



First Nations Screen Fellowship

Grant Guidelines

About the program

The First Nations Screen Fellowship provides mid-career to established First Nations screen practitioners a dynamic range of funding and support across a 12-month period. In addition to providing strategic professional development opportunities, the Fellowship aims to raise the national and global profile of experienced First Nations key creatives in NSW.

This career-boosting program offers one Fellowship recipient \$25,000 of funding and support, including:

- \$15,500 in early project development funding
- \$6,000 in international travel funding to attend the 2026 SXSW Film & TV Festival in Austin, Texas (USA)
- \$500 in funding for membership fees to a relevant screen industry guild
- Access to an industry mentor for 12 months (worth \$3,000)
- A 2026 SXSW Film & TV Badge (provided by SXSW Sydney).

Delivered in partnership with SXSW Sydney, Screen NSW welcomes applications to the First Nations Screen Fellowship from eligible practitioners with a demonstrated track record in the screen industry.

Key information

- Funding value: \$25,000
- Applications open: Monday 4 August 2025, 1pm (AEST)
- Applications close: Friday 5 September 2025, 2pm (AEST)
- Designated Decision-Maker: Head of Screen NSW
- Grant opportunity type: Open, competitive
- [Program page](#)
- [Apply here](#).

Program objectives

The objectives of the First Nations Screen Fellowship are to:

- Support professional development for mid-career and established First Nations key creatives
- Assist early-stage project development from local First Nations screen talent
- Help NSW-based First Nations screen practitioners connect with national and global screen industries and reinvest back into the NSW content landscape
- Build industry connections to strengthen the NSW First Nations screen community
- Increase industry participation of screen practitioners from NSW Government key priority areas
- Raise the national and global profile of NSW-based First Nations talent
- Increase accessibility to opportunities that foster the global advancement of the NSW screen industry and First Nations practitioners
- Facilitate mentorship opportunities between First Nations practitioners and screen industry leaders.

The First Nations Screen Fellowship is funded and administered by Screen NSW, an entity within the Department of Creative Industries, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport (DCITHS).

Eligibility criteria

Who can apply

To be eligible for the First Nations Screen Fellowship, applicants must:

- Identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander*
- Be over 18 years of age
- Be an NSW resident (i.e., lived in NSW for at least 6 months immediately before the date of application)
- Be an Australian citizen
- Be a mid-career or established key creative with demonstrable experience in producing or creating screen content
- Have a body of key creative credits: writer, director, producer
- Be available to accept the First Nations Screen Fellowship at SXSW Sydney Bush Shorts opening night on 16 October 2025
- Be available to attend the 2026 SXSW Film & TV Festival from March 12-18 in Austin, Texas (USA)
- Commit to regular meetings with an industry mentor throughout the Fellowship
- Commit to being a guest speaker at a Screen NSW *Gathering Ground* session in 2026 (date to be confirmed in consultation with successful Fellow)
- Have an Australian Business Number (ABN)

- Adhere to general eligibility requirements under the Screen NSW [Terms of Trade](#).

**An Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander is a person of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which they live.*

What is the definition of a mid-career or established practitioner?

For this program, Screen NSW defines a mid-career or established practitioner as:

- Mid-Career: Key creative credits on 2 or more screen projects released via formal/informal channels (e.g., online, broadcaster, studio, streamer)
- Established: Key creative credits on 5 or more projects released via formal channels (e.g., online, broadcaster, studio, streamer).

Who cannot apply

Applicants will be ineligible to apply for the First Nations Screen Fellowship if they:

- Do not identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- Are an early or emerging screen practitioner
- Are a full-time tertiary student
- Are applying on behalf of an organisation
- Intend to develop a project throughout the Fellowship that has already started or is due to be completed before end of the program
- Cannot attend the 2026 SXSW Film & TV Festival
- Are in breach of any obligation under any funding agreement it has with Screen NSW
- Are a previous First Nations Screen Fellowship recipient.

Funding

Available funding

The successful Fellowship recipient will receive funding and support worth \$22,000 in grant funding and \$3,000 of value in-kind, the makeup of which includes:

- Early Project Development Funding - \$15,500
- International Travel Grant - \$6,000
- Industry Mentorship - \$3,000 (in-kind value)
- Industry Membership - \$500
- 2026 SXSW Film & TV Badge (in-kind).

Early Project Development Funding (\$15,500)

The \$15,500 in early project development funding must be used for the development of new creative works. The successful Fellow is not permitted to use this funding to work on an already substantially developed project. This funding may be used to support activities such as concept development, writing and story development, research, community engagement, and the development of creative materials. During the Fellowship, it is expected that the Fellow will develop their project with ongoing input from their industry mentor.

As part of the final acquittal process, the Fellow must submit the following creative materials (dependent on project format) to Screen NSW at the end of the Fellowship program:

- Feature (narrative or documentary): Pitch Deck, Treatment
- TV Series (narrative or documentary): Pitch Deck, Series Outline, Character Breakdowns.

International Travel Grant (\$6,000)

The \$6,000 international travel grant is for covering the costs of attending the 2026 SXSW Film & TV Festival in Austin, Texas (USA) from March 12-18, 2026. This grant must be used for flights, accommodation, ground travel, per diems, and other reasonable travel expenses.

Industry Mentorship (worth \$3,000)

Screen NSW will assist the Fellow with accessing a suitable industry mentor for the duration of the Fellowship.

In the application form, applicants must identify up to three mentors from the screen industry that they believe can accelerate their career, industry knowledge, and professional development. These mentors can be from both the national and global screen industries.

Screen NSW will attempt to facilitate a connection between the successful Fellow and one of their identified mentors. If no identified mentors are available, Screen NSW will work with the Fellow to secure another suitable industry mentor aligned with the Fellow's career and professional goals.

Throughout the 12-month program, the Fellow must meet regularly with their mentor, with confirmed meetings to be scheduled in advance. It is the responsibility of the Fellow to schedule all meetings with their mentor, and the Fellow must inform Screen NSW of any relevant outcomes from these meetings.

Note: Screen NSW will pay fees directly to the selected Mentor, up to the value of \$3,000.

Industry Membership (\$500)

The Fellow will receive \$500 to cover membership fees to a relevant industry guild (e.g., Australian Directors' Guild, Australian Writers' Guild, Screen Producers Australia).

2026 SXSW Film & TV Badge

The Fellow will receive a complimentary 2026 SXSW Film & TV Badge, provided in-kind by SXSW Sydney.

The Film & TV Badge will provide the Fellow with primary entry to all SXSW Film & TV Festival screenings, Film & TV sessions, mentors and workshops at the SXSW Conference, Comedy Festival showcases, plus secondary access to a majority of Interactive and Music programming.

SXSW Sydney will also work with the Fellow to help prepare a valuable program and schedule of events in advance of attending the 2026 SXSW Film & TV Festival.

Assessment criteria

Applications will be competitively assessed against the following weighted criteria:

Applicant Track Record (40%)

Applicants must submit, and will be assessed on, the quality of:

- An up-to-date CV, including overview of work, career achievements, credits, and projects to date
- A 250-word statement on their career to date, including their distinctiveness in the NSW screen industry
- Up to three samples of relevant and recent creative works
- All other information provided in the application, including support materials.

Merit of the Opportunity (50%)

Applicants must submit, and will be assessed on, the merits of:

- A 500-word statement that outlines the rationale for undertaking the Fellowship, including how the Fellowship will advance their screen career, intended activities across the 12-month period, and what they hope to achieve by the end of the program
- A 200-word statement on the professional benefits of attending the 2026 SXSW Film & TV Festival
- A one-page synopsis of the proposed project to be developed
- A 200-word development plan for the proposed project
- A 200-word statement on the proposed project's audience and potential marketplace
- The quality and experience of the three proposed industry mentors and strategic reasons for identifying them.

NSW Cultural & Economic Benefit (10%)

Applicants must provide:

- A description of the cultural and economic benefits of their Fellowship to the NSW screen industry, including any benefits to the First Nations screen community.

Application process

Screen NSW uses the SmartyGrants platform for submission of all applications. Applications made using any other format will not be accepted. Applications must be submitted by the closing date.

Late applications due to technical difficulties will be reviewed and eligibility determined with absolute discretion by the Manager, Industry and Audience Development, Screen NSW. A request for late submission due to technical difficulties must be submitted by email to industry@screen.nsw.gov.au within 60 minutes of the application close time, setting out the reasons for the request, along with any evidence.

A preview of the application form can be viewed on the SmartyGrants portal.

What to include in your application

With regard to the assessment criteria, applicants must prepare responses to all questions and submit all core materials listed on the application form, including:

- A 250-word career statement
- A 500-word Fellowship rationale
- A 200-word 2026 SXSW attendance statement
- A 200-word development plan for the proposed film or television project
- A 200-word statement on the proposed project's audience and potential marketplace
- Identification of, and rationale for three proposed industry mentors
- A description of how work undertaken during the Fellowship will contribute to the NSW screen industry, including to the First Nations screen community
- All relevant support material (listed below).

Support material

Support material plays a vital role in how we understand and assess applications. Please submit high-quality support material that is concise, current and directly relevant to your application.

Applicants must provide the following support material as attachments:

- A current CV (maximum two A4 pages)
- Up to three relevant and recent examples of your creative work (images, video, recordings, written material or links to websites)
- A one-page synopsis of the proposed project to be developed
- A letter of support from an Elder or First Nations community member recommending them for the Fellowship (maximum one A4 page)
- A letter of support from an established screen practitioner that outlines an applicant's professional attributes and ability to commit to and deliver a project (maximum one A4 page).

Please submit support material in the amount and format required, including:

- Combined files not exceeding 25MB
- Up to five minutes of video or audio recording
- No zipped or compressed files
- Documents in PDF format where possible
- Links for externally hosted work only.

What happens after you apply

When an application has been submitted, applicants will receive an email from our secure online grants system, SmartyGrants, confirming receipt of your application.

Please note that applicants cannot edit or modify an application once it has been submitted.

Assessment process

Eligibility

Applications will be initially assessed by Screen NSW staff to ensure they meet the eligibility criteria, and that all application materials are acceptable. Applications deemed ineligible will not proceed to the formal assessment process.

Screen NSW will inform all ineligible applicants via email within 14 days of this outcome.

Assessment and Recommendations

Eligible applications will proceed to formal assessment by an assessment team, comprising two Screen NSW staff (i.e., the First Nations Development Lead and a Sector Investment Manager) and one external First Nations screen industry subject matter expert.

Grant funding allocation under the First Nations Screen Fellowship follows a competitive process. This means that the assessment team evaluates applications against the:

- Assessment criteria
- Strength of other applications.

The assessment team will individually assess each application before meeting to deliberate and agree on final consensus scores for each applicant and each criterion. This will determine a ranking for each application.

The highest ranked applications will be recommended to the designated decision-maker for the award of the grant to one successful applicant.

Decision and Approval

The designated decision-maker, the Head of Screen NSW, will review, consider and approve the final successful applicant based on the recommendations from the assessment team.

All applicants will be informed of their application outcome via email.

Timing

The assessment process will take up to four weeks from the application closing date.

Screen NSW aims to advise all applicants of their application outcome by 6 October 2025.

Award process

The successful applicant must enter into, and abide by, the terms of a funding grant agreement with Screen NSW, which will include all deliverables and acquittal requirements in addition to the process for dealing with any variations to the Fellowship.

Screen NSW will not enter into a funding grant agreement with an applicant who has not acquitted any previous funding or is in breach of any funding obligations it has with the NSW Government.

Publicity

All applicants will be notified of their application outcome under embargo. Under embargo means that applicants are notified but they cannot publicise the outcome of their application until the official announcement has been made by the Minister for the Arts or Screen NSW. Please note that the embargo period is taken seriously and failure to comply may impact your current or future funding eligibility with Screen NSW.

The successful First Nations Screen Fellowship recipient will be presented an award by Screen NSW at the opening night of SXSW Sydney's Bush Shorts program on 16 October 2025. It is expected that the Fellow will attend the event in person to accept the award.

If successful, the NSW Government must be acknowledged in any marketing/publicity collateral relating to the Fellowship.

Variations

Any variations to the funding grant agreement, including project scope or activities, location or timeframes outlined in the application form and Grant Guidelines must be submitted in writing for approval from Screen NSW. Failure to do so may result in the withdrawal of the grant offer.

Screen NSW has the discretion to approve or reject any written variation request from a grantee where the funding grant agreement has already been executed.

To submit a variation request, or if you are unsure if your enquiry qualifies as a variation, please contact the Industry and Audience Development Team via email at industry@screen.nsw.gov.au.

Deliverables, acquittals and final reporting

The successful recipient must submit various deliverables and acquittal materials to Screen NSW throughout the Fellowship, including progress updates and creative materials. Submitting these materials to Screen NSW will trigger additional grant funding payments throughout the program. All deliverables and acquittal materials must be approved by Screen NSW.

Specific acquittal materials and relevant dates will be outlined in the funding grant agreement between Screen NSW and the successful applicant. However, at a minimum, the Fellow must submit to Screen NSW the following deliverables for approval:

- A 2026 SXSW Film & TV Festival Attendance Plan
- An Interim Acquittal Report, including: 1) Summary of 2026 SXSW Film & TV Festival attendance outcomes, including expense report and receipts; 2) Summary of meetings with industry mentor; and 3) Project development update
- Final Acquittal Report, including delivery of creative materials (e.g., pitch deck, treatment, outline, etc, based on Fellow's specific project type).

All acquittal materials and final reports must be submitted via SmartyGrants.

The successful Fellow must also commit to being a guest at a Screen NSW *Gathering Ground** session during 2026 (exact date to be confirmed in consultation with Fellow).

Failure to comply with any deliverable, acquittal and reporting requirements may impact an individual's eligibility to apply for future Screen NSW funding.

**Gathering Ground is a Screen NSW initiative for emerging First Nations screen practitioners in NSW to connect with established First Nations industry leaders, foster knowledge sharing, meaningful connections, and insights to support ongoing professional development.*

Publication of grants information

The NSW Government Grants Administration Guide (the Guide) requires that certain information is published in relation to grants awarded no later than 45 calendar days after the funding grant agreement takes effect (see section 6.5 of the Guide and Appendix A to the Guide).

This information is also open access information under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (NSW), which must be made publicly available unless there is an overriding public interest against disclosure of the information.

In accordance with these requirements, relevant information about the funding awarded will be made available on the NSW Government Grants and Funding Finder as soon as possible after the funding grant agreement is executed.

All records in relation to this decision will be managed in accordance with the requirements of the *State Records Act 1998* (NSW).

Conflict of Interest Management

Any conflicts of interest will be managed in accordance with the Guide.

A conflict of interest, or perceived conflict of interest, may be identified if staff, any member of a committee or advisor and/or you or any of your personnel has:

- A professional, commercial, or personal relationship with a party who can influence the application selection process
- A relationship with or interest in, an organisation, which is likely to interfere with or restrict the applicants from carrying out the proposed activities fairly and independently
- A relationship with, or interest in, an organisation from which they will receive personal gain because the organisation received funding under the program.

If you identify an actual, apparent, or perceived conflict of interest at any time, you must inform Screen NSW immediately via email at industry@screen.nsw.gov.au.

NSW Government staff, committee members and other officials including the decision maker must declare any conflicts of interest and ensure they are managed as per the DCITHS's Code of Ethics and Conduct and the Guide.

Complaint handling, access to information and privacy

Details on how Screen NSW handles complaints, access to information and your private information is available at:

<https://www.nsw.gov.au/departments-and-agencies/dciths/policies-plans-and-procedures/access-to-information/agency-information-guide>

Support and contact

Screen NSW staff are available to provide technical advice and general information to potential applicants on the interpretation of these guidelines, including eligibility and assessment criteria as well as support with the online application process.



Screen NSW staff cannot help directly with your application. To maintain a fair and equitable process, staff cannot edit or correct any applications or provide advice on the content or choices required against the Assessment Criteria for this grant opportunity.

For further information or clarification, please contact the Industry and Audience Development Team via email at industry@screen.nsw.gov.au.