



Australian Government



# WITNESS Initiative with Al Jazeera:

## PROGRAM GUIDELINES

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Screen Australia and Al Jazeera English's flagship documentary strand, *Witness*, are calling for short character-led documentary proposals from early-career Australian filmmakers.

*AJE Witness* showcases independent documentaries that place people at the heart of the story. With inspirational and provocative stories, and intimate character-led accounts, *AJE Witness* provides an insight into the world's key global events as they impact people's daily lives. *AJE Witness* films look at the big issues from the inside out and celebrate the human spirit, with a sense of humour and poignancy even in the most difficult of circumstances.

Submissions for the series are now being sought, with up to six Australian film-making teams being selected to pitch their idea to a panel including representatives from *AJE Witness* and Screen Australia at AIDC in March 2020. Up to three projects will be selected for matched Al Jazeera/Screen Australia commissioning totaling up to AUD \$300,000.

### WHY

This Initiative is underpinned by Screen Australia's aim to support and inspire Australian practitioners to look for and embrace international opportunities, particularly in a rapidly diversifying global screen landscape. The collaboration with *AJE Witness* offers an exciting opportunity for early-career filmmakers to make a documentary for a highly-acclaimed international strand with access to a global viewing audience.

### WHAT

The Initiative will commission up to 3 documentaries of 25 minutes in length, directed and produced by Australian filmmakers. The content can be shot in Australia or overseas, with at least one documentary set in Australia. The films will premiere on *AJE Witness* across Al Jazeera branded platforms including television, online and apps.

Screen Australia and *AJE Witness* will each commit up to AUD \$150,000 for up to three short documentaries 25 minutes in length (Initiative Funding). The Initiative

Funding will be applied as agreed between *AJE Witness* and Screen Australia (up to AUD \$50,000 to each project).

*AJE Witness* broadcasts two documentaries every week including original half-hour commissions, and hour long acquisitions or co-productions. *AJE Witness* promotes all its content across digital platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and Facebook.

We strongly recommend applicants watch previous [AJE Witness](#) documentaries. Here are a few stand-out 25 min documentaries commissioned by *AJE Witness*:

- [Sudan's Forgotten Films](#)
- [China's Fake Boyfriends](#)
- [India's Wushu Warrior Girl](#)
- [Broadband Bruce](#)

### What Your Application Should Include

Specifically, proposals should include:

- Bold storytelling that informs, empowers and challenges perspectives for a global audience. We value stories of agency.
- A strong central character/s who 'owns' the film and tells their own story.
- Films that are character-driven, rather than issue-driven, but still have a topical global issue as a backdrop.
- A specific journey that the character/s are on with the potential to capture a sense of transformation and narrative arc.
- Immersive, well-shot observational/actuality scenes and confidently crafted sequences.
- Documentaries that have a timeless quality and therefore are usually not built around fast changing news events.
- Stories that can make an impact globally.

The films should NOT be: reporter/presenter led; profiles/hagiographies; advocacy/activist films; heavily archive-reliant stories. We don't use 'outside expert' interviews: the characters are experts in their own stories.

The journalism behind the film must be meticulous and follow Al Jazeera's [Code of Ethics](#). The documentary must be [Ofcom](#) compliant to broadcast on Al Jazeera English.

The opportunity provided through this joint initiative is primarily for original 25-minute films, but we will consider the potential for other versions on merit.

### WHO

This Initiative is targeted at **Australian early-career practitioners**.

Teams must consist of at least a director or producer, one of whom has at least one screen credit in their respective role on a project no less than 15 minutes in duration that has been broadcast and/or screened at a recognised film festival or distributed on a significant curated online platform. Please note:

- All key creatives must be Australian citizens or residents.

- Applicant teams can submit multiple applications, as long as the proposals are different.
- Applications must adhere to the [ACMA guidelines](#).
- Applicants must also meet the general eligibility requirements set out in Screen Australia's [Terms of Trade](#).
- An applicant cannot be a full-time student at film school or enrolled full-time in a similar tertiary film, television or interactive digital media course. Applications from part-time students will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- An applicant cannot be a full-time employee of a state or federally funded film or television agency or organisation.
- An applicant cannot be an employee of a broadcaster or commissioning platform.
- Subject to approval by both Parties, applicants who do not comply with these criteria may be selected in exceptional circumstances.

Applications are particularly encouraged from applicants and/or teams who identify as First Nations Australian, culturally and linguistically diverse, living with disability and/or LGBTQI+.

## HOW

Applications close 11:59pm AEST Friday 1 November 2019 through the [Application Portal](#) and must include all necessary and relevant additional supporting material which includes:

1. **A one-sentence synopsis (30 words max)** - how would a TV listing guide describe your film?
2. **A one-paragraph synopsis (200 words max)** - tell us the story, describing the key character/s, scenes and elements and how the narrative will develop and resolve over the film. Highlight any unique access you may have.
3. **A detailed treatment (2 pages max)** - 'walk us through' the film as you plan to make it so we can get a strong sense of the visual storytelling and how the narrative will unfold through your central character's key scenes and sequences, making clear what is at stake for those characters - usually about 8-12 scenes. Do not rely on background information for your treatment. If you would like to highlight background/context elements, you can add a few short bullet points of information at the end of your treatment.
4. **A Director's Statement** - a short paragraph that provides your broader rationale for the film, distilling the themes/issues you will explore through the character's journey and explaining why this story is topical to look at now.
5. **Impact (150 words max)** - what kind of impact do you expect from your film? Are there any bespoke digital elements you would like to produce for

the release of the film? Please include any relevant dates for potential release (hooks). Do you have any other ideas to promote your film and make an impact?

6. Up to 3 mins of downloadable **footage or sizzle reel**, if available, for the proposed project to show evidence of character, access and/or storyline via an online viewing link, such as Vimeo.

Please note: This doesn't have to be a polished pitch reel, it could simply be a short introduction with key characters filmed on a mobile phone or similar device.

#### Access

- Confirmation of key subjects' willingness to participate.
- Where there is Indigenous community participation or content involved in the project, written confirmation of the willingness of both the subject(s) and the community to be involved in the project is essential.

Specific requirements apply to projects where there is Indigenous community participation or content involved. Please refer to the Screen Australia website for [further information](#).

#### The Team

- 200 word biographies for key creative(s)
- Short CVs of the team, including relevant prior credits, and any other confirmed key personnel (DOP, editor, etc.)
- An example of the relevant director and producer's previous work (a complete film, not a show reel) via an online viewing link, such as Vimeo.
- Information on diversity within the core creative team - applicants and/or teams who identify as First Nations Australian, culturally and linguistically diverse, living with disability and/or LGBTQI+.

#### The Production

- A production schedule with approx. dates for:

#### Pre-production

Production  
Post-production  
Delivery to *AJE Witness*

- Budget\* - key budget line items estimates for:

Pre-production  
Production  
Post-Production  
Total budget

\*If selected, a detailed schedule and Screen Australia A-Z budget will need to be completed for approval.

- A finance plan - only if additional funding is required.

Please note: If selected, the film will need to comply with the AJE Technical Specifications, which will be supplied to all shortlisted applicants.

## What is the assessment process?

All eligible applications will be read by Screen Australia's Head of Documentary, a Screen Australia Investment Development Manager and an Al Jazeera Executive who will shortlist the projects.

- Shortlisted applicants will be informed of the outcome by early December 2019.
- Applicants who are shortlisted may be required to submit additional documentation outside of the materials noted in these guidelines.

Selected finalists must be available to attend AIDC 2020 on Monday 2 March in Melbourne, where they will present their projects to a judging panel that will include representatives from Screen Australia and Al Jazeera.

Al Jazeera will provide the six finalists with a complimentary day-pass to attend AIDC to pitch. Interstate finalists are also eligible for an additional contribution from Screen Australia to assist in travel costs in getting to Melbourne. Final projects for commissioning will be selected either at the end of the Pitching Forum or in an announcement at the AIDC Closing Night event.

All applicants will be advised in writing of the success or otherwise of their application by mid-December 2019.

Please note: We aim to make the application process as transparent as possible, but given the volume of applications we receive, we do not have the resources to provide feedback on each project.

## ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

When assessing applications, we will take the following criteria into account:

- The strength and originality of the proposals;
- The suitability of the proposals for the *AJE Witness* strand and international audiences;
- The track record and/or potential of the applicant;
- Project viability in terms of the proposed budget, financing strategy and schedule;
- The value of participation in an internationally-focused initiative as stated in the applicant's submission;
- Capacity of the team to manage the project creatively and their ability to deliver a complete project no later than 1 December 2020;

- Diversity representation on and off screen.

The above criteria are weighted evenly.

## TERMS OF FUNDING

All projects selected for production will be subject to the *AJE Witness* Commissioning and Screen Australia funding processes.

Screen Australia funding is provided as a grant. See Screen Australia's [Terms of Trade](#) for more details. Materials will be required for delivery to Screen Australia throughout the full production cycle and will be outlined in the executed PGA.

The *AJE Witness* funding is provided on their terms and conditions.

We receive more applications than we can support. Inevitably, some applications will be unsuccessful and applicants will be disappointed by this result. However, our decision is final.

For any enquiries, please contact the Program Operations team on 1800 507 901 or [documentary@screenaustralia.gov.au](mailto:documentary@screenaustralia.gov.au).