

# CHICAGO FILMMAKERS

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5720 N. Ridge Ave. | Chicago, IL | 60660 | (773) 293-1447 | [www.chicagofilmmakers.org](http://www.chicagofilmmakers.org)

## Chicago Filmmakers Fiscal Sponsorship Guidelines and Application

Chicago Filmmakers provides fiscal sponsorship for select independent film or video makers who are soliciting funds from private foundations, government agencies, and individual donors for their noncommercial film or video project. Chicago Filmmakers is a not-for-profit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization that has been in existence since 1973.

### Our Mission

Chicago Filmmakers is a not-for-profit media arts organization that fosters the creation, appreciation, and understanding of film and video as media for artistic and personal expression, as well as media of important social and community impact. Chicago Filmmakers' twofold mission is to serve independent film and digital video artists by supporting the creation and dissemination of new media arts works and to serve Chicago audiences by screening artistically innovative, socially relevant, and diverse films and videos.

### Eligibility

You must be working on a non-commercial film or video to apply for nonprofit fiscal sponsorship for your project. You must be seeking donations in the form of grants from public agencies, foundations, corporations, or individual donors (including fundraising benefits). If any of your project funding is currently coming from investors, you are ineligible to apply. Some independent films begin as non-profit projects and at some point solicit funds from investors. It is important to understand that once the project has investors you may not continue to fundraise for non-profit grants and donations through a Chicago Filmmakers fiscal sponsorship. You will need to close your account prior to accepting any investor funds; according to the IRS, and at that point you are no longer considered a non-profit entity.

You must be a producer and/or director of the submitted work. For the purpose of our guidelines we will use the term Project Director in this document.

You must have a track record in the film, digital, or video making medium or be working with at least one experienced film/digital/video maker as a key member of your crew.

You must present clearly written and well-defined proposal with a realistic budget.

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You must be 18 years of age or older.

You must have a US Taxpayer ID number or FEIN number.

The project may be in any stage: development, production, post-production, or distribution.

Programs produced for hire or under the direction of a third party and where another entity besides the applicant will own or have editorial control over the finished work are **not eligible**.

Student films being produced through a college or university are **not eligible**.

## To Apply for Fiscal Sponsorship from Chicago Filmmakers

Submit a **Narrative Proposal** of the project, which is comprised of the following:

### A Cover Sheet

Include the following information:

- Project Title
- Contact information for the Project Director
- A one or two sentence description of the project
- Project length and format
- Brief timeline and current status
- Budget total (including in-kind goods and services)

### Project Synopsis/Treatment

Describe the story of your film (documentary or narrative) specifically and visually, explaining the approach to the subject and the style. Background information on the importance of the subject is helpful. Key questions to address might include:

- What is the story you plan to tell and how will you tell it? Consider themes, characters, narrative-arc and point of view.
- Why is this story, character or topic important or timely?
- What will be your stylistic and visual approach and are there specific creative elements you will use?
- Do you foresee any specific challenges in producing this film and telling this story and how do you plan to address them?

### Project Status and Completion Timeline

Outline what has been accomplished to date plus the stages and approximate lengths of time estimated for each stage leading to completion.

### Audience and Distribution Strategy

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What is the intended audience for the project and how do you intend to reach them?

**Fundraising Plan**

Include the total fundraising goal for the project and, if applicable, the amount raised or committed to date in the form of contributions, in-kind donations of services or equipment, waived fees, etc. It is also helpful for you to discuss your strategy and potential sources for raising funds including specific grant or foundation funding opportunities.

**Key Personnel and Advisors**

Include a one or two paragraph bio about each of the project's principal production staff, crew or advisors, and filmographies if appropriate. Please also include a current resume for the Project Director.

**Comprehensive Line Item Budget**

Including projected income and expenses; the budget should include as much detail as possible, including rates of pay and unit pricing. Please also include itemized in-kind contributions. Please note which expenditures have already been made on the project ("Actuals") and which are anticipated ("Estimate"). Please add additional categories if needed and include detailed budget notes for any areas that may be viewed as out of the ordinary or which needs further explanation. This document should be prepared using spreadsheet software. To expedite your application for long-strand projects, we recommend that you use the *Chicago Filmmakers Fiscal Sponsor Budget Template*.

**Work Sample (via a playable online link)**

Your work sample should be about 10 minutes long. Please include a statement about your specific involvement with the work submitted.

## **Review of Your Proposal**

Chicago Filmmakers Board of Directors will review your Fiscal Sponsorship Application. We will evaluate your proposal in terms of whether or not it conforms to our tax-exempt purposes and whether or not we feel confident in the successful completion of the project. If the board has any questions about your proposal our Program Director will contact you to ask for clarification. If further consideration is needed, you may be asked to attend a board meeting to discuss your project in person.

Our board meets monthly and the evaluation process may take up to 30 days or so to determine the outcome. If you need a more expedient review of your proposal, please let us know. We will try to accommodate your request, but cannot assure you that the board will be able to give consideration to a proposal between board meetings.

Some of the questions the board will use in evaluating fiscal sponsorship proposals include:

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- Do the Project Director and the project proposed meet Chicago Filmmakers Fiscal Sponsorship eligibility requirements?
  - Does the project tell a compelling story?
  - Does the project take a creative approach to the subject matter? If the story has been told before, does this project's approach bring something new to the story?
  - Does the Project Director have the necessary access to tell the story in a compelling way?
  - Is the treatment well written and does it give a clear picture of the story and themes?
  - Are the Project Director and the assembled production team experienced and capable of completing the project as described?
  - Does the proposal have a clear and realistic plan for reaching and engaging the intended audience?
  - Does the proposal have a realistic and well thought out fundraising strategy and reasonable chance of raising the necessary funds to complete the project as described and during the projected time frame?
  - Is the budget thorough and realistic; and are line items based on industry norms and standards for documentary production?

## **When Proposals Are Approved, Then What?**

### *Fiscal Sponsorship Agreement*

If the board determines that Chicago Filmmakers will sponsor your project, you will be asked to sign a *Fiscal Sponsorship Agreement* (samples are available upon request). Chicago Filmmakers charges a fiscal sponsor fee, which is a percentage of the funds raised for our services. At this time, the fee is 6%.

Funds are solicited by the project, not by Chicago Filmmakers' staff. The project will be required to submit a finalized fundraising proposal and a list of funders it intends to approach under CF's fiscal sponsorship for approval **before** funders are approached. There may be funders that CF considers a conflict of interest.

To qualify as tax-exempt, funds raised through the fiscal sponsorship relationship are made payable to Chicago Filmmakers. Money is then disbursed to the project, subject to the conditions of the grant agreement. This is usually done in staged payments according to benchmarks to insure control and accountability. The project then pays its expenses out of its own account. The project makes periodic written reports to the fiscal sponsor showing actual expenditures of grant funds and progress toward accomplishing the purposes of the grant. Once the project is completed, the project and anything of value that results from the project is the property of the project, not Chicago Filmmakers.