

2015 Documentary Fund: FAQs

Submissions open: April 1 - September 1, 2015

MacArthur Documentary Open Call FAQ's

We understand that this process raises many questions. We have tried to anticipate some of those questions here. Please carefully read these Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) when deciding whether to apply.

(Note: These FAQs differ from those of previous MacArthur Documentary Open Calls)

Q: What kind of documentaries does MacArthur fund?

A: Independently produced documentaries that examine underreported but important social issues. These films have the potential to spark dialogue, create understanding, and contribute to social, culture, and policy change. MacArthur-supported documentaries:

- Address important, contemporary social issues – international and domestic – illustrating the human impacts of public policy.
- Follow an issue over time, providing in-depth reporting that goes beyond conventional news coverage.
- Utilize compelling personal stories to engage viewers and create empathy
- Appeal to a broad audience because they treat differing points of view with respect.
- Are factually accurate and follow best practices in documentary ethics.
- Are led by experienced teams that have had past success in bringing a documentary or interactive project to completion and reaching broad U.S. audiences.
- Are in production or post-production stage.

Q: What are the 2015 deadlines for MacArthur's Open Call?

A: For 2015, the MacArthur will be accepting proposals for documentary funding on a rolling basis between April 1 and 11:59pm EST on September 1.

Q: When will grant decisions be made, and announced?

A: Grants will be made on a rolling basis. The Foundation is likely to approve 1-3 grants per month, and a total of 15-20 grants for 2015. A final list of 2015 grants will be announced by MacArthur at the end of the year, but grant recipients will be notified as grants are approved and will be allowed to share the news publicly.

Q: When can I expect to hear back from the Foundation?

A: When you submit your proposal, you will receive a confirmation email acknowledging your submission. You will be notified as to whether your proposal is still under consideration within 6-8 weeks of when you have submitted.

Q: May I request a deadline extension for special circumstances?

A: No extensions will be granted. Completed proposals must be received electronically by September 1, 2015. Proposals received before April 1 or after September 1, 2015 will not be considered.

2015 Documentary Fund: FAQs

Submissions open: April 1 - September 1, 2015

Q: May I send the application by email, mail, delivery service, fax, or in person?

A: We will be accepting applications online only at www.macfound.org/docfilm.

Q: Is there any advantage to applying earlier or later in the open call period?

A: Yes. When MacArthur's 2015 budget for documentary films has been allocated, no more grants will be made, even if the open call period has not ended.

Q: I am an independent filmmaker working on my own without an incorporated or organization through which to apply. May I apply?

A: Unfortunately not. MacArthur's Documentary Open Call can only make grants to organizations and companies that are legally incorporated in a U.S. state. The organization/company applying must be able to accurately state that it has complete editorial and financial control over the documentary project.

Q: May I apply through a fiscal sponsor?

A: Unfortunately not. We realize that many foundations and film funders prefer to make documentary grants through fiscal sponsors or fiscal agents – however, the MacArthur Foundation does not make documentary grants through fiscal sponsors or fiscal agents. The organization/company applying must be able to accurately state that it has complete editorial and financial control over the documentary project.

Q: May I apply through a non-profit production company?

A: Yes – as long as the company can accurately state that it has complete editorial and financial control over the documentary project. Your production company must also be in good standing before you apply for funding.

Q: May I apply through a for-profit production company?

A: Yes – the MacArthur Foundation can make a grant to a for-profit production company for a documentary project with a charitable purpose if the following conditions can be met:

1. The organization/company must affirm that the professional fees and costs associated with the documentary project are being charged at or below cost.
2. The organization/company must affirm that no individual or organization will make a profit from the film. If your project proceeds past the initial application review, you must submit a project budget that reflects this, and includes both the “at or below cost” and “will not give rise to a profit” statements.
3. The production company is incorporated in a U.S. state and is in good standing with that state (no outstanding filing fees or taxes). We strongly urge you to check with your Secretary of State's office to confirm your company is in good standing before you apply for funding.

2015 Documentary Fund: FAQs

Submissions open: April 1 - September 1, 2015

Q: How can I tell if my company is in good standing?

A: Please contact your Secretary of State's office to determine this.

Q: Does the charitable purpose requirement mean that my production company can't earn revenue if a public or commercial broadcaster, or an educational distributor acquires our film?

A: No. You may still make distribution deals with these entities, and receive compensation. Please note that a requirement of receiving MacArthur funding is that the film must be made available at low-cost or no cost to wide audiences. This can be achieved by a PBS broadcast, and/or by a robust educational and community screening distribution plan.

Q: I am not a U.S. citizen or permanent resident, but living and working in the U.S. at the moment on my film. May I apply?

A: MacArthur makes grants to organizations and companies that are legally incorporated in a U.S. state – not to individuals. If you are affiliated with, or have been hired by, a U.S. organization to produce/direct this project, the head of the organization should apply and list you as the primary filmmaking contact person for the project.

Q: Do you require a video footage sample?

A: Yes – You must submit a footage sample from the project for which you are applying for funding. The sample should be between 5 and 10 minutes in length. Please do not submit footage from previous work.

Q: I submitted a documentary film proposal in a previous year's MacArthur Documentary Open Call but my project was not funded. May I reapply for this round?

A: Please refer to your correspondence from the Foundation notifying you of the outcome of our consideration for the project you submitted in a previous round. If the letter discourages you from reapplying, we advise you not to reapply with the same project. If you have made a substantial change in the focus or direction of the project since you last applied, which you believe brings the project more in line with the Foundation's present guidelines, you may reapply. If our correspondence encouraged you to reapply, we invite you to do so.

Q: I received MacArthur Foundation support for my documentary through a previous Open Call – May I apply for funding from the 2015 Documentary Fund with the same project?

A: If your project has received support through a previous MacArthur Documentary Open Call, it is not eligible to receive funding again for the same project. Your organization is eligible to apply with a different project.

Q: I'm producing a historical documentary. Should I apply?

A: The MacArthur Foundation supports documentaries that explore contemporary social issues. Films rooted in history are eligible, but should be comprised of more than 50% present-day footage to be competitive.

2015 Documentary Fund: FAQs

Submissions open: April 1 - September 1, 2015

Q: Do you accept proposals for web-native documentaries, participatory documentaries and transmedia projects?

A: Yes. We will consider these projects, provided their subject and approach fit the criteria listed in our open call guidelines, and provided there is a strong plan for broad dissemination.

Q: My organization applied online to the 2014 Documentary Open Call. Should I use the same login and password to apply again?

A: No. You must create a new login for the 2015 MacArthur Foundation Documentary Fund. Any previous proposals from 2013 or 2014 will not be available in our online system.

Q: Do you fund post-production expenses?

A: Yes – when we refer to production funding, this includes both the production and post-production phases.

Q: Do you fund research and development?

A: We do not fund research and development, by which we mean projects without video samples.

Q: Do you fund outreach or community engagement?

A: No. While we appreciate the important role of outreach, public engagement and distribution activities, we are primarily looking for projects seeking support for production and post-production activities.

Q: If I make significant progress on my project or have significant news to share after deadline, may I send an update to the MacArthur Foundation?

A: We are unable to accept updates through the online system once the application period ends on September 1, 2015. If your project is under consideration, we will give you the opportunity to submit updates.

Q: I have a question that is not addressed in the guidelines or the FAQ's. May I email or call the Foundation?

A: We are sorry but we are unable to respond to phone or email questions. Please use your best judgment and submit a proposal to the best of your ability.