

CHICAGO DIGITAL MEDIA PRODUCTION FUND

Production Fund FAQ

Here are a few answers to common questions about the guidelines and recommendations for applicants to the production fund. If your question is not answered below, please contact the Grants Administrator for assistance at (773) 293-1447, ext. 1002 or coop@chicagofilmmakers.org.

1. I don't live in Cook County but would like to apply. Can I?

The Production Fund is only open to Chicago/Cook County residents, meaning that the Applicant (Director, Producer, and/or Developer [Apps/Games only]) needs to reside in Cook County. If you are not locally-based you may want to consider partnering with someone who does live in Chicago/Cook County and have them apply as long as that person serves as the Project Producer, Director, or Developer.

2. I have more than one idea in mind for a project. Can I submit more than one application?

Yes, we will accept more than one application from individuals and organizations. Each must be complete, with separate application forms, supplementary materials, and budgets.

3. I own or work for a for-profit company/business. Can we apply?

No, only individuals and individuals with fiscal sponsors (non-profit organizations) can apply.

4. Can I receive monies through my LLC?

We understand that many independent filmmakers and digital media artists are sole-proprietors and have either an LLC or some other legal model to protect themselves and their businesses. Grant monies will be paid out to individuals, and individuals may transfer the money to their own business for the production if they prefer. Grant monies will not be paid out to businesses directly, only to individuals and non-profit fiscal sponsor organizations.

5. I don't see any age restrictions. Can applicants be any age?

Yes, applicants can be any age. Applications from people under the age of 18 will be accepted and will have to meet all of the same requirements. Consideration will be given to the age of youth applicants in the evaluation process. We recommend that youth applicants work with an adult on the application. If awarded, a parent or guardian (or Executive Director of an associated fiscal sponsor organization) will need to co-sign the contract with the youth applicant and will also need to accept funds on the youth's behalf.

6. The guidelines say that the project should be "appropriate for a youth audience." What does that mean? My project is not a youth-focused one.

While projects need to be appropriate for youth, they are not required to be intended for youth. The content must not be such that it could not be shown to youth. Think of it as though you were making a PG or PG-13 rated work, not an R rated work. However, we strongly recommend that a youth audience be taken into consideration. Projects with target audiences that include youth or are primarily aimed at youth are highly desirable.

7. The guidelines say that the project should be "aimed at advancing progressive social change." What do you mean by that?

Ideally, the digital media works produced with these awards are meant to create impact or raise awareness and public consciousness about an issue or problem facing contemporary society. This is somewhat open for creative interpretation, and different projects may approach this through a variety of strategies. Projects could focus on or contain content related to any number of cultural, social or political issues (gender stereotyping; racism; bullying; poverty; homelessness; free speech; health care; HIV/AIDS prevention; drug policy; immigration; etc.) and, through documentary modes, narrative storytelling, animation or experimental allusion, interactive design, webisodes, or other means, provide some exploration, analysis, interpretation, foregrounding, or other treatment of the topic, either directly or indirectly. The experience should be intended to be transformative for the audience and one that encourages progressive social change.

8. The guidelines say that projects must be available to view for free on the web. What if I want to submit to festivals or other screening situations that won't accept work that can be viewed on the web?

This is a consideration you will have to make in applying for this grant. Free online distribution is a firm requirement and speaks to the kind of work the grantor is looking to fund. These grants are intended to fund new, innovative works that may not fit certain distribution models (such as film festivals, theatrical runs, etc.) and are geared more toward new modes of distribution (web, mobile, interactive) that promote broad reach and spectatorship. That said, artists will own the rights to funded work, and are free to submit to festivals as part of their distribution plan. The goal of the fund is to have work as widely seen as possible. Festivals and other screenings are fine, and that can be part of your distribution plan before or after the online date requirement.

9. What amount should I request for funding?

Grants will range between \$500 – \$20,000. The panel of judges will look to fund projects with budget levels that are appropriate for their particular project. The panel will consider proposals up to \$20,000 as well as projects with very low micro-budgets. Artists with great ideas and low budgets are encouraged to apply at lower funding levels (i.e.- \$500 – \$1,500). Some experimental found footage or projects that don't require high production costs, for example, should consider applying at these lower levels, as well. All applicants need to demonstrate how funds will be spent for their particular project. Please see the sample budget template available for download under 'FAQ, Budget Templates, and more!'

10. The budget template provided doesn't fit my project.

Applicants are welcome to submit a budget that fits their project and are not required to use the budget template provided. The template is available to use as a reference and can be changed to the extent necessary. Panelists will be looking for detail that breaks down the expenditure of funds needed to complete the project.

11. What if my budget changes after receiving an award?

The submitted budget is recognized as the "best guess" for the project. If the budget changes after the grant is given, CF will work with the grantee on those changes. However, once awarded a grant, no further funds are available from the Production Fund. If a project goes over budget, the grantee is expected to raise or cover all additional costs in order to complete the project.

12. Is it important that everyone I list as a crew member or key creative personnel be contractually attached to the project? Not necessarily, but it sure does help! We understand that especially for new projects and ideas, you might not have your entire crew in place yet. It's also okay to speculate about who you might have working with you on the project. That said, we need to know the difference between someone attached to the project (ideally, with a contract in place that says they are on board to work on/complete the project with you) versus someone who is just a proposed collaborator. It will be important for you to note the difference in your application so that our panel is able to evaluate your proposal accordingly.

13. My project doesn't fit into the traditional narrative or documentary genres. Should I still apply?

Yes, definitely! The fund is especially interested in work that breaks new ground and might not fit into conventional or traditional categories. We are interested in funding a diverse range of work and are open to considering a wide variety of formats and genres. Such genres might include animation, remix, machinima, found footage, interactive, multi-media, performance, and anything that might be considered “web video,” which is open to interpretation. Strong content, distribution plan, and creativity will be the deciding factors, rather than genre.

14. If I receive a grant, how and when do I receive the money?

Grant monies will be dispersed in three roughly equal installments: 33% upon signing the grant agreement; 33% after a satisfactory mid-term evaluation; and 34% after the film is completed and all grant requirements are met. To receive the second payment, the Grantee must submit a written interim report and a financial report documenting expenditures to date. Upon receipt of this report, Chicago Filmmakers staff will schedule an in-person meeting at which point grantees must demonstrate that satisfactory progress has been made on the project prior to Grantor issuing the second grant payment. In order to receive the final payment, the Grantee must submit a final report, the project must be complete and available for free online, and all fulfillment requirements of the grant must be met to the satisfaction of the Grantor.

15. How should I deal with in-kind items in my budget?

You should list everything that is a hard cost (things that you are spending money on) AND everything that is being donated or is otherwise free (in-kind items) in your budget. These in-kind items can be labor (production or post-production personnel), services (free editing time somewhere), equipment usages (donated use of a camera, sound equipment, etc.), catering, etc. In-kind items can also incorporate labor, services, and equipment that you are providing. You should list estimated market rates for these items in your budget and indicate that they are being provided in-kind. You can also split the value of items between hard cost and in-kind (i.e. you are using an editor whose fee would normally be \$1000 and he's only charging you \$500; \$500 would be a hard cost and \$500 would be in-kind contribution). Be sure to look over the sample budget on our website.

16. Should the expense side and the income side of my budget match?

Yes. Your total income should match your total expenses. If your total expenses (including in-kind items) amount to \$12,450 then you need to show \$12,450 of confirmed, anticipated, or potential income (including in-kind items). Be sure to include in-kind items on both sides – these will zero out. The cash value assigned to an in-kind item is an “expense” (even though it's being provided for free), which becomes a donation/contribution on the income side. Be sure to look over the sample budget on our website.

17. Is there an option to submit a hard (paper) copy of the Production Fund Application and DVDs containing my previous work and current project footage?

No. In order to increase accessibility for our applicants and panelists and to stay consistent with the digital nature of the fund, we have made the decision to streamline the application to an entirely digital platform. If you previously submitted documents/sample works, you will need to resubmit all materials through the online platform to be considered for the current grant.

18. Is the application deadline firm or is it possible to get an extension on that? The deadline to submit an application is firm. It will not be possible to get an extension on that deadline.

HELPFUL TIPS

How can I make my project more likely to be funded? *We're glad you asked.*

1. Social Change. Ideally, the work produced in these videos should have an impact, be transformative, and illustrate a contemporary social issue in a new way. This can be done in a variety of ways, but the intention here is to get people excited and inspired: about the video, about the issue, and then to take the extra step to get involved.

2. Supplementary Media. While the core of the proposal should be about funding an outstanding web video/app/game, the content of the project could be further explored and enhanced by using various forms of new media. These can include Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, Reddit, blogs, websites, mobile apps and/or games (for video projects), and many others. Supplementary media could be used as part of a marketing strategy for the video, a platform from which to show the video, and/or a means to provide additional material. The use of these media should be articulated in the Online Distribution & Exhibition Plan section of the application.

3. Creativity. Artistic merit will count heavily toward final decisions. There should absolutely be a unique style, approach, or voice to the project that illuminates the subject in a special way. Traditional storytelling is good, but we're more interested in projects that take risks, and find new ways of storytelling that are not explored in traditional media.

4. Distribution & Outreach Plan. The goal of the fund is to have work as widely seen as possible. A significant amount of consideration will be placed on your outreach and distribution strategy. Proposals should include outreach partners, effective ways to reach your target audience and promote online viewership.

5. Study guide. Projects with target audiences that include youth or are primarily aimed at youth are highly desirable to the Grantor. Proposals may consider including a study guide, curriculum, or interactive educational element in the distribution section so that if the work is appropriate for students, a teacher, or youth coach can help facilitate discussion of work and elaborate further on context and interpretation.