

# 2022 GRANT WRITING TIP SHEET

## PROOF OF RESIDENCY

You must be a current resident of Texas and have been a resident since July 1, 2021. A “resident” means someone who has lived in the state of Texas for one full year at the time of application to the AFS grant. If you are a permanent resident of Texas but are attending a college or university outside of the state for the past year or more, you would not be eligible. The Grant is intended to support the artist community in Texas and keep it thriving. As such, we are not able to award grants to previous Texans or Texas-based projects where the director is residing out of state.

## CASH REQUEST AND BUDGET INFORMATION

The Total Cash Cost will come out of your completed budget and should only include your out-of-pocket (Cash) costs, not your in-kind totals.

Note: While you can apply for multiple grants for which you are eligible, the total of the award allotment will not exceed \$10,000 in total for production (\$3,000 for development). Be specific about how cash funds requested would be used towards your project. Fill this in after you've completed your full budget. This will help to show that you've thought through your project.

Regardless of what phase of funding you are applying for, include budget amounts for pre-production through distribution. Not all line items will apply to your project.

Be sure to double-check your math and balance your budget. “In-kind” refers to anything that is donated outright. For example, if a friend is loaning you a camera for the shoot, you would place a value on the use of the camera and list it in the in-kind column—likewise with donated time on the part of your cast and crew. Be sure that the rates you list are in scale with your budget. For example, if your actual out-of-pocket costs are \$8,000 and you are not paying your actors or crew, list their services “in-kind” not at SAG or full union rates, but at a rate in scale with your budget (say \$50/day).

Note: While there are no hard budget limitations, remember that we are looking to fund projects where the AFS grant will make a difference. If your budget for a short is over \$100,000, it is important to make the case about why the AFS Grant is important for your project to meet its goals.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In the first round of review, the project description is the most significant written part

of your application. Think of it this way - you've got two pages to make a summation of your entire proposal. The other materials (the budget, the timeline, the personnel page, the video sample, etc.) are there to expand in more detail on what you've laid out in your 1-2 page project description.

- Make sure your project description does ALL of these things:
- Describes the STORY or the CONTENT of the film, with details on the stylistic approach, visual elements, story structure, characters, and thematic threads. Clearly state the format, including whether it is a documentary or narrative, or a specific genre, early in your description so that reviewers don't have to cross-reference your application form while reading your narrative.
- Describes the production plan and provides information on the project status to-date, as well as your unique approach to the material.
- Provides information about your goals, target audience and distribution plan.
- Details your fundraising strategy and how AFS funds would be used.

## The Story

Of these four elements, the first one is the most important. The story or contents of your film is what will make it interesting and unique. Do your best to describe the story in clear but evocative language. Don't be afraid to give away the ending. Your “audience” (the panel) needs to know what story they're funding.

In describing the story, take the advice of Strunk and White - “omit needless words,” and “use the active voice.” Identify who in your story (whether it's a documentary or a narrative)

is active and is striving for something and describe in clear terms what they're doing and how and why they're doing it. Describe their obstacles and how they overcome them (or don't!). Then, tie this story to the themes you're hoping to explore or what ideas or issues you're hoping to illustrate or critique by making this film. Avoid getting bogged down in superfluous detail that will lose your reader. If you have a complex plot with many twists and turns, don't try to explain it all - submit a treatment or screenplay to tell the whole story. Get a friend who doesn't know the story to read your description and see if they can follow it.

## The “Why”

Recognize that the panel may want to know why you, in particular, want to tell this story, or why you are the best person to do so. If it's based on a personal experience, let them know, or if the subject matter is something you have some familiarity with, describe how that came to be. Especially if your story or subject is rather heady or abstract, putting a little bit of yourself into your proposal helps the panel see the person behind the project.

## The “Look”

Let the panel know how you're going to translate this story into visual language. If your project is a documentary about a historical event, you can explain it perfectly with statistics, anecdotal evidence and pleas for justice, but the panel wants to know what they will actually see in the finished film. Expert interview “talking heads”? Or have you uncovered an incredible wealth of archival material that is going to bring a 75-year-old story to 21st Century life? Likewise, if you're making a narrative, describe your visual strategy with your film. Feel free to name-check your influences here if you can avoid sounding overly derivative of work that already exists. What films inspire you when you think about how you want your film to look?

## The Production Plan

Now that you've laid out your story, its themes and its visual style, describe how you're going to pull all this off. Chances are you have more ambition than you have cash in the bank, so what specific resources do you have to bring to bear that the average filmmaker doesn't? Are you attending a well-funded film school where you can get all the lights, dolly tracks and free student labor you need? For your documentary about Irish mine workers, do you have a kindly aunt in Dublin who will let your entire crew stay with you for 3 months?

Also, be sure to let us know where you're at in this process. Have you raised \$45,000 of your \$50,000 budget and secured all your cast and crew and are ready to go once you get that last chunk of funds in? Are you fourteen weeks into your post-production schedule but need to shoot for one more week with the subject of your documentary to finalize the ending of your story?

## Target Audience and Distribution Plan

You need to make it clear that you've given some thought to how you're going to get your film out into the world, including your back-up plan if the best-case scenario of premiering it at Sundance and selling it for \$1 million doesn't

work out. Think about the communities that you engage with who would have an interest in the project. Are there any specific niche audiences that would be predisposed to like or identify with your project? How are you going to reach them? Say you're making a documentary about drag racing, perhaps you've come from that world yourself and you know that if you advertise it on drag racing websites you could sell a few thousand downloads? Maybe you've made several short films that have done well on the festival circuit, and you've made friends with programmers who will look at your first feature with some heavy interest. Or, you know of certain film-focused websites who love to discover new artists. Which communities will get behind this film?

### Fundraising Strategy

You also need to make it clear that you've got a plan to pay for all this stuff. Describe how much money you've raised and from what sources. Describe the sources of funding, which you are going to go after in addition to the AFS grant. Plausibility is important! If you are a first-time feature filmmaker and you haven't raised a dime yet for your \$50,000 budget, you'll need to make a convincing case that you have another source to supplement the \$10,000 you're asking for from AFS.

It is important to be realistic about your crowdfunding goals. While crowdfunding is now essential to almost every independent project at some phase of production, it is not a given that every project will be successful. Our juries tend to be critical of overly ambitious crowdfunding aspirations particularly when they are unarticulated in this section of the application. You must demonstrate that you have a thoughtful and researched approach to your campaign: in the amount of money you plan to raise, the team assembled, and the timeline.

### Project Description vs. Other Materials

As stated above, make sure that your project description and the rest of the application materials (budget, timeline, personnel page, etc.) are all working together to make it clear that you have thought this project through in full. You don't want to lay out a proposal in the project description that your other materials do not support. If you describe a Stanley Kubrick-like cinematic vision, with lots of dolly shots & crane shots & Steadicam moves all over the place, but the budget has none of those items priced out, it will look like you don't know what you're talking about.

And vice-versa – don't reference things in your supplemental materials that aren't addressed in your project description. For example, if you identify in your project timeline that you will be traveling to Australia for six weeks, the travel plans should appear in your production plan and budget as well.

### The Video Sample

In the final round of review, the video sample is the most important part of your application so think carefully about what it will be!

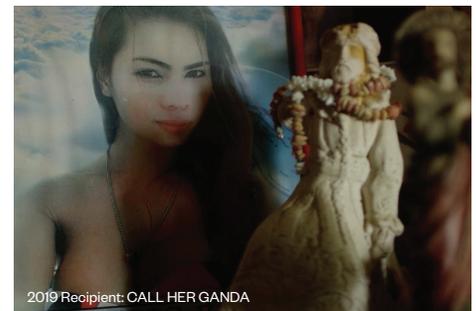
AFS requires a downloadable 6-minute or less video sample submitted via online link (No DVDs). We strongly encourage submitting an additional video sample as "Additional Supporting Material" with the full length of a film: a rough cut of the project being proposed, if one exists, or a previous project. We suggest using a password protected Vimeo link but will accept links from other platforms as long as they work—be sure to test your link before submitting.

You want the 6-minute video sample to give the panel a sense of what the completed proposed project will be like. In descending order of preference, the best way to do that is:

1. Submit material from the proposed project
2. Submit a previous project you directed
3. Submit a project from someone on your production team (if you have never directed something yourself, consider submitting several examples of work from members of your production team; we recommend samples from your DP, creative producer or writer)

### Material from the proposed project

Ideally you can submit a polished scene or two that will give the panel a good sense of what this project will be like. Even if you just have raw footage, choose some select moments that highlight your best stuff. **Avoid sending in a trailer for your film as your video sample.** While trailers can show off your production value and the scope of your project, they won't necessarily convey the real substance, the pacing or the character development of your piece. Some of the most successful work samples have included a few selected scenes followed by the rough cut in its entirety (as additional supporting material). Just make sure you use the written description of your sample to explain and give context for what you are showing. Feel free to also use brief title cards between segments to explain what you are showing.



### Previous projects

It is always best to submit your very best previous work as your sample in order to demonstrate your filmmaking ability. Most successful projects will have an older piece that has some rapport in style and/

or subject matter to the proposed project, which makes it easier for the jury to envision the approach to the new project. If your previous work is distant from the current project, it should show that you have a special vision and approach to the material. The jury will be creative enough to see how that will apply to your next project, but only if you make a great case for this transition in your project description. If your very best work is a very far cry from what you are doing now, but you also have a short sample of something closer in form or genre, you can submit several select scenes in that 6-minute timeline to make your case, or include as additional supporting material. Do not randomly select the first 6 minutes of your feature film unless that is

definitely your strongest work. We recommend preselecting the strongest scenes for your 6-minute sample.

**First time filmmakers & the video sample**

If this is your first film ever, and you haven't shot anything yet, you still need to submit a work sample. You can submit a previous work from one of the key players on your production team. Again, any resemblance to the proposed project makes it easier for the panelists to assess.

Use the description of video sample area to indicate anything that is incomplete about your work sample - if the sound levels haven't been mixed, if you're using temp music or a temp narrator or uncleared music, if the image is low-resolution, whatever the issues may be. You might know that the Rolling Stones song you're using is a temporary placeholder, but if you don't tell the panelists that and your budget doesn't reflect the costs for copyright clearance, they may question the thoroughness of your application.

**GOOD LUCK!**

