

# Independent Documentary Filmmaker 101

## Documentary Film Proposal Breakdown

### 1. Cover Letter

- Written on letterhead
- Addressed to a particular person (you will confirm whom this is in your call to the grant officer prior to applying)
- Brief introduction of project/production company
- Why you are applying to them (*hint: how your project fulfills the funders requirements/mission/objectives*)
- How much funding you are requesting
- What that money will be used for
- Thank them for their time & consideration
- Tell them not to hesitate in contacting you if they have any questions

**Tip:** Keep it brief and try not to just repeat content you have within your proposal

### 2. Cover/Title Page

- Production company name
- Film title
- Contact person's name & title e.g. you or producer
- Contact info to inc. address, phone number, email address & website
- Key art / film logo

**Option:** Fiscal sponsors name & information inc. an address, a phone number, email address, website and person of contact.

### 3. Contents Page

- List each section of your proposal with the relevant page number

### 4. Project Description

#### **A. Logline** (*suggested length: Approx. 2 to 3 sentences*)

- Brief and catchy summary capturing the essence of your story.

#### **B. Story Summary/Synopsis** (*suggested length: Approx. 1 to 2 pages*)

- Overview of story in more detail
- Introduce main character(s)
- Introduce plot points
- Share the 'hook' of the story
- Structure of story
- Narrative trajectory
- Potential character arcs
- Capture & articulate the emotive elements of your story
- Capture imagination and interest of the reader

### C. Interview Subjects, Narrator or Cast (Optional)

- Choose a selection of interviewees or characters from your film
- Also experts or consultants featuring in your film
- Give a brief description of each, which highlights what they bring to the film
- If your narrator is a known person, then include his/her bio here
- If your reenactment or other cast are known, then include bios here
- Include a photograph of each interview subject next to their bio
- If you haven't confirmed your interviewees, narrator or cast you can list your potentials, but ensure you give clarity

**Tip:** Do not include all your interviewees or experts! In total this section should include between 3 and 5 bios. Include only those that enhance your proposal.

**Suggested length:** Approx 1 paragraph per bio

### D. Topic Summary (suggested length: Approx. 1 to 2 pages)

- Why topic is important, timely or relevant
- Why the world needs this film
- Why you are the best person to make this film
- Explain cultural or social relevance & context
- Background or context for story
- Explain what makes this film compelling
- Detail topics, issues, themes, challenges and stakes project will cover
- Questions your film will answer
- Refer to films on the same topic and explain why yours is new and different from anything else
- Use data where relevant

### E. Artistic Approach (suggested length: Approx. 1 page)

- The look and feel of the film. What are the audience seeing? How are the audience feeling?
- What artistic approach informs the storytelling
- Who's perspective the film is from
- Use of narrator, talking heads, archival footage or reenactments
- Examples of other films that highlight your points esp. on any visual or emotive aspects of your film
- Describe your films content in such a way that the reader can see it playing out in front of their very eyes
- Create a visual enactment of the film on paper
- Share the equipment and format of the footage you will use, if relevant

## **F. Project Stage & Timeline** (suggested length: Approx. ½ page)

- Current status of the project
- Projected production timeline (current to distribution)
- Include creative & production processes
- Detail major project activities
- Production schedules
- Anticipated post-production and release dates

**Tip:** Rather than use specific dates or months for your production schedule instead consider using quarters, e.g. Year one 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> quarter then year two 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, etc or use seasons. This will help with the almost inevitable delays or changes, which may occur.

## **5. Audience and Distribution**

### **A. Distribution & Marketing Strategy** (suggested length: Approx. ½ page)

- Share intended plans for securing distribution for the life of your film or if you will self-distribute
- Where and how your film will be released
- Share plans for festival, theatrical &/or community screenings
- Plans to broadcast on PBS, a specific network or cable channel
- Plans to screen online, on platform such as, Netflix, Amazon or Hulu
- Plans to create a national or international tour
- Plans for DVD release or online 'Video On Demand'
- Plans to share the film online for free for a period of time
- Use as an educational resource to schools & universities
- How grassroots and community outreach will help with marketing the film

**Tip:** Be convincing, but don't overdo it. Funders will sense if you are being realistic and have done your research.

### **B. Intended Audience** (suggested length: Approx. ½ page)

- Anticipated audience
- Niche down and be specific
- Include age, race, gender, specific organisations, socio-economic groups, etc. where relevant
- Any underserved audiences you will reach
- How you will reach your target audience(s)
- If you will utilize interactive elements such as social media, website or crowd funding
- Needs and interests of this audience
- How and why your film will appeal to your intended audience
- Provide demographic and statistical information
- Your relationship & access to this community

### **C. Audience Engagement & Social Impact (if applicable)**

- Intention to activate audiences and constituencies toward specific goals
- Actions that you hope viewers will take after seeing your film
- Potential activities i.e. educational guides, community screenings, social media strategies, multi-platform activity or social change campaigns
- Partner relationships on the issues you address & impact they are having

**Suggested length:** Approx. ½ page

### **D. Partnerships** (suggested length: Approx. ½ page)

- List groups and organisations that are already affiliated with your project and those that you are in the process of bringing onboard
- Include your fiscal sponsor. How does their mission align with the intention of your film, if it does.
- Refer to partnership letters of support, if you have any.

## **6. Key Creative Personnel, Advisors & Consultants**

### **A. Bios of Key Creative Personnel**

- Brief one paragraph bios for each key personnel – Director, Producer, Cinematographer and Editor
- Include notable credits, relevant expertise, major accomplishments and significant awards
- If relevant, include why they have gotten involved with this project
- Include a photograph of each personnel member next to their bio

**Note:** Ensure each member of your crew sound credible. Try to include members with greater experience if yours is limited.

**Suggested length:** Approx 1 paragraph per bio (50 -150 words)

### **B. Advisors & Consultants** (suggested length: Approx 1 paragraph per bio)

- Brief bio for each advisor, consultant or mentor supporting you/your project
- Include a photograph of each person next to their bio (*with permission*)

## 7. Fundraising Strategy and Grant Impact

### A. Fundraising Strategy

- Be specific with your strategy for raising the funds necessary to complete your film
- Inform of how much you need/total remaining budget
- Inform of the sources in which you will garner funding
- Inform of the amounts you anticipate receiving from each

**Tip:** *Keep it realistic and in most cases multi-faceted. Funders need to know you will finish your film!*

**Suggested length:** Approx 1 paragraph

### B. Funding to Date

- List funding sources where you have secured funds and where they are pending/in progress
- Clearly distinguish between funding secured, applied for or in progress
- State the amount of money secured, applied for or in progress
- Use a three column table to input the information
- State the current date to show when the information was correct/up-to-date (*optional*)

### C. Amount Requested/Impact (*suggested length: Approx 1 paragraph*)

- How much money (or other goods) you are requesting
- Should you receive funding, describe how the funds would be used
- How the money requested will help the project move forward

**Note:** Be sure that the amount requested is within the amount designated for the grant. If unsure of giving amount, discuss with the grant officer. Do your research on previous giving amounts.

## 8. Budget

### A. Comprehensive Line Item Expense Budget

- Provide a line item detailed budget of projected expenses
- Ensure it ranges from development to distribution
- Provide a budget total
- Ensure your budget is realistic and in line with your production ideas
- Use an industry standard excel template or budgeting software

**Tip:** *Remember that often grants are being judged by filmmakers, who will know realistic costs. Provide notes for any areas that may be viewed as questionable or require further explanation.*

**Note:** *Check the currency that the funder is requesting the budget be in, if you are applying abroad.*

## 9. Work Sample

### A. Director's Prior Work (If applicable)

- Describe the sample you have submitted inc. narrative, aesthetic or communication intentions
- Relevance of work to current project, if any
- Explain how your current project differs from this work

*Note: Only include this if it is requested, and if optional, that it will be beneficial to your proposal*

### B. Current Sample/Rough Cut (If applicable)

- Describe the sample you have submitted
- Explain what reviewers should be looking for
- What is present or missing from the sample
- How the sample will differ from the finished film
- How it is representative of intended story, style, subject or another aspect of the project
- Rough cut – Explain changes or additional material you have planned

*Note: If you do not have a sample or a rough cut, then utilize your fundraising, promotional or teaser videos which show the tone and style of your film.*

## 10. Supplemental Questions

### A. Supplemental Question (If applicable)

- Provide any supplemental material or answer any additional questions requested of you here.

## 11. Supportive Materials

### A. Supportive Materials (Optional)

- Letters of support from your fiscal sponsor, distributor, broadcasting organisations or other people or professionals of note on the topic of your film
- If you have mentioned their support in your proposal then consider including a copy of their letter as a supportive resource