

NZ On Air's response: 2020 NZ Media Fund Review

March 2021

CE's Introduction

NZ On Air wishes to thank Hal Crawford for his diligence in conducting a thorough and thoughtful review of the three-year old NZ Media Fund (NZMF). We also thank all the stakeholders who gave so freely of their time and considered views during the review process.

Inviting an independent person to come in and review an integral part of your work requires a total commitment to accept findings 'warts and all', and constructively use the information to improve. That is NZ On Air's commitment.

Overall, we have been heartened by the positive message that the NZMF is headed in the right direction, laying the groundwork for future change. Nonetheless, we have more work to do, and the below sets out what we are doing, or are planning to do, in response to the review's recommendations and points for consideration. (The blue boxes quote directly from the review.)

Responses to the Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Collect and unify audience data. Audience engagement metrics should be systematically collected and unified with other funded project data.

Response: We have just recruited for an Audience and Media Strategist role. This role will work closely with our Funding Analyst to explore aggregated audience measurement across linear and online, and new performance measures for funded content that take into account various factors such as cultural impact and critical acclaim alongside audience reach and engagement.

Recommendation 2: Improve diversity process. Important areas are the appropriate handling of stories within productions, makeup of production teams, and the identity of audiences.

Response:

Appropriate handling of stories within productions. Work is currently underway with guilds, platforms and producers to implement safeguards that aim to protect story sovereignty and support equitable partnerships. A recent example of this can be seen in the published guidelines for the Pan-Asian Factual RFP in the Jan/Mar 2021 round. Staff worked closely with the Pan-Asian Screen Collective (PASC) to include language in the guidelines that explicitly addressed these issues:

"In cases where the producer or production company of a proposal are not Pan-Asian, demonstration of meaningful collaboration with the creative team will be expected (i.e. how the partnership came together, nature of the collaboration, potential sharing of Intellectual Property ownership)."

Application guidelines have been updated (Section 15) stipulating the inclusion of principles and processes productions intend to have in place to ensure authentic and inclusive representation in front of and behind the camera where it is relevant to do so. The updated guidelines are as follows:

Equity and representation (including cultural and spiritual elements) – both on and off screen.

We will want to see aspects covered in your application including:

- where a project has specific cultural or spiritual elements, we will expect you to include information (i.e. a plan) that demonstrates how these will be handled through production and distribution to ensure safety of cast and crew and appropriate handling of sensitive subject matter
- appropriate people attached to the project in leadership roles who can manage and advise on these cultural and spiritual aspects of the production at critical stages (i.e. character development, set design)
- IP ownership structure; who created the idea? Who was involved in the initial stages of development and is this appropriately recognised in the budget, credits and potential income share of the project?
- language strategies to ensure correct pronunciation and use of language/s. Correct use and pronunciation of languages / dialects on screen (unless it is important to the narrative not to e.g. demonstrating mono-cultural attitudes)
- meaningful representation on screen in key talent roles. We want to see depth and complexity of character arcs and storytelling; multi-dimensional cultural characters who appear credible to the communities they represent and aren't reliant on stereotypes
- where relevant - mentoring and talent development – leading to career pathways

This approach will likely see an increase in production budgets to include aspects such as funded attachments, mentoring, external cultural and language consultation. Recently funded projects have built training and development opportunities into their productions to improve outcomes in this area and we intend to showcase learnings from these in due course.

Makeup of production teams. As per the notes above, this is being addressed at submission stage (in terms of the data and information we seek up front and prioritise at assessment), and we are looking to expand this scope of work further in collaboration with the sector.

A rough quantification of funded content consumption by ethnic, age and regional demographics. This is a more complex area to deliver to however, the audience and media data mahi will explore better audience tracking measures. We have also subscribed to a data tool which offers real-time insights into NZ audiences' content consumption.

Recommendation 3: Accept higher agency overheads. This relates to the previous two recommendations as well as responding to changes made under the NZMF. The very lean model of past years is no longer appropriate given the new data and application handling requirements. The increase need not be large to be effective.

Response: We have maintained admin costs at or under 3% for a number of years. This has ensured as much of the available funding as possible went to supporting public media content. We acknowledge though that we need to review our structure and capacity to continue to be effective as an agency and reflecting the significantly changing media landscape. We do not see this as an excuse to spend money unwisely. We are in a modest growth phase, adding the Audience and Media Strategist role previously mentioned, and new roles in the Funding and Corporate Services teams to

assist with the growth in workload. In addition, additional specialist resource will be hired to administer the new Journalism funding.

Recommendation 4: Fund marketing. The hard fact of TV PUTs decline (persons using television at a particular time) mean that a broadcaster's in-house marketing is seen by considerably fewer people than a decade ago. People can only enjoy content they know exists, and funding content that is poorly consumed through lack of awareness defeats the purpose. NZ On Air should explore allowing a proportion of the platform contribution to be house inventory on big platforms. In addition, projects should be allowed to include a set marketing spend (that cannot be spent on a funded platform's internal marketing) within funded costs.

Response: This approach is underway with both the recent Pan-Asian RFP and the current Youth RFP stating that applications should include:

"A marketing and release plan outlining a thorough understanding of the intended audience, their viewing habits, the intended release platform and strategy around how this project will attract an audience. Support for paid marketing and promotion may be reflected in the proposal budget. A maximum allocation of \$20k can be sought for a marketing and release plan with clear justification provided."

We are clear that producer-led marketing and promotion must be ancillary to network/platform marketing contributions and must be monitored closely to analyse audience engagement outcomes against reduced content outputs.

We are also supporting a new industry development initiative to boost capability and help NZ's screen storytellers to better reach and engage with audiences, so local screen stories can be discovered by their intended audiences.

Recommendation 5: Improve the visibility of NZ On Air. Public awareness of NZ On Air has declined over the past two years. In the past, the agency has had a high profile within the industry and a moderately low profile with the general public. NZ On Air must become more visible in order to avoid ossifying in the public mind.

Response: NZ On Air does not intend to undertake a marketing campaign to promote itself as our purpose centres around the content. Greater visibility of funded content with those audiences who are currently less likely to engage with funded content (Youth and Pan-Asian New Zealanders for e.g.) is likely to organically improve NZ On Air's visibility. However, consideration is needed of whether the brand currently conveys the meaning and impact of what we do. Updated requirements around accreditation on funded content are also being devised to ensure audience awareness of NZ On Air's involvement and branding.

Responses to the Considerations

In addition to his recommendations, Hal Crawford raises further points for 'consideration'. (The blue boxes quote directly from the review.)

Consideration 1: Review the digital funding cap.

Response: The current \$500k cap on digital-only projects will be reviewed alongside a robust assessment of audience/funding proportionality. We need to ensure we can effectively measure audience outcomes across linear and digital if we intend to fund premium content for digital-first platforms.

Consideration 2: Require industry attachments.

Response: This requires deeper exploration with the sector (in particular the guilds) as we want to ensure that a mandate in this regard does not turn into a box-ticking exercise without meaningful mentorship and support structures in place on productions; and that it is not an onerous exercise for productions without adequate resourcing.

Consideration 3: Fund some projects over multiple years.

Response: This would be difficult to implement without changing the nature of the way the agency itself is funded (annual appropriation). It would also limit our ability to support new ideas, or move on if a project does not reach its audience.

Consideration 4: Build a comprehensive content archive.

Response: This requires analysing within the wider context of current platform funding and could be a focus of a future platforms review. However, it is also noted this may be an ancillary outcome of the Strong Public Media work.

Further

Beyond the Recommendations and Considerations section, the Review contained a number of other areas for staff to consider including:

- reducing complexity of the Scripted and Factual roadmaps and genre classifications,
- reviewing targeted rounds and tagged funding approach,
- addressing funding round bottlenecks in the first half of the financial year,
- revisiting the [nine investment principles](#),
- reviewing content and industry development approaches,
- reviewing Te Rautaki Māori,
- and a more focused approach to partnerships with agencies including Te Māngai Pāho.

Many of these activities require sector consultation (some of which is already underway).