



# Factual Wānanga

This document provides a summary of the Factual Wānanga hosted by NZ On Air in March 2019. NZ On Air will use this summary to inform development of a Factual Roadmap.

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## Overview

In March 2019 NZ On Air invited Factual production professionals to meet for one day and workshop a wide range of issues facing NZ On Air in a rapidly changing media landscape. Factual generally means non-fiction content that includes documentary, observational, docudrama, information and interviews, and current affairs, and includes content for different audiences including children.

The focus of the day was to kōrero the competing tensions that impact the current funding environment that will help NZ On Air develop a roadmap to guide its Factual investments. A previous such workshop in 2017 helped develop NZ On Air's [Scripted roadmap](#) and [Development roadmap](#).

More than 100 people took up the opportunity: producers, directors, writers, and representatives of guilds, networks and other platforms. Scene-setting presentations set up the morning, followed by round tables in the afternoon discussing challenges raised throughout the morning which we then consolidated as specific questions (see Appendix A). The contributions were thoughtful and measured and attendees provided very positive feedback afterwards.

## What we discussed

The breadth of expertise and opinions in the room led to wide-ranging discussion. 10 industry professionals on a 'Perspectives and Provocations' panel were asked to speak from a range of viewpoints: Platforms, Broadcasting, Commissioning, Journalism, Documentary, Targeted Audiences, Online Innovation. Key issues raised included:

- Effective multi-platform commissioning is more important than it's ever been
- Linear distribution and promotion remain critical to reaching large NZ audiences
- Diversity and representation across the board is an issue for Factual production
- We struggle to see ourselves as a Pacific nation and have a backlog of untold stories
- There are a lack of talent development pathways for newer creators
- There should be a better balance of funding niche, mid-sized and mainstream content
- Online platforms are essential for creating powerful, niche Factual stories – but their financial contribution to production budgets is inadequate
- Effectively measuring the performance of online-only content is a sector-wide challenge
- Is it NZ On Air's role to save quality local journalism and current affairs? If so, how?
- The lack of development funding for Factual projects is stifling innovation
- Support for one-off docos/long-form doco series needs to line up with global trends

In the face of growing global competition and the increase of international platforms at home, all attendees agreed that reaching New Zealanders with quality, local Factual stories has never been more essential to the wellbeing of our society. There was consensus that the intrinsic value of Factual content helps protect our history and stories for future generations.

## The challenges

The main challenges and opportunities identified and generally agreed during the day concerned:

1. Funding policy and practice
2. Representation
3. Māori content
4. Development (Talent and Content)
5. Journalism

## 6. Partnerships

### General comments

There is a strong feeling from many that there is an insufficient diversity of stories and people on and off screen and that the guiding philosophy should be “Nothing about us without us” to ensure authentic representation in the media. It was pointed out that diverse audiences are not necessarily ‘small’ audiences either as Aotearoa is more diverse today than it has ever been.

Most advocate for more diversity of content representing regional, cultural, and gender perspectives. This feels particularly important given the emphasis on Factual content existing to reflect ourselves and promote understanding. One of the key issues with achieving better representation is a lack of training and talent development pathways for diverse voices to gain industry experience.

Local journalism and current affairs is reaching crisis point. There is significant industry debate about the role that NZ On Air has to play in saving quality local journalism. It is agreed that without quality local journalism “we’re stuffed” but there is no consensus about where increased NZ On Air funding will come from to support this.

There needs to be a fair balance of funding content for niche audiences online vs. mainstream audiences on linear. Discussion around this was vigorous. Viewing trends show that Factual content is generally less time-shifted meaning it is attractive for linear broadcasters. Television output remains important for retaining talent in NZ to work on projects of comparative scale, for developing capability, and showcasing NZ stories and talent to large audiences. And where the large budget projects should be. There are conflicting opinions about whether too much funding is being invested in online-only content, without clarity as to whether audiences are effectively being reached. The counter argument is that NZ On Air is currently ‘over-serving the same large but shrinking audience’ on linear television.

There is a strong opinion that - contrary to global trends - one-off docos and long-form series are unsupported by local networks and becoming an endangered species, and that networks should look to the likes of Netflix and successes like *Wild*, *Wild Country* to re-think their strategy. Many believe that greater NZ On Air investment in Factual development will help move the dial on this issue.

Greater partnership opportunities and collaboration between sector agencies is welcomed as a way to leverage funding. Similarly, content sharing and collaboration between platforms is seen as a key way to reach the broadest possible audiences.

There is unanimous agreement that stronger industry-wide lobbying is required to make the case for increased funding. There was no consensus that NZ On Air was funding content that it should not be. NZ On Air has insufficient funds both to maintain current production levels and also to effect substantial further change.

### Funding policy and practice

#### Should Factual goals mirror Scripted goals?

- This was a question about whether the *Premier*, *Sustainable* and *Newer Storyteller* strands of the Scripted Roadmap could be useful to a Factual Roadmap. The answer was ‘no’: Factual and Scripted are too different, and Factual isn’t as easy as Scripted to compartmentalise. All agree that Factual must be able to remain more agile.
- There is no agreement on other categorisation options but a recognition that a roadmap would need to do this.

### Uneven funding distribution

- Many producers have been struggling with the uneven spread of yearly funding since the launch of the NZMF (compounded by NZ On Air's funding freeze). The sector widely refers to the first round of the new financial year as "Super July" indicating that a disproportionate amount of general funding goes in this round.
- There is strong support for four, not five, rounds a year as long as those rounds have meaningful money attached to each of them.
- Applicants were comfortable with the reality that more good projects may be declined, if a finite amount is applied to each round, as long as they were able to reapply if advised by NZ On Air.
- Some request that General Factual and Scripted be accepted into every round but that this doesn't need to be the case for all genres – i.e. Targeted Audiences should be a specific round – although some query why this is only one round a year.
- Funding could be allocated to different audience groups per round rather than content genres – e.g. Pasifika, Māori, Disability communities, Asian, Regional.
- There is support for a discretionary 'out of round' fund (to be responsive to opportunities).

### Platforms

- There is agreement that platform contribution to projects should be mandatory (with a minimum guaranteed input), and ideally cash ("skin in the game"). Smaller platforms argue that cash contribution can be challenging and that in-kind contribution should be better valued by NZ On Air; i.e. legal contribution, internal resources, infrastructure etc.
- Where cash contributions are not offered, most argued that platforms should then not push for exclusivity.
- Some believe that largely non-commercial platforms should have their contributions scaled.
- All believe that platform contribution requirements must be fair to all platforms, and that NZ On Air will need to fix the measurement issue first in order to create a level playing field.
- Some argue that requiring a platform contribution can have the opposite effect as it reduces creative risk given a significant cash investment leads to bigger, broader, safer outcomes and mainstream audience targets.
- There should be greater distribution opportunities allowed by commissioning platforms – cinema release, SVOD broadcast release, more windows, geoblocking flexibility.

### One-off docos and docudramas

- One-off docos are still under threat. Networks will rarely schedule them unless there is a clear audience hook. Where do docudramas fit?
- There is consensus about the importance of docos in protecting our history and providing a contemporary snapshot on issues that matter to New Zealanders.
- Many believe that greater NZ On Air investment in Factual development will help move the dial on this issue as networks would take more creative risks.

### International

- Some argue that NZ On Air should not fund international formats because it discourages taking risks on homegrown IP. Others argue that international formats reduce risk to a more acceptable level and many add NZ-focused adaptations that are important.

- Many believe retaining and encouraging domestic IP is critical for the sustainability of the local industry, and that NZ On Air should support this more.
- Most argue that a NZ perspective on an international story should be funded. Some argue that a NZ director making an international story without onscreen NZ relevance should also be funded.

#### Fragmentation and funding levels

- There is tension about the balance of funding for content online vs. on air. Many believe NZ On Air's move to increase online-only series is diluting the impact of Factual funding. Others argue that less funding should be allocated to linear content given declining audiences on television. Is there an increasing vacuum between online and docs of high production value/cost?
- Some online platforms are seeing strong growth in online audiences and can demonstrate specific online performance outcomes vs. more assumptive TV ratings.
- There is some concern about the falling cost per hour for online content production not reflecting the true cost of online video production. Many believe that funding online-only content at a lower level is not sustainable and is damaging to the industry.

#### Better guidance from NZ On Air

- Some argue that the information we publish before each round needs to be clearer in terms of what ideas NZ On Air is interested in, and that longer-term guidance is required to help the industry plan better. Too many RFPs can be confusing. NZ On Air's website navigation to find this information seems over-complicated and non-intuitive.
- Many feel there is a lack of clarity around what defines innovation vs. risk and how NZ On Air assesses each.
- NZ On Air should signal in advance any changing expectations for returning series YOY. There was divided opinion on whether series caps should remain (currently a maximum of four Factual series unless special circumstances exist). "Success should be rewarded as much as innovation".
- Be open and transparent about funding decisions – e.g. five bullet points in decline letters reflecting the rigorous process.
- Providing the industry with a summary of post-funding trends from NZ On Air's perspective would be helpful.

#### Measurement

- Measuring success of multi-platform content is complex: NZ On Air notes the difficulty in trying to create comparative data sets to measure and compare performance between funded shows for online and/or on-air.
- People are keen to better understand what success looks like in the eyes of NZ On Air – is it audience engagement? Views? What could success look like aside from high ratings?

#### Representation

- Many feel that the industry as a whole needs to address unconscious bias and get out of comfort zones. There is interest in targeted funding strands/RFPs.
- There is general consensus that quotas are not the right approach and that talent development needs to be the primary focus.
- There is acknowledgement that it can be difficult and costly to film in the regions.

- Others argue that if there was greater diversity in commissioning across the industry, then we would have greater representation on and off screen.
- Many believe that new digital opportunities and platforms are more receptive to independent producers and are helping to diversify the gatekeepers.
- Some suggest NZ On Air establish a Diversity Fund with a broad umbrella that includes gender, regional and cultural diversity. Others argue that if funding is ring-fenced too strictly, then problems may emerge if projects are selected based on diversity vs. quality.
- People commended the Scripted Roadmap which explicitly calls out the need for more female writers/directors and feel this is a good approach to adopt for Factual. The recent joining of Asia and Pacific content creation in a single RFP is seen as unhelpful in trying to develop representation and capabilities in these two different communities.

## Rautaki Māori

- There is some lack of understanding that NZ On Air's Rautaki Māori is a strategy not a fund. Some wish for a ringfenced fund.
- Programmes that are more mainstream should be funded by NZ On Air rather than Te Māngai Paho (TMP) to free up TMP funds. Given the rise in te reo Māori in NZ, NZ On Air should put their hand up to fund more.
- Some argue that meeting Rautaki Māori criteria is challenging as there is a skills shortage in the industry, and that some people lacking experience are thrown into roles without support in order to fit the key personnel criteria.
- There is interest in seeing Rautaki Māori better championed in a new NZ On Air Factual strategy.

## Development

### Talent Development

- Some argue that because the industry is so lean, it is difficult to take risks with less experienced people. Many express a desire to work with underrepresented voices but say it is difficult to find the right people.
- NZ On Air should consider stipulating talent development requirements in contracts with larger production companies to ensure they build development and a diversity of talent into their production process.
- Production companies could work more closely with Iwi, education and training institutes to offer paid internships/apprenticeships and increase pathway opportunities.
- The guilds should have a general marketplace/website (developed in partnership with the education sector) that experienced producers/journalists can use to discover and support emerging talent.
- NZ On Air could support the guilds and/or organisations such as Script to Screen to offer greater training opportunities to diverse voices.

### Content development

- Many believe there should be more money available for Factual development and pitch resources as this would be an incentive to start projects and an incentive for platforms and partners to support them. There is an argument made that greater development investment will lead to better representation and diversity outcomes.

- Others say that the current allocation of Factual development funding - a small number of complex projects that generally require significant research to validate - is the right approach, especially given a high number of developed Factual projects have proceeded into production. This latter point may be less true as funding constraints intensify.

## Journalism

- The critical gap at the moment is civics coverage of New Zealanders as citizens and involvement in local politics. This has to be addressed otherwise “we’re all stuffed”.
- Should more Factual funding be extended to cover this area? If so – where should it come from? Should ‘Journalism’ be treated separately to ‘Factual’? Many believe that investigative journalism should have a distinct fund.
- Media ownership has to be part of this discussion as many argue it is unwise for local journalism to rest in the hands of international conglomerates, and that NZ On Air should be investing in platforms that are “demonstrably invested in New Zealand”.
- In a news environment rife with fake news, it is getting difficult to promote authentic, quality local news and engage an audience with it. Thus the credibility of the platform is increasingly important in terms of making funding decisions.
- There is industry-wide interest in how we ensure young, diverse journalists and Factual creators develop their talents locally.
- Some believe that there is duplication in currently funded current affairs shows – e.g. *Q+A* and *The Nation*, and question whether these are the right formats for the current landscape. There is an argument that resource could be freed up to be invested in other current affairs projects.

## Partnerships

- There is broad support for partnerships between NZ On Air and the wider sector (especially NZ Film Commission) as people see partnerships as a way to better leverage funding opportunities for the sector.
- Some argue that NZ On Air and TMP could be better aligned both in terms of coventuring and in what type of content each will support alone.
- There is enthusiasm for platforms to better collaborate around content roll outs that would allow greater discoverability of content – i.e. a small window of exclusivity for a primary platform and then the content to be made available to all platforms if they are interested.
- Many champion collective advocacy across the industry (networks, platforms, guilds, production companies) to make the case for increased funding. A Collective Advocacy Group is suggested (similar to the 10 Year Strategy Group or the Film Industry Working Group) that provides a unified industry voice with the intention to develop an action plan to take to the Minister. The industry could also collectively invest in a specialist to raise the profile of local storytelling. They would sell in all the things our industry does best – investment, employment (regional), diversity.



## Ideas for change

Attendees agreed that NZ On Air is facing hard choices, with or without a funding increase. There is strong support for the development of a Factual Roadmap to clearly set out priorities and to help the industry plan more effectively.

Ideas for change were summarised as follows:

### 1. Reframe Factual priorities

- a. Actively seek a wider range of Factual investments to provide for both mainstream and targeted audiences. Genres are bending and NZ On Air needs to remain agile.
- b. Actively encourage submission of one-off docos (perhaps in a strand) and long-form series.
- c. Consider how to encourage more mid-sized projects that have the potential to break through to larger audiences (e.g. content aimed at families)
- d. Articulate NZ On Air's role in funding quality local journalism. Consider a separate stream.
- e. Explore adapting Rautaki Māori to help address the skills shortage in the industry and review it once the Māori Media review is complete.
- f. Don't overload industry with too many RFPs and unclear round information. Make NZ On Air priorities clearer.
- g. Consider number of funding rounds and whether they could be audience focused, not genre focused.

### 2. Improve diversity (on and off screen).

- a. Seek specific initiatives to encourage wider representation in front of and behind the camera (including women, Māori, Pacific, Asian, regional).
- b. Consider investing in more this specific talent development and frame as a 'pathway' model.
- c. Facilitate/support an industry database that helps production companies discover and develop emerging talent.
- d. Diversity includes technology, e.g. including podcasts and multimedia content.

### 3. Make development (talent and content) more strategic

- a. Ask producers of Factual applications (especially larger budget) to explain how the proposal will assist talent development, and consider response as part of assessment.
- b. Consider how much funding should be provided for non-production outcomes and on what basis.
- c. Get better at measuring the success of outcomes from any change: e.g. having a large development slate that does not proceed to production has a risk of criticism that public funds are being wasted as well as causing industry frustration.

### 4. More partnerships

- a. Look for more partnership opportunities (i.e. collaborating with NZFC or TMP).
- b. Encourage greater collaboration and content-sharing between platforms.

## Next steps

The Factual roadmap (and any other policy work) will take effect from the 2019/20 year. NZ On Air will publish a draft roadmap shortly and seek further feedback.

## Appendix A: The 14 questions agreed for workshopping

1. What should NZ On Air be funding that we are currently don't? What should we stop funding to make way for new areas?
2. Should the goals for Scripted and Factual be the same (Premier, Sustainable, Newer Storytellers)?
3. How do we address under-representation on and off-screen (e.g. ethnicity, disability, gender and regional representation)?
4. Should NZ On Air set representation quotas?
5. What can NZ On Air do better to ensure young, diverse journalists and Factual creators can develop their talents locally?
6. How can Rautaki Māori be presented better throughout NZ On Air policy?
7. Should NZ On Air restructure funding rounds throughout the year?
8. What can NZ On Air do in terms of better communicating expectations, guidance and guidelines ahead of funding rounds?
9. What should a platform contribution look like?
10. Should NZ On Air spend more money on Factual Development?
11. Should NZ On Air have a greater role in funding investigative journalism?
12. What can the sector do collectively to better advocate for increased govt. Funding?
13. Should NZ On Air prioritise support for platforms that are demonstrably invested in NZ?
14. Do one-off docos deserve a special funding initiative?