

2015 Documentary Fund: Guidelines

Submissions open: April 1 - September 1, 2015

Introduction

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation 2015 Documentary Fund will open April 1. The MacArthur Foundation Documentary Fund seeks to support feature documentary films and interactive digital documentaries that combine engaging storytelling with in-depth journalism. Proposals will be accepted through September 1, 2015 and grants will be made on a rolling basis.

What kind of documentaries does MacArthur fund?

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.

What do you need to apply to the MacArthur Foundation Documentary Fund?

1. Be producing a journalistic, in-depth documentary film or interactive web-based nonfiction project that follows one or more contemporary social issues through compelling human stories.
2. Be a legally incorporated U.S. production company in good standing with the state in which it is incorporated and have editorial and financial control over the documentary project for which you are seeking funds. Nonprofit organizations and for-profit companies may apply. The MacArthur Documentary Fund does not make grants through fiscal sponsors, or to individuals.
3. Be in production or post-production, and able to show a 5-10 minute representative sample from the project for which you are applying for support.
4. Read and agree to the MacArthur Foundation's Policy on Intellectual Property: [here](#).

What's the process?

Applicants are invited to submit their project proposals through <http://macfound.org/docfilm> anytime between April 1 and September 1, 2015. All applicants will be notified of their status within 6-8 weeks of submission.

Grants will be made on a rolling basis as qualified proposals are selected for funding. Consistent with previous years, the Foundation expects to fund no more than 20 projects this year, even though we recognize that many more will meet the Foundation's stated guidelines.

The application period will close at 11:59pm EST on September 1, 2015 but **applicants are encouraged not to wait until the end of the application period**. Available funds are limited.

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How to Apply

Please read these guidelines and the FAQ's before you start your application online. We have done our very best to anticipate and answer all of your questions. Please do not call or email the Foundation. Due to the very high volume of applications, we are unable to answer individual questions. Please do not ask for extensions or exceptions, no extensions or exceptions will be given.

Timeline Applications may be submitted between April 1, 2015 and September 1, 2015. No exceptions.

Initial review will take place as proposals are received; applicants will be notified as to whether their proposals are still under consideration within 6-8 weeks of their submission. Grants will be made on a rolling basis.

Eligibility

- Organizations and companies incorporated in a U.S. state may apply (we cannot make grants to individuals or to non-U.S. companies)
- The applicant organization must have editorial and financial control over the project (we cannot make grants through fiscal sponsors)
- The project must be intended for a wide U.S. audience at little or no cost to the audience (through public television broadcast, free online distribution, or a robust community engagement screening plan)

Amount The typical grant amount is \$50,000 - \$200,000.

Proposal Please prepare your proposal using the proposal checklist. All proposals must be submitted online at <http://macfound.org/docfilm>

Documents Within 6-8 weeks of submitting your proposal, you will be contacted to tell you whether your project is still under consideration. If your project is still under consideration, you will be asked to provide:

- 1) Treatment
- 2) Full production budget
- 3) A copy of your company's Articles of Incorporation
- 4) If a non-profit, your company's IRS letter.

Please note: Your company must be in good standing in the state in which it is incorporated.

Policies In the event that your project is approved for MacArthur Foundation funding, you will be asked to sign a Grant Award Agreement. Please review the **MacArthur Foundation's [Policy on Intellectual Property](#)** before submitting your proposal. If you cannot comply with these terms, please do not apply.

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Proposal Checklist:

Please prepare your application using this checklist.

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- 1) **Logline** (25 words maximum)
Provide a 1-2 sentence description of your documentary project.
- 2) **Narrative Synopsis** (700 words maximum)
What is the documentary about? Provide a clear sense of the documentary's theme, format, structure, style, and point of view. Please include the current status of the project and explain how MacArthur funds will be used to advance the project. If your project proceeds to the semi-final round of review, you will be asked to submit a more detailed treatment.
- 3) **Background & Access** (150 words maximum)
What led you to this story?
- 4) **Urgency & Perspective** (150 words maximum)
Why does this story need to be told now, in a documentary format? Why is your team particularly well-qualified or positioned to tell it?
- 5) **Experience** (200 words maximum)
Provide a 50-word bio for up to 4 key production team members.
- 6) **Distribution Planning** (150 words maximum)
Who is the target audience for this project, and how will it reach them? Describe any plans for television broadcast, theatrical release, and community engagement screenings.
- 7) **Request, Budget & Current Funding**
The amount you are seeking from MacArthur (the typical grant range is between \$50,000 and \$200,000). Include the amount of the total production budget, and list any income (and its source) already secured.
- 8) **Work Sample**
For documentary films: provide a Vimeo link (the Foundation will not accept YouTube links or DVDs) to a piece of footage from the project from which you are applying for funding from MacArthur. This sample should be between 5 and 10 minutes in length. If password protected, the password MUST BE "macarthur" (all lower case).

For Interactive projects: provide screen shots or a link to work-in-progress. If the sample is password protected, the password MUST BE "macarthur" (all lower case).