



# Project Submission Guidelines

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## Western Documentary Unit

*These guidelines are specific to the NFB's Western Documentary Unit and were last updated February 15, 2025*

## About the Documentaries We Make

The National Film Board of Canada's mandate is to reflect the diverse experiences and perspectives of Canadians through the production and distribution of innovative audiovisual works.

To fulfill this mandate, the Western Documentary collaborates with documentary directors and producers who are based in Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, Yukon and Northwest Territories. We produce artful and impactful documentaries that:

1. have deep social, cultural, and historical relevance.
2. are made by filmmakers with a strong creative vision and a unique voice; and
3. push boundaries in the stories we tell, the forms our films take, and/or the audiences we seek to reach.

We care deeply about artistic excellence, the point of view of the filmmaker, the power of documentary, the craft of storytelling, and the freedom to experiment.

To be eligible for consideration, your film:

- must be a documentary
- can be almost any length (short, mid-length, feature, or short-form series)
- must be directed by a Canadian citizen or permanent resident;
- must be produced by a Canadian independent producer (if your film is envisioned as a co-production – see further information about our models of collaboration below);
- should (ideally) be at an early stage of development; and
- must not be already receiving money or services from another program at the NFB.

Please note that we only accept projects about Indigenous stories and communities if they are directed by an Indigenous filmmaker.



## How We Work

When submitting your project to us for consideration, it's important to note that we are not a funder. The NFB is Canada's public producer and distributor: we are a full creative partner in the production of your project. As such, we prefer to consider projects as early as possible in the project's development.

Before submitting your project for consideration, please familiarize yourself with the NFB in general and the Western Documentary Unit in particular:

- Understand our work by visiting the Western Documentary Unit webpage (especially our works-in-progress).
- Watch our recent films at [www.nfb.ca](http://www.nfb.ca).

If you are making an animated project, or if you feel your documentary might be better suited for another unit, please consult the NFB [Production Units](#) page.

The NFB has two models of collaboration:

- 1) A **"Full NFB"** production is produced, funded, and owned solely by the NFB. The director brings their idea to us. If we choose to produce the project, the director will transfer their rights to the NFB and is then hired onto the project as its director. The NFB will retain copyright ownership of the project and full distribution rights.
- 2) A **"Co-Production"** is jointly produced, funded, and owned by the NFB and an independent Canadian producer (referred to by the NFB as our "co-producer"). The potential co-producer brings the project to the NFB. If we choose to co-produce the project, the NFB identifies its level of participation, contributes that percentage to the financing as an equity investment, and owns the same percentage of the copyright. The co-producer raises the remaining percentage of the financing and owns the remaining percentage of the copyright.

Please consider which model is right for your project and complete the submission form accordingly.



## How to Submit Your Project

Submissions can be made at any time through our [Online Submission Form](#). We aim to respond to filmmakers within 6 weeks of project submission.

We encourage you to speak with a producer before submitting your project. Please email [western@nfb.ca](mailto:western@nfb.ca) for more information or to make an appointment.

To help you prepare your submission, a list of the submission questions can be found at the end of this document. In addition to answering the questions, you will also be asked to submit the following:

### For Full NFB Projects:

- ✓ **Project Proposal:** 3-5 pages, which may include a detailed synopsis, and outline of the film, a director's statement, and/or a sound and visual treatment.  
Use the following naming convention: *Title of Film\_Project Proposal*
- ✓ **Director's Filmography:** List of previous work, may also include a bio.  
Use the following naming convention: *Title of Film\_Director\_Name*
- ✓ **Links to Director's Work:** A link to a demo for the current work (if applicable) and a link to a previous project.

### For Co-Productions:

- ✓ **Project Proposal:** 3-5 pages, which may include a detailed synopsis, and outline of the film, a director's statement, and/or a sound and visual treatment.  
Use the following naming convention: *Title of Film\_Project Proposal*
- ✓ **Director's Filmography:** List of previous work, may also include a bio.  
Use the following naming convention: *Title of Film\_Director\_Name*
- ✓ **Producer's Bio**  
Use the following naming convention: *Title of Film\_Producer\_Name*
- ✓ **Proposed Financing Structure & Budget:** For the current phase of production (i.e., if you are applying for development, please submit a development budget and financing structure).  
Use the following naming convention: *Title of Film\_Financing & Budget\_Date*
- ✓ **Links to Director's Work:** A link to a demo for the current work (if applicable) and a link to a previous project.



## How We Evaluate Your Project

All projects submitted to the Central Production Unit are reviewed by the unit's producing staff.

In our review, we look for projects that align with our mandate – and with the kinds of documentaries that we typically make – by considering the following:

- Project originality and creative potential
- Filmmaker vision and skill
- Potential audience and impact
- Community representation and relationships
- Geographic location
- Project feasibility
- Our current project slate and studio capacity

Please note that we receive more than 100 submissions per year. The programming process is a very competitive one, as we are only able to move forward with approximately 5% of submitted projects.



# PREVIEW

## Project Submission Form

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Please Note: This is not the official application form. Use this document to help you prepare your submission offline.

Please use the [Online Submission Form](#) to make your official submission.

### First Page – Basic Information

1. **Project Title**
2. **Project Synopsis**  
*(approx. 50 words – limit of max. 280 characters)*
3. **Director's Name**
4. **Is your film a documentary?**

*Yes / No*

*Please Note: The NFB's Western Doc Unit only produces documentary projects.*

*We have a broad definition of what makes a documentary, so please review the [Western Documentary Unit - NFB Production | NFB Production](#) webpage to learn more about our work and feel free to resubmit if you feel your project might be characterized as a documentary.*

*If your project is an animation project, please refer to our list of [Production Units](#) to find the studio whose mandate is in better alignment with your project.*

### Second Page – Project Information

5. **Project Synopsis - Long**  
*(approx. 300 words – limit of max. 1600 characters)*
6. **Proposed Format**
  - Feature Doc
  - Mid-length Doc
  - Doc Series
  - Short Doc
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
7. **Proposed Length**  
*(for series, please include episode numbers & runtimes of each)*
8. **What stage is your project at?**
  - Pre-Development *(very early development of your concept)*
  - Development *(early development, with solid concept)*
  - Production *(very developed and ready to shoot)*
  - Post-Production *(mostly or entirely shot and ready to edit)*
  - Uncertain



9. **What do you hope to accomplish in this next phase?**  
*(max. 1000 characters – approx. 200 words)*
10. **Project's Intended Audience**  
*Who is it for? What platform are they likely to view the work on? How will the work be relevant to them? What is the filmmaker's relationship to this audience?*  
  
*(max. 1500 characters – approx. 300 words)*
11. **Key Reference**  
*What are the films, books, or other media that currently exist on the same subject matter? How is your documentary different? Please especially consider any previous NFB projects that have been made.*  
  
*(max. 1000 characters - approx. 200 words)*

### **Third Page – Filmmaker's Information**

12. **Filmmaker Bio**  
*Please provide a brief description of yourself as a filmmaker, including any personal or community connections to this story. (Please note that the Central Documentary Unit is accepting projects on Indigenous stories and subject matter only if they are directed by Indigenous creators.)*  
  
*(max. 1000 characters - approx. 200 words)*
13. **Experience Level?**
  - Emerging (directed 3 films or fewer)
  - Established (directed more than 3 films)
14. **Director Based in ... (City)**
15. **Director's Phone Number**
16. **Director's Email Address**
17. **Director's Website**
18. **NFB Participation**
  - Full NFB Production  
*A "Full NFB" production is produced and funded solely by the NFB. The director transfers their rights to the NFB and is then hired onto the project as its director. The NFB will retain copyright to the project and full distribution rights. If you are a director who is bring your project to us, you are likely applying as a Full NFB production.*
  - Co-Production  
*A "Co-Production" is produced, funded, and jointly owned by the NFB and the co-producer. If you are a producer, or are working with a producer, you are likely applying for a Co-Production.*



## **Fourth Page – Production Company Information**

*Only applicable to Co-Production applicants.*

19. **Name of Production Company**
20. **Producer's Name**
21. **Producer's Base of Operations (City)**
22. **Producer's Phone Number**
23. **Producer's Email Address**
24. **Production Company Website**

## **Fifth Page – Links to Director's Work**

*We will be asking you to please provide online-viewing links to allow the Programming Committee to view examples of the Director's previous work.*

25. **Link to Demo Material for this Project**  
***If available:***  
*Please share any sample video material you have already created in connection with this project (i.e., sizzle reels, demo scene, raw interview clips, etc.)*
26. **Password for Demo Material Link**  
*if applicable*
27. **Description of Demo Material**  
*What do you need us to understand about this piece before watching it?*
28. **Link to Previous Work**  
*Please share 1 previous film you have made as the director.*  
*If you have work that is stylistically similar to the approach you are taking with this project, please share that film.*
29. **Password for Previous Work Link**  
*if applicable*
30. **Description of Previous Work**  
*What do you need us to understand about this piece before watching it?*  
*Please include how this work is similar to, or different from, the submitted project.*



## Sixth Page – Supporting Materials

1. Please upload the following documents in PDF Format following these naming conventions:

### FULL NFB Submissions

- *Project Proposal ( Title of Film\_Project Proposal )*
- *Director's Filmography ( Title of Film\_Director\_Name )*

### Co-Production Submissions

- *Project Proposal ( Title of Film\_Project Proposal )*
- *Director's Filmography ( Title of Film\_Director\_Name )*
- *Producer's Bio ( Title of Film\_Producer\_Name )*
- *Proposed Financing Structure ( Title of Film\_Financing & Budget\_Date )*