

## Development Notes and Project History Notes:

### What are they and why do I need to write them?

Development Notes and Project History Notes are critical elements of a strong application. They provide Screen Tasmania and Screen Tasmania's Expert Advisory Group (STEAG) with important information and insight into the project and the team developing it, including how the project will resonate with contemporary audiences, how the development funding will be utilised to strengthen the project and the development, and marketplace pathway for the project.

### Project History

#### *Inspiration*

The Project History Notes are usually written by the creator of the show and they are, generally speaking, an opportunity for your team to show *what drew you to this particular story and why?*

It always helps to give Screen Tasmania a sense of what is driving the storyteller's passion for this story and it can reveal how authentic the creative inspiration is/was.

Ask yourself if there was some specific inspiration

- A newspaper story?
- A personal experience?
- A story that you heard at a party?
- A theme that resonated with your own life experience?
- A song or piece of music?

The project history should also offer a sense of:

- Why now?
- Why is this story important to contemporary audiences?
- Why is your team the right team to be telling the story?
- What is your genre and why is it the right choice for this project?

#### *Project Changes*

The Project History Notes are an opportunity to talk about *how the project has changed* from its conceptual stage. Have there been changes in the narrative focus or the key creative team? Have there been discussions with marketplace at any stage? Has the team applied for agency funding for the project's development in the past and, if so, was it successful?

### Development Notes

The Development Notes document offers your creative team the opportunity to *analyse your own creative work*: a critical examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the screen story that you have expressed in the application materials. Within the development notes, you can discuss the team's creative intentions for the project, including:

- *What are the themes?* How are these themes explored in the application materials? Why are these themes relevant to contemporary audiences?
- *Who are your primary characters (protagonist/s)?* What is their arc (journey)?
- *What is your intended tone?*

- *What is your intended genre?* How will this genre resonate with your audience?

The Development Notes enable Screen Tasmania and the STEAG to compare and contrast the creative team's intention and the execution:

- *Intention*, as detailed in the development notes
- *Execution*, as evidenced in the pitch/bible/script materials submitted in the application

### *Weaknesses and Challenges*

Importantly, the Development Notes gives you as the applicant an opportunity to *identify and analyse the weaknesses* in the application materials and to outline *how you intend to address these during the next stage of development* as these form part of the assessment of your project.

### *Weaknesses are strengths*

You may balk at being overtly critical of their project in the development notes, fearing that being critical and identifying weaknesses will reflect poorly on the project when it is being assessed. This is not the case. The strength of a creative team is evident in its ability to identify and articulate at least some of the critical work that will be undertaken with the development funding.

A project is unlikely to receive development funding if the creative team is not able to identify the challenges they face at the next stage of development. Projects that are successful invariably have a set of development notes that show that the team can see areas that need work and have a clear plan to improve the project at the next stage of development.

For Documentary applications, many teams assume that having an idea is enough, and that once funding is secured, they will work out how to "bring it to life". Unfortunately, an idea has to be developed quite far in order to give Screen Tasmania confidence to fund it further. The more Contributors you have secured, the more you have explored your themes on paper, the more you have worked out your Story Beats in each episode, the more likely you are to receive funding. This is relevant for any stage of Documentary Development funding applications.

It can be helpful to use some of the lexicon of screenwriting and storytelling.

- What are the *central dramatic and/or thematic questions* in your project and how are these focused upon in the application materials?
- What are the *wants and needs of the primary characters*, what are the obstacles they must face how do these generate drama?
- *What are the stakes* for the protagonist and why will the audience be compelled to watch? What work needs to be done on these dramatic elements at the next stage?
- Is the story *structured in acts* and, if so, what is the structure and where are the current structural weaknesses?
- Does the story represent the *diversity* within contemporary Australian culture?
- What are the challenges you face in the next stage of development?

In a scripted series you might also ask how many characters have been presented to establish "the world" of the series. Are there too few or too many? Are there some characters who serve little dramatic purpose? How might their roles be strengthened? Is the story too expositional? Are motives unclear? Will the audience readily suspend their disbelief and, if not, how might the narrative be more convincing in this respect?

In a documentary application, you can explore issues such as:

- What is your story arc in each episode – where do your characters start and where do they end up?
- What are your moments of drama, to keep the audience on the ‘edge of their seats’?
- What’s at stake – why should the audience keep watching to the end and how will they be rewarded when they get there? This is true for all genres of documentary. There must be something to keep us hooked, to keep us watching.
- What are some of the ways in which the story will be told on the screen? Archival footage, interviews, presenter-led, observational filming, user-generated content? This needs to be thought through and justified in terms of the themes explored in your program/series.
- How will issues around access be managed? If your idea relies on access to a particular person or organisation, you should approach them before applying for funding and get them on board.
- How much of the story is undiscovered and how can the uncertain nature of any future direction be managed by the team in development? Almost all broadcast factual programs are highly planned in Pre-Production with Rundowns and Shooting Scripts written before any filming takes place. Your application needs to give an indication of what compelling content can be filmed, even at this early stage of a funding application.
- Doing Research Interviews (by phone, not filmed) with your Contributors and including genuine quotes in your written application can help the Assessor see that you know where you’re going with your ideas and themes.
- Do the interview subjects/presenters need training to present better on camera?
- It is not necessary to submit a Sizzle. It’s better to film a few minutes of your main On Screen Talent to show how they can engage the audience than to create a Sizzle that has high production values but undersells your idea.

### *Asking the Right Questions*

Development notes are not expected to provide definitive answers, but they need to *address some of the key questions* that need to be answered at your particular stage of development. The development may be focused specifically on a particular audience and market; there may be a particular broadcaster the project is being shaped for and, if so, it is worth mentioning how you’re shaping the project for that broadcaster and why. Even for Documentary applications, some of the fundamental themes/questions in your program need to be explored and worked out before applying for funding so that Screen Tasmania can be sure that you will make progress once funding has been secured.

### *Development Process*

The development notes provides Screen Tasmania with an understanding of what the team plans to do with the money if the funding is approved. The process may include a writers’ room, proof of concept production, marketplace discussions, and working with a story consultant or script editor. Please include the estimated timelines for these. Be aware that the development *process* should never be the focus of the development notes.

### *Development Notes: Things to Avoid*

Your Development Notes outline your intent for the work you will undertake in the next stage of development and forms part of the assessment. So it is important that your notes are clear and specific. Try to avoid generic statements in your development notes, such as:

- “To develop the characters to make them stronger”

- “To develop the arc of the protagonist”
- “To develop the episode outlines to make the plots stronger”
- “To ensure that the story line is strong and working – that the plot has no holes”
- “To ensure the characters are plausible and well-rounded”
- “To explore the themes in the documentary”

These sorts of responses offer no clear indication that your creative team understand the specific work required at the next stage.

Do not focus on the development process in your development notes. Rather, you should focus on your critical analysis of the project materials.