



# Frequently Asked Questions

**Note: This information is provided only as general guide to answers to common questions.**

**In all situations, final decisions on the interpretation of SFO criteria and policies remains with the Board of Trustees of Short Film Otago, and may change from time to time without notice.**

## **Does the Short Film Otago process really work for writers?**

SFO seeks to identify 6-10 film ideas per year for script development support and up to 4 of those for production funding, supported by industry professionals.

Approximately 20% of SFO productions have featured in the NZ International Film Festival, and more in other festivals here and overseas. About 15% of filmmakers have gone on to make feature films, and approximately 50% of people involved in SFO productions continue to work in the screen industry.

## **What should I submit?**

Submissions should include a covering letter containing the name and address of the writer/s and any team members.

Most submissions tend to be full dialog scripts of around 10 to 15 pages, however you are free to submit any literary material that could be produced as a short film. This includes short stories, treatments and outlines.

Entrants may wish to use the free scriptwriting software Celtx to draft and submit their script (<https://celtx.en.softonic.com/>).

Every submission should have a Writer attached. Directors and Producers cannot make a submission without a Writer and a script.

We encourage teams of Writers, Directors and/or Producers to apply. If applying as a team include a one-page overview of the team members listing any relevant skills and include a link to a show reel or other previous work. Do not submit DVDs.

The initial selection is made purely on the anonymous script - no names, no bios, no team details, but sending additional info is almost always good.

Once scripts make it through the first round and script development, the fuller picture is considered before production is approved. There can however be dialogue with the applicant as part of that if the Board has concerns or queries.

Ultimately, Rule #1 applies: the clearer picture you give of your film, the better the chance of the panel seeing its potential the way you do - and ability to deliver.

At the initial stage we **do not** request storyboards, Director's notes, budgets or schedules so please don't send them in.

### **Where / when do I submit?**

Submissions should be emailed to [contact@sfo.org.nz](mailto:contact@sfo.org.nz).

We prefer submissions by email with PDF, but they can be posted to:

Short Film Otago, PO Box 5692, Dunedin 9058

### **Do you require physical copies of the script, or just digital files?**

Emailed submissions are fine.

### **What type of scripts are you looking for?**

In this round we are focusing on funding scripts that will deliver great films and be produced on a budget of \$10,000.

The kind of short films we seek are those that:

- Have a strong story. An effective ending is probably the most important factor
- Be visually powerful or interesting
- Be compelling in originality, character and setting
- Be stories of today although we won't rule out an interesting futuristic or historical treatment
- Be dramatic stories, including tragedy or comedy or horror.
- Be fiction rather than documentary
- Normally have a maximum length of 10 to 15 minutes
- Be achievable on a budget of around \$10,000
- Appeal to a significant audience
- Above all, something must happen!

We are encouraging writers to partner with Producers and/or Directors at the earliest stage possible.

### **How are successful scripts selected?**

Once Short Film Otago receives a script the writer's name is removed, making the initial script assessment a 'blind read'.

A script selection committee is appointed by the Board. At this point only the scripts themselves are read, any information about Directors or Producers is not considered at this stage.

The script selection committee recommends to the SFO Board up to 6 scripts for further development. The scripts are still blind but the Board may take information about any team attached to the script into consideration.

The scripts selected for further development are provided with a \$500 grant and are assigned a script editor who will work with the writer and any other team members to get the script ready for production.

### **Since the readings are done 'blind', should I leave my name off the script part that I send?**

Do not leave your name off. Please put writer's name on all documents submitted.

We receive many many documents and unnamed documents may easily be confused.

The Short Film Otago secretary will "blind" the scripts before distributing them to the Selection Panel.

## **How are scripts chosen to go into production?**

After selected scripts have been through development with a script editor, the two or three strongest scripts will be selected by the SFO Board to go into production.

Each production will be assigned an Executive Producer who will oversee the film on Short Film Otago's behalf.

Before production funds can be drawn down each script must have a Director and a Producer attached. In some cases the Writer can also be the Director. This team must deliver a budget, a schedule and a production plan that demonstrates to the board that the film can be produced for a cash budget of \$10,000, and an industry standard production contract must be signed

The grant from Short Film Otago must only be spent on the production of the film and each team must show they can deliver the film without additional funding. However, teams are able to source additional funding in the form of donations.

## **Where do I go if I still need more information**

In the first instance all enquiries should be made to Short Film Otago secretary George Dawes. Writers looking to contact Directors or Producers, or Producers/Directors looking to contact Writers can get in touch with George Dawes. Media enquiries should be directed to Allan Baddock.

## **CONTACTS**

George Dawes	Allan Baddock	George Dawes
SFO Secretary	Chairperson/Media Contact	Production Contact
contact@sfo.org.nz	baddock@earthlight.co.nz	gpdawes@gmail.com
+64 21 109 2058	+64 21 588 545	+64 21 109 2058

## **What is SFO's Development and funding policy?**

The primary focus of Short Film Otago is to developing script writing within Otago and the production of short films based on those scripts.

The writer or the director should normally be resident in the Otago province or have strong family connections with Otago, and the majority of filming and other production work must be carried out within Otago.

Script Development grants (usually \$500) are provided to progress scripts to a stage where we can hopefully commit to production. The provision of a script development grant does not guarantee the script will go into production.

Short Film Otago must hold the majority rights to any production.

A condition of the development grant is that the writer/s work exclusively with SFO until a decision is made on production. If for some reason the production falls over, the Short Film Otago will take over.

## **What is SFO's Script selection & production policy**

### **Eligibility**

Either the writer or the director should normally be resident in the Otago province or have strong family connections with Otago.

The majority of filming and other production work will be carried out within Otago.

Every submission should have a Writer attached. Directors and Producers cannot make a submission without a Writer and a script.

## **"Blind" assessment process**

Submissions must include a covering letter containing the name and address of the author/s and any team members.

A Board member (who is not a member of the Selection Committee) manages the receipt and numbering of scripts and will be the only Board member who has a list of the authors.

For the script selection process, the name of the author/s will be removed and the covering letters and scripts will be assigned a matching number and then separated.

Only the numbered anonymous scripts will be forwarded to the Selection Committee.

## **Selection Committee**

The Selection Committee comprises at least 3 people, including at least one person with a writing background and one person with a film making background.

They may be from within the SFO Board or external to the Board.

No person who has a conflict of interest or perceived conflict of interest in relation to any submitted script/story can serve on the Selection Committee (e.g. if a member has been involved in the development of a script they cannot serve on the Selection Committee.)

## **Selection of scripts**

The Selection Committee makes a recommendation to the full Board on which scripts should be developed for production.

The board's selection decision is final and while feedback may be provided the board will not enter into correspondence regarding its final selection.

## **Script development**

The Board determines how many and which scripts are supported for further development, guided by the recommendation of the Selection Committee.

Only after this stage, is the identity of the writer revealed.

An experienced script editor is assigned to assist the writer/s.

## **Executive Producer**

The Board appoints an Executive Producer for each production who oversees progress of the production on behalf of SFO.

The Executive Producer manages the completion and signing of the standard *SFO Production Funding Agreement* and the appointment of a Producer and other production staff in consultation with the Producer and Writer/s.

## **Production budgets**

The standard funding allocation for each production is \$10,000, however the Board may determine more or less funds be allocated to particular productions.

A draft budget must be provided to the Board for approval prior to the disbursement of the allocated funds, and a Production Plan must be provided.

**I was reading about the Otago Short film process and wondered if my Script 'xxxx' may be of interest. Copy attached if you would like to have a read.**

We won't look at your script outside the formal funding round.

SFO generally puts out a call for submissions two times a year. That is the time to apply.

We don't want to compromise your chances in the process or create any conflict of interest by reading it outside the selection process.

SFO's funding process is a blinded, merit-based process. The SFO secretary "blinds" all scripts before distributing them to a Selection Panel to select the best from the submission round.

Generally the call for submissions is advertised in local news media, through screen industry channels, and on the website and other online outlets.

**Do you require bios of the key personnel, and a director's vision or any other supporting material for the application?**

There is very little required other than a good, powerful film story, but check out the website [www.sfo.org.nz](http://www.sfo.org.nz) where there should be details of criteria and requirements.

The initial selections are made purely on the blinded script - no names, no bios, no team details.

But sending additional info is almost always good. Once scripts make it through the first round & script development, the fuller picture is considered before greenlighting production. There can however be dialogue with the applicant as part of that if the Board has concerns or queries.

Ultimately, Rule #1 applies: the clearer picture you give of your film, the better the chance of the panel seeing its potential the way you do - and ability to deliver.

**Am I eligible to enter.**

**I live in Auckland right now, but I grew up in Mosgiel, which is where most of my family still lives. According to your website, strong family ties count - does this include me?**

You seem to clearly fit the "strong ties" criteria.

To be sure in your application, tell us how long it is since you lived in Otago, and how often are you back here.

**My day job is as a TV writer - knowing this, am I still eligible to enter?**

If you haven't made a lot of short films or features before – or only one or two shorts – you are most likely still eligible.

If you've only made one short film there should be no problem.

SFO is aimed at supporting writers to develop a feature film career. Writing for TV and writing for cinema are different forms.

Put information in your applications about how long you've been writing for TV (or how many broadcast hours of credited shows) and what and how many films for theatrical release you have written for or worked on previously

**Because of the heavy workload of my job, I don't have much time for organising production on other projects - but I do have time to write them. So, I'd like to enter some short film scripts of mine - but I don't have a team other than myself attached. Is that okay?**

It is not necessary to have a team attached.

**What kind of literary material is required along with the submission? Is further support material required alongside a script or outline?**

Short answer: No.

The only actual requirement is something that gives SFO a clear grasp of a strong, original story that is visually interesting and has an ideal length of 10 to 15 minutes.

We accept anything from fully finished scripts to one-page outlines – or works in between.

The initial selection of projects is "blind" and based entirely on the strength of the story as conveyed in the script or story outline submitted.

However, if you have supporting material it may help later in gauging the ability of the writer or team to achieve the vision of the project.

This may include visual treatments, directing notes, notes on particular skills or experience you (or team members) have, access to special technology or locations, and any other supplementary information.

**Which is the preferred submission format; script, treatment, short story or outline? Is one favoured over the other?**

Short answer: Generally, there is no specifically preferred format. All will be considered on the strength of the story conveyed.

The objective of the Short Film Otago initiative is to support and nurture emerging screenwriters and film-makers, and to help writers transition from other fields into screenwriting.

Generally applicants are best to submit in the format they can express their story most effectively or comfortably.

**While our current team is Writer, Producer and Director – what kind of experience is required of the team?**

While SFO is keen to nurture production teams, it is not a requirement that applicants are part of a team, or that the team has specific past experience.

If your story is among those identified by the selection panel, SFO will look at the make up and experience of the production team in gauging the team's ability to complete the film.

Before approving final production, SFO would need to be satisfied that the necessary expertise was available to ensure completion, but this may include calling on others to fill gaps or give support to existing team members. This is part of SFO's support.

However, it is worth noting that the first step to being a successful screenwriter is to write scripts that can be made into films, which includes taking into account the resources and capabilities of the team involved.

**Do I need to include other members of the crew, ie. DoP, editor, etc.?**

If you have crew members identified that you feel reinforce your argument that you can realise your film, by all means include them. It is not essential at this stage. See above.

**Are you favouring teams who apply with a separate writer, director and producers? Can this be a writer/ director hybrid?**

Writer/directors are an industry norm and SFO has no preference either way, except when it has a bearing on the deliverability of the story, which is considered on a case by case basis.

**Wondering if I am better to submit my script via hard copy or email?**

Email preferred, please do not submit hard copies.

**Which address please?**

To email address here on SFO website: [contact@sfo.org.nz](mailto:contact@sfo.org.nz).

### **If my script is chosen can I help with directing, as I have written this with shots in mind.**

We encourage writers to be involved in the production of films based on their scripts. This gives writers insight into the film-making process and the pitfalls and challenges that can arise. This can help their writing in future.

If you have a particular visual treatment in mind, or techniques for achieving the vision of your film, it may be helpful to include visual notes with your application.

If applicants wish to direct, or have talent, interest, or skills that may help realise a successful film this should be noted in the application. If you have friends or supporters with talent, resources, or skills that may help realise a successful film this should be noted in the application

(e.g Dad owns a helicopter; Uncle Peter owns Wingnut Films)

### **Does our script application to Short Film Otago prevent us from submitting to Fresh Shorts?**

Current SFO policy does not prevent you submitting to Fresh Shorts at this stage. We understand that timing of applications may mean you want to explore opportunities simultaneously.

However, once a project has been accepted into the SFO development process, the writer/s must work exclusively with SFO until a decision is made on production, and Short Film Otago must hold the majority rights to any production.

### **If I get SFO funding can I also get NZFC's Fresh Shorts funding?**

While you can submit an application to SFO and NZFC to keep your options open, you can't receive funding from both, for the reasons below.

#### **Script Development**

A condition of the SFO development grant is that the writer/s work exclusively with SFO until a decision is made on production, and Short Film Otago must hold the majority rights to any production.

#### **Production Funding**

All films SFO supports must be achievable for \$10,000.00 and we can't invest in projects that don't meet that requirement.

If SFO supports a project going into production, SFO's conditions of funding specify a payment of \$10,000, "being 100% of the cash budget for the film". This is necessary to protect the investment SFO makes into each film, and to protect SFO's ability to complete the film if the filmmaker is unable to deliver.

In accepting the contract, applicants undertake that they will deliver the film for the contracted cash budget of \$10,000.

If you sign the contract and then find additional funds, you can spend additional funds on the film. However, if you sign the contract and then try but fail to raise additional funds then you must still deliver the film with the \$10,000.00 provided, as agreed under the contract.

Furthermore, because Short Film Otago must hold the majority rights to any production, the judgements, objectives, concerns, and interests of SFO and any matters relating to benefits to the Otago community take precedence over the artistic and/or financial needs of all other parties.

This is fundamental to the mission of Short Film Otago, and is the basis for the generous funding the SFO initiative has had from the Otago Community Trust for so long.

So any arrangements and agreements you enter into with other funders cannot compromise or conflict with SFO's requirements and interests.

Therefore, films lose eligibility for SFO funding if they are taken into the NZFC Fresh Shorts or other similar funding scheme.

### **Curious to know if SFO allows co-investment/crowd funding?**

See also above.

It is widely recognised that additional support beyond the cash budget SFO provides is needed to complete productions. Generally this is provided as in-kind support: donated equipment and services from the local industry, friends, and family.

The Board's position is that filmmakers are not precluded from raising additional funding, within certain provisos.

All films that SFO supports must be achievable for \$10,000.00 and we can't invest in projects that don't meet that requirement. In accepting the production contract, applicants undertake that they can deliver the film for the contracted cash budget of \$10,000.

If you sign the contract and successfully raise additional funds you can spend additional funds on the film. However, if you sign the contract and then try but fail to raise additional funds then you must still deliver the film with the \$10,000.00 provided, as agreed under the contract.

Furthermore, the judgements, objectives, concerns, and interests of SFO and any matters relating to benefits to the Otago community take precedence over the artistic and/or financial needs of all other parties. This is fundamental to the mission of Short Film Otago, and is the basis for the funding the SFO initiative receives from the Otago Community Trust and other support from the region.

So whatever arrangements and agreements you enter into with other funders cannot compromise or conflict with SFO's requirements and interests.

Within those parameters, SFO would do what it can to support you.

### **What is the situation with copyright should funding be awarded?**

Copyright in SFO productions remains with the Producer, however, revenues from any sale and licensing of the film are shared until such time as SFO's investment is repaid.

### **What are the approximate time frames for the script selection process?**

SFO is run by a small team of unpaid volunteers fitting this work around their own day jobs, which can mean things take longer than might otherwise be expected.

Given the number of submissions typically received it is likely to be at least 1-2 months before successful applications are confirmed.