



Pathways Development Program

Program Guidelines

About the program

The Pathways Development Program is a competitive Screen NSW initiative that supports emerging writers with disability to develop original long-form screen projects to a pitch-ready stage. The program invests in distinctive voices and stories that reflect the diversity of NSW, providing targeted mentoring and development support.

Key information

- Applications open: 13 February 2026
- Applications close: 2 April 2026 at 5pm
- [Program page](#)
- [Apply here](#)
- Grant value: Up to \$30,000

The program is funded and administered by Screen NSW. Screen NSW [Terms of Trade](#) must be read in conjunction with the [Application Form](#).

Program objectives

The objectives of the program are to:

- Increase the participation of creatives with disability in the NSW screen sector.
- Support the development of up to three long-form projects to a pitch-ready stage per round.
- Create clear industry pathways for alumni of the Screenability Film Fund and other emerging practitioners from under-represented groups.

- Strengthen the cultural and economic value of the NSW screen industry by fostering authentic, distinctive voices and stories.

Eligibility

Who can apply

A primary eligibility requirement for Screen NSW funding is that applicants meet the provisions of the Screen NSW [Terms of Trade](#). In addition, for the Pathways Development Program:

Writer applicants must fulfil the following criteria:

- Be a NSW resident
- Be a writer living with disability. Screen NSW classifies disability as per the NSW Disability Inclusion Act 2014 (see definition below*).

Producer applicants must fulfil the following criteria:

- Be a producer who will undertake responsibility for producing the project
- Have the right to carry out the project or other activity, for example, own or have licences or any relevant copyright. If the application is based on a third-party underlying work, at a minimum, an appropriate option agreement, with appropriate option periods.

*The NSW Disability Inclusion Act 2014 (DIA) defines disability as: “The long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which in interaction with various barriers may hinder the full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”. The term ‘disability’ can also include d/Deaf or hard of hearing people and people with mental health conditions.

Eligible projects

Eligible projects must have:

- a NSW-based producer who is at least mid-career (a mid-career producer is defined as a producer with at least one significant long-form credit (feature film, broadcast television or premium factual) or equivalent body of work, and
- a NSW-based creator who is the Writer and who identifies as having a disability. The Writer must have an Eligible Credit as a writer on a Qualifying Project that is a short film, web series or television program, but not a major credit as a lead writer on a feature film or long-form drama series, or
- a playwright, journalist, audio drama writer, podcast scriptwriter or author who has at least one work professionally produced, published, or distributed through publicly recognised media with demonstrated audience reach.

- **Eligible Credits** are credits for the same role as the role described in the application for this Program.

For screenwriters, Qualifying Projects are those that have fulfilled at least one of the following:

- Been commercially distributed or exhibited theatrically
- Been commissioned by a recognised commissioning platform with proof the project is, at minimum, already in production and has a release plan in place
- Been screened at a recognised marquee film festival
- Online digital projects with significant demonstrable audience reach

For playwrights, journalists, audio drama writers, podcast scriptwriters and authors:

- The work must have been professionally produced or published by a recognised company, festival, venue, or publisher. Community, amateur or self-published works without demonstrable professional recognition or significant audience reach are excluded and are not considered an Eligible Credit.
- For journalists, the work must have been published by a recognised media outlet.
- For audio drama writers and podcast scriptwriters, the work must have been released by a recognised broadcaster, streaming platform, or production company with proof of distribution and audience reach.
- For authors, the work must have been published by a recognised publishing house with evidence of distribution and readership. Self-published works without demonstrable professional recognition or significant audience reach will not be considered Eligible Credits.

Eligible projects must be:

- Narrative fiction including children’s feature films and series for any release platform including cinema, video on demand, broadcast television and online
- Documentary and factual including children’s feature films and series ([as defined by ACMA Documentary Guidelines](#)) for any release platform including cinema, video on demand, broadcast television and online, broadcast television and online

What you can’t apply for

Ineligible projects include but are not limited to:

- Short films under 60 minutes
- Lifestyle, Infotainment, Magazine, Sports, Game Shows and Current Affairs concepts.
- Community television
- Reality television series
- Projects being developed as part of a course of study
- Video or screen content that are for art installations.

Diversity Commitment

Screen NSW is dedicated to promoting fairness and equality in its programs and interactions with the community. Our main priorities include supporting increased participation in the industry of people from underrepresented groups, including:

- First Nations people
- Regional NSW
- Western Sydney
- People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- People living with disability
- LGBTQIA+ people.

Screen NSW does not currently support projects with significant First Nations content without a member of the key creative team, including for example, Producer, Director, Writer, coming from an appropriate background. Please refer to Screen Australia's guidelines [Pathways & Protocols: a filmmaker's guide to working with Indigenous people, culture and concepts](#).

Funding

Available funding

- Up to \$30,000
- Requested amounts should be reasonable and relative to the development stage and proposed activity, the scope of the final project being developed, and align with our [Budget Guide](#).
- Applicants are expected to supplement this funding with their own or third-party contributions and Screen NSW funding is generally a partial contribution to development.
- Screen NSW funding is provided as a development investment which must be repaid from the production budget unless rolled over into the production. Development funding automatically rolls over into production and is treated as Screen NSW equity or producer equity in accordance with our [Terms of Trade](#).
- If the project goes into production and production is not funded by Screen NSW, the development funding is repayable.
- When production does not occur, the funding is not repayable.

What you can get funding for

Funding can be used for:

Please see our [Budget Guide](#).

- As per the Terms of Trade, Screen NSW only funds expenditure in NSW.
- For example, while a non-NSW based producer applicant may apply, their producer fees cannot be included in the Screen NSW funding request.

Funding requests can include:

- Fees for writers' rooms
- Writer fees for creative material such as **series bibles, treatments**, pitch documents and scripts including draft to draft
- Character and environment design work for animation
- Fees associated with research and consultation
- Strategic shooting for documentary projects
- Proof of concepts (capped at \$25,000), prototypes, concept art, test shooting (360-degree projects only)
- Budgeting, scheduling, casting and travel to finalise production finance for advanced stage projects with significant market interest
- Producer fees.

Funding requests to Screen NSW cannot include:

- Office overheads
- Legal fees
- Option fees
- Fringes
- Items already expended before applying for development funds
- Graphic design or printing costs associated with a pitch deck
- Catering costs for writers' rooms over \$200 per day
- Software hire.

Assessment criteria

Applications will be competitively assessed against criteria. Screen NSW will apply weightings to each assessment criterion, which will apply to all applications considered in a round equally, at its discretion. An assessment panel including a minimum of one Screen NSW staff member and one industry expert will assess applications based on the following criteria:

1. Creative Strength and Vision (50%)

- Originality and distinctiveness of the idea.
- Strength of the pathway to audience and potential for the story to resonate with its intended audience.
- Clarity in articulating the creative approach, genre, tone and intended outcomes.

2. Key Creative Team's Potential and Industry Impact (25%)

- The applicant's existing skills, experience and aspirations, and how the opportunity will contribute to their professional development
- The contribution to increased participation in the industry of people from under-represented groups, including cultural, gender, disability, LGBTQIA+, and regional communities.
- Capability and suitability of collaborators, mentors or attachments in supporting the applicant's goals.

3. Feasibility and Alignment with Program Objectives (25%)

- Viability of the proposed development plan including timeframe, budget and resources.
- Whether the development plan is appropriately scoped for the Program.
- Alignment with the Pathways Development Program's intent to build industry capacity and support emerging voices with disability.
- Screen NSW will determine the weighting of assessment criteria, which will then be applied to all applications at the time of assessment.

Additional considerations

If your project contains First Nations content your project cannot be funded unless your application is assessed by the Assessment Panel as demonstrating appropriate First Nations consultation and/or participation. Please refer to Screen Australia's guidelines [Pathways & Protocols: a filmmaker's guide to working with Indigenous people, culture and concepts](#).

Application process

A preview of the application form can be viewed on the [SmartyGrants portal](#).

Applicants are required to complete an application form and submit project documentation including:

- A one page synopsis
- A Development Statement (including current strengths and weaknesses, and improvements to be made.)
- A Development Plan
- Audience and Pathways to Audience statement
- Development budget (for this stage of development only)
- Key Creative team's bios
- Career statement from the Creator/Writer.

Assessment process

Once your application has been submitted, you will receive an email confirmation from our online grants system, SmartyGrants.

Applications will be initially reviewed by Screen NSW staff to ensure they meet eligibility requirements, and that all application materials are acceptable.

If your application is ineligible, you will be notified by email within 14 days of submission.

Application assessment

If eligibility is confirmed, the application will be assessed by a Screen NSW staff member and an at least one independent assessor with relevant industry expertise.

Assessors will score the applicants responses against each assessment criterion prior to a formal panel meeting.

During the Assessment panel meeting, panel members will discuss responses to reach a single score for each response, against each criterion, using a collaborative consensus-reaching approach. Final scores are subject to the applicant satisfactorily meeting any due diligence or other checks.

Please note that funding allocation follows a competitive process. Evaluations will consider the assessment criteria outlined above, the availability of funds at Screen NSW, the variety and representation of the original IP and the applicant's need for Screen NSW funds.

Screen NSW will prepare written advice on the merits of the proposed funding, in accordance with the Grant Administration Guide, and seek approval from the Executive Director, Screen Development, Screen NSW.

The Executive Director, Screen Development, will act as final decision maker and applicants will be advised, in writing, of the outcome of their application.

Timing

Screen NSW aims to advise the outcomes of applications approximately 8 weeks from the application close date.

Award process

Successful funding recipients will enter into a standard non-negotiable agreement with Screen NSW, setting out the terms and conditions of the funding.

Feedback on applications

Applicants can seek feedback on their application from Screen NSW by emailing investment@screen.nsw.gov.au.

Publication of grants information

The *Grants Administration Guide* (Guide) requires that certain information is published in relation to grants awarded no later than 45 calendar days after the funding 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) (GIPA Act), 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 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).

Contact & support

Screen NSW staff are available to provide technical advice and general information to potential applicants on the interpretation of these guidelines, including the types of activity eligible for funding and 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 further information or clarification, please contact:

Investment Team, Screen NSW: investment@screen.nsw.gov.au