applicants are expected to support an inclusive and respectful workplace climate; free of discrimination, bullying and harassment. This includes their dealings with the Bell Fund and its Board and staff.

Content must be compliant with all standards and policies applicable to broadcasting and to intellectual property laws and not infringe upon any public or private rights and not otherwise contravene any civil and/or criminal laws in effect in Canada.

Environmental Sustainability

Bell Fund encourages all Applicants to implement more environmentally sustainable practices including the use of cleaner technologies and reducing the use of unsustainable resources, in the development, production and exploitation of projects. Applicants and production teams are encouraged to refer to resources such as the Producing for the Planet – Action Guide, Reel Green, Rolling Green, and Ontario Green Screen.

ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility Support

The Bell Fund welcomes applications from people with disabilities, people who are Deaf, and people who have barriers to accessing technology. Support for application assistance is also available to First Nations, Inuit or Métis applicants facing language, geographic and/or cultural barriers.

Upon request, Applicants that have accessibility needs, face accessibility barriers, or require accommodations may request an alternative process or format for submitting an application, or funds (up to \$500 per application) towards service providers to assist with your application.

Services may include, but are not limited to, assistance in creating an account and navigating the Online Application Portal or the Bell Fund self-identification data collection portal; and/or transcribing, editing, and translating application materials.

Please note that receiving Accessibility Support funds does not guarantee a successful application nor will it impact evaluation scores during the application evaluation process. To request support, please contact Bell Fund at info@bellfund.ca at least four (4) weeks before the applicable closing deadline for a Program.

Accessible Content

The Bell Fund requires all projects funded in production to be delivered with Closed Captioning and Described Video.

SHORT-FORM DIGITAL SERIES PRODUCTION PROGRAM

1. INTRODUCTION

The Short-Form Digital Series Program is a selective program that supports Canadian producers and creators by funding high quality original series for digital platforms and online audiences.

Financing is limited to any two (2) seasons of a Project. The seasons need not be consecutive.

2. ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Eligible Applicants to the Short-Form Digital Series Production Program will be either a:

1. “Canadian Independent Production Company” - Is a for-profit (i.e., a taxable Canadian corporation, within the meaning of Canada’s Income Tax Act) production company that is Canadian-controlled as determined in sections 26 to 28 of the Investment Canada Act and has its head office in Canada; or a
2. “Broadcaster Affiliated Production Company” - Is a Canadian production company carrying on business in Canada, with a Canadian business address, owned and controlled by Canadians, whose business is the production of film, video or live programs for distribution and, in which, a broadcasting licensee, or any company related to the broadcasting licensee owns, in aggregate a 30% or greater (voting) equity interest.

Broadcaster Affiliated Production Companies are limited to a maximum of 25% of the Short-Form Digital Series Production Program Funding.

Eligible Applicants must also be in good standing with the Bell Fund. Note that Applicants that received Bell Fund Slate Development funding for the Project for which they are applying must have completed and delivered the Slate Development (for that Project) prior to submitting the application to the Short-Form Digital Series Production Program.

First-time applicants are encouraged to watch the Short-Form Digital Series Production Program Webinar prior to applying.

3. ELIGIBLE PROJECTS

Eligible Projects must be a series of episodes in an Eligible Genre (defined below) that meet the following criteria:

1. Be live-action in an Eligible Genre;
2. Include a minimum of six (6) episodes;
3. Have a minimum average episodic running time between five (5) minutes and twenty (20) minutes;
4. Has not commenced principal photography at the time of the Application;

5. Qualify for CRTC or Canadian Audio–Visual Certification Office (CAVCO) program certification with a minimum of 6 out of 10 points (unless otherwise stated in CAVCO guidelines or regulations) or as an official treaty coproduction certified by Telefilm. Additionally, at least one of either the Director or Screenwriter positions and at least one of the two lead performers must be Canadian;
6. Must conform to the Canadian Association of Broadcasters' (CAB) code of ethics as well as the CRTC's programming standards including but not limited to sex-role portrayals and television violence;
7. Must have a signed agreement (deal memo or commitment letter is sufficient at application stage) with an eligible Digital Platform and must be initially developed and produced for and released on a Digital Platform;
8. Must be made available exclusively on a Digital Platform for a minimum of seven (7) days;
9. Rights are owned and meaningfully developed by Canadians and creative and financial control remains with the Canadian producer throughout the production and postproduction. The Bell Fund acknowledges that copyright for Indigenous productions may be held by communities and is open to ways to demonstrate the required control.
10. If applying for a subsequent season, the majority of the previous season must have been released.

Eligible Genres

The following [CRTC program categories](#) will be considered Eligible Genres of Projects in the Slate Development Program (with additional consideration below):

- Category 2a (Documentary only)
- Documentary that would otherwise align with Category 2b) (with the exception of the minimum running time; subject to Bell Fund approval and not including one-off documentary)
- Category 5a) Formal Education & Pre-school (live-action only)
- Category 5b) Informal Education/Recreation & Leisure
- Category 7 Drama and Comedy (except 7c, 7d, 7e), and 7g)
- Category 11(b) Reality television

For Bell Fund eligibility, only Canadian-originated IP will be considered. Eligibility will be determined at the sole discretion of the Bell Fund.

Eligible projects must be produced as an ongoing series (e.g. not a mini-series or limited series).

Ineligible Genres

The following [CRTC program categories](#) will be considered Ineligible Genres of Projects in the Short-Form Digital Series Production Program (with additional consideration below):

- Licensed formats (which are not Canadian-originated)
- Category 1 News
- Category 2 a) Analysis and Interpretation (projects that are not short-form documentary such as talk or panel shows, consumer affairs or reviews, newsmagazines as determined by the Bell Fund)
- Category 3 Reporting & Actualities
- Category 4 Religion
- Category 5 a) Formal Education & Pre-school (animation)
- Category 6 Sports
- Category 7c) Specials, mini-series, and made-for-TV feature films
- Category 7d) Theatrical feature films aired on television
- Category 7e) Animated television programs and films
- Category 7g) Other drama, including, but not limited to, readings, narratives, improvisations, tapes/films of live theatre not developed specifically for television, experimental shorts, video clips, continuous action animation (e.g. puppet shows)
- Category 8a) Music and dance
- Category 8b) Music video clips
- Category 8c) Music video programs
- Category 9 Variety
- Category 10 Game shows
- Category 11(a) General entertainment and human interest
- Category 12 Interstitials
- Category 13 Public service announcements
- Category 14 Infomercials, promotional and corporate videos
- Category 15 Filler programming
- Broadcaster in-house programming
- Telethons and fundraising
- Interactive Digital Media

Market Interest

In order to be eligible, Applications must include a commitment from an eligible Digital Platform (also known as a channel), defined below.

Consideration will be given for platforms that are already part of CAVCO's [List of Acceptable Online Services pursuant to CAVCO Public Notice 2017-01](#).

A "Digital Platform":

- makes content available in English, French, Indigenous languages, or a combination ;
- is available in Canada AND markets to audiences in Canada;
- features a variety of high-quality entertainment content that is comparable to short-form digital series that Bell Fund has financed in the past;
- has been active for at least twelve (12) months;
- has posted new content within the last six (6) months;
- has at least 30,000 (English) or 15,000 (French) subscribers;
- has total views of at least 300,000 views (English) or 150,000 views (French);
- features content or serves audiences that are a clear fit for the proposed Project (and does not feature primarily ineligible genres);
- will assist the Producer in contributing to Audience Development and will share audience data related to the Project;
- complies with the Canadian Association of Broadcasters' (CAB) code of ethics and with the regulations, policies, and rulings of the CRTC guidelines on violence and sex-role portrayal, which includes prohibiting any explicit sex, excessive violence, sexual violence or sexual exploitation, or any matter which is libelous, slanderous or obscene, or in any other way unlawful; and
- is one of the following:
 - a. digital platform owned, controlled, and operated by a Canadian broadcaster, or digital platform operating as a Hybrid VOD service (e.g., OUTtv, APTN lumi, Gem, Tou.TV); or
 - b. a digital platform/channel (Canadian or foreign owned) that is eligible for Bell Fund's Short-Form Digital Series Production Program.

Community Channels are not eligible Digital Platforms; some exceptions may be made for channels in the North.

The Digital Platform must provide an agreement that outlines the terms of its commitment including but not limited to:

- Any financial contribution, licence fee, and/or advances;
- Revenue sharing (if applicable);
- Audience Development support; and
- to have the production shown in Canada within the first two (2) years after it is completed and commercially exploitable; and exclusively on the digital platform for a minimum of seven (7) days.

4. DEADLINES AND APPLICATION PROCESS

All Applications must be submitted through the [Bell Fund Application Portal](#). Documents must be current and relevant to this application deadline.

Important Dates

| | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Application Portal Opens | July 29, 2025 |
| PROGRAM DEADLINE: Application Portal Closes | August 26, 2025 (7pm ET) |

Number of Applications

An Applicant may submit a maximum of two (2) applications for funding per Deadline.

Funding is limited to any two (2) seasons of a series. (e.g. If your series has already had two (2) seasons funded by Bell Fund you are not eligible to apply with that series). The seasons need not be consecutive.

Projects not approved from previous Short-Form Digital Series Production Program deadlines may only apply once more with the same project.

Projects may only be funded in one (1) Bell Fund Program at a time. (e.g. a Project that was funded in the Slate Development Program must be delivered, and the same Project cannot be funded in both the TV Production Program and the Short-Form Digital Series Program)

Application Assessment

Projects in the Short-Form Digital Series Production Program are assessed through a competitive process. To make funding decisions, the Bell Fund will rely on a jury of industry experts; recommendations from this jury will be made to the Board for consideration and final selection using the Evaluation Grid (see section 7 below).

Funding decisions are made by the Board of Directors. It is the intent that funding decisions are made by the Board of Directors 10 - 12 weeks following the application deadline.

Advancing Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

The Bell Fund is committed to supporting a more equitable, diverse, inclusive and accessible industry across Canada. This means supporting screen-based producers/creators who are Indigenous and/or identify as being from an Equity-seeking community such as Black, racialized, women and gender-diverse, 2SLGBTQIA+,

persons with disabilities, regional¹ and Official Language Minority Community (OLMC), or emerging screen-based producers/creators and teams.

Commencing in 2025, the Bell Fund has committed that it will allocate at least 10% of its total budget to an envelope dedicated to OLMC producers (in either official language) and producers from diverse communities (as defined by the CRTC). A minimum of 5% to OLMC and 5% to diverse communities.

Self-identification Data Collection Process

To further the commitments established in the Bell Fund's guiding principles, measure progress, and align with other funders, Bell Fund is collecting information related to identity and representation from individuals associated with applications to its programs. The self-identification data collection questionnaire allows individuals to disclose their demographic information on a voluntary basis, confidentially and securely to the Bell Fund.

Using a questionnaire based on the Canada Media Fund PERSONA-ID data collection systems, the collection and analysis of self-identification data will allow the Bell Fund to:

- Determine compliance with assessment criteria (where applicable);
- Assess whether progress is being made in achieving the goals set out in our guiding principles;
- Consider any changes that may be required to the programs to meet objectives; and
- Provide aggregated data to the Board and other industry stakeholders who have an interest in the Bell Fund.

1. Applicants are required to provide a Self-Identification Data Code (SID-code) for each Company Owner (including Shareholders) and Key Creative Personnel who are confirmed as part of the Project.
2. To obtain a SID-code, all Company Owners and Key Creatives must create an account on the [Bell Fund Self-Identification Data Collection Portal](#) and complete a confidential online questionnaire. The disclosure of any individual identity data is voluntary and will be kept confidential ("I prefer not to answer" is an option within the questions).
3. Applicants will be required to enter the SID-codes into the [Self-Identification Data Code List](#). Evaluators will only consider materials submitted by the deadline. If an SID-code is not included as part of the application, the information may not be included in the processing of the application.
4. Please consult the [Self-Identification Data Collection Process Webpage](#) for additional information.

Audience Development

Audience Development is important to the success of any Project. Successful Applicants to the Short-Form Digital Series Production Program receive additional funding of \$30,000 to support activities related to advancing audience engagement for the Project.

¹ Regional defined as 150 kilometers outside of Toronto (English-language projects) and Montreal (French-language projects).

There are two phases:

1. At the time of Application for Short-Form Digital Series production, an Audience Development Plan (maximum 10 pages) must be submitted.
2. If approved for funding an updated Audience Development Plan and Budget may be required.

Following the launch of the Project, a Final Audience Development Report and Final Audience Development Cost Report will be required. Digital Platforms are expected to share data or information on the performance of the Project with the Applicant in order to complete these reports.

Proof of Concept Video

Applicants are required to submit a Proof of Concept Video as part of the application. The purpose of this Proof of Concept Video is to inform the understanding of the tone, pace and other creative elements of the Project.

New Series

If applying with a new series, please submit a link to a non-broadcast demo or pitch reel. This video should be a maximum of two (2) minutes and reflect the look, feel, tone and pace of the proposed Project. It may be comprised of original footage or found footage.

Subsequent Season

If applying for a subsequent season you may use or adapt a trailer or teaser from a previous season provided it reflects the look and feel of the proposed new season including on-screen talent.

5. FUNDING CONTRIBUTION

Amount of Contribution

The Bell Fund will solely decide the amount of its financial contribution to an Eligible Project, up to a Maximum Contribution. The Maximum Contribution shall be the lesser of 75% of the Project's Eligible Costs or \$150,000 for production, and additionally up to \$30,000 for audience development (the audience development contribution may account for up to 100% of those eligible costs).

Coproductions and Coventures

For Treaty Coproductions and/or majority Canadian-owned Coventures, the Maximum Contribution for the Eligible Project will be calculated on the lesser of the Eligible Costs of the Canadian portion of the Eligible Project global budget and the Eligible Costs of the Canadian portion of the global final costs of the Eligible Project, as certified by Telefilm Canada Business Affairs and Certification Department. Treaty Coproductions as determined by Telefilm and Coventures as determined by the CRTC.

Nature of Contribution

The Bell Fund funding will be in the form of a non-repayable contribution.

Note: Bell Fund's non-repayable contribution is considered assistance and will impact tax credit calculations.

6. ELIGIBLE COSTS

Applicants must complete the [Short-Form Digital Series Production Budget Template](#).

The expectation is that all budget costs will be spent in Canada, and on Canadians. Up to 25% of the budget may be spent on non-Canadian costs provided that the Applicant can establish the need for the non-Canadian costs. Applicant will prepare the Non- Canadian Costs Declaration within the Budget Template for any and all non-Canadian labour services and/or products.

For audiovisual treaty coproductions and coventures, eligible costs will apply to the Canadian portion of the global budget.

Please also refer to the [Bell Fund Program Policies](#) for additional information regarding budgeting and financing considerations including Insurance requirements and policies regarding Producer Fees, Corporate Overhead, Cost Reporting and Contingency.

7. SHORT-FORM DIGITAL SERIES PRODUCTION PROGRAM - EVALUATION GRID

For the purposes of assessment and evaluation, the jury will rely solely on the written and audiovisual materials initially submitted by the Applicant.

| Assessment Criteria | Points | Point Details |
|---------------------------|-------------|--|
| Team (27) | 16 | Track record (experience and/or achievement) of Applicant company and <u>confirmed</u> Key Creative Team (Producer(s), Writer(s), Director(s)). |
| | 2 | Applicant Company is majority (51% or more) owned and controlled by individuals who are from a Diverse Community. |
| | 2 | Applicant Company is majority (51% or more) owned and controlled by individuals who identify as women and/or gender diverse. |
| | 2 | 40% of the cumulative paid positions on the Key Creative Team are held by individuals who are from Diverse Communities. |
| | 2 | 40% or more of the cumulative paid positions on the Key Creative Team are held by individuals that identify as women and/or gender diverse. |
| | 2 | Applicant Company is majority (51% or more) owned and controlled by individuals who identify as OLMC. |
| | 1 | Applicant Company is considered emerging, or from regions outside of Toronto (English)/Montreal (French) |
| Content (30) | 10 | Excellence of creative materials. Quality and strength. Creative Materials: Treatment/Bible/Script(s). |
| | 5 | Potential to result in critical or commercial success |
| | 10 | Quality and strength of the Proof-of-Concept Video. |
| | 5 | Approach to cultural sensitivity with regard to the subject matter and/or intended audience. |
| Feasibility (15) | 5 | Budget – Reasonableness and appropriateness of budget relative to the proposed project. |
| | 5 | Schedule – Realistic schedule and likelihood of the Project to proceed without delay. |
| | 5 | Financing Plan (confirmed third-party financing and ability to cash-flow production). |
| Market Interest (15) | 5 | Alignment between Digital Platform and the target audience for the series. |
| | 10 | Potential to result in critical or commercial success (reach and/or support from Digital Platform). For subsequent season this may include previous performance. |
| Audience Development (10) | 10 | Potential for success based on proposed audience development plans – appropriateness of ideas, potential partners, feasibility and expertise required for execution. |
| Sustainability (3) | 3 | How effective will the Applicant Sustainability Plan be in advancing ecoresponsibility? |
| TOTAL | /100 | |

8. DOCUMENT CHECKLIST

All documents must be uploaded through the [Online Application Portal](#). Underlined document(s) have links to template(s).

Documents to be uploaded

| | | |
|----|---|----------------------|
| 1 | Project Details Form | Required |
| 2 | Signed Proof of Rights Attestation Form (to be made available in May 2025) | Required |
| 3 | Agreement with Digital Platform (deal memo or commitment letter is sufficient at application stage) | Required |
| 4 | 2025 Digital Platform Support Form | Required |
| 5 | Proof of other financing (if applicable) | If applicable |
| 6 | Short-Form Digital Series Production Budget (.xls or .xlsx) | Required |
| 7 | Audience Development Plan (maximum of 10 pages, to be made available in May 2025) | Required |
| 8 | Articles of Incorporation of Applicant | Required |
| 9 | Creative Materials that best represent the project (e.g. outlines, scripts, bible, link to episode, etc.) | Required |
| 10 | Production Schedule | Required |
| 11 | Credits of Applicant Company | Required |
| 12 | List of <u>confirmed</u> Key Creative Team (with links to IMDB/website) | Required |
| 13 | CVs of <u>confirmed</u> Key Creative Team (experience and achievements) | If applicable |
| 14 | Bell Fund Self-Identification Production Code List | Required |
| 15 | Sustainability Plan (please use the Producing for the Planet template) | Required |
| 16 | Coproduction Agreement (if applicable) | If applicable |
| 17 | Additional documents (if applicable) | If applicable |

Please email info@bellfund.ca for technical assistance.

NOTES:

- No .ZIP files – for multiple documents please upload each file separately. To upload more than one document or for documents not listed, please use “Additional Documents”
- Keep file names short with no symbols
- Acceptable file types for upload are: .pdf, .jpeg, .jpg, .doc, .docx, .xls, .csv, .xlsx, .txt, .mov, .avi, .mp4, .wmv, .png, .ppt, .pptx, .tif
- Do NOT email documents