



Television Documentary Funding Strategy Review

August 2013

Introduction

NZ On Air regularly reviews funding and operations so that we remain responsive to change and open to new ways of serving audiences. In June 2012 we chose to review our funding strategies for television documentary and factual programming, which involved a [discussion paper](#), [consultation](#) and [research](#). As a result of the review we are issuing an updated Television Documentary Funding Strategy. This updated strategy takes into account changes in the past year that have already affected television documentary programming, both in audience interest and broadcaster scheduling.

Summary of Review Outcomes

NZ On Air is the primary investor in New Zealand television documentary production. As an active supporter and promoter of New Zealand television documentary making, NZ On Air will undertake six new actions to inform and diversify our documentary funding work.

NZ On Air will **maintain and diversify our significant investments** in this genre. In addition to current activities NZ On Air will –

1. actively promote NZ On Air funded documentaries when they go to air as part of **strengthened advocacy** for documentary
2. **introduce retrospective funding** of up to \$75,000 per broadcast hour for self-funded programmes where principal photography may have been completed but post-production has not. This is to reward initiative. An adequate broadcaster commitment must be secured. On-line projects will not be eligible. (Other criteria will also apply)
3. **actively monitor** broadcasters' commitment to diversity by assessing funded output each year and publishing the results, by channel, in NZ On Air's annual report
4. use that data to inform funding priorities and consider annually whether we need to issue a **targeted RFP** to improve diversity
5. ask producers to **report on success factors post-broadcast** such as awards, prizes, online presence, public feedback and research where it exists to get a more comprehensive picture of audience reach (to build on the information obtained from ratings)
6. **improve collaboration** with relevant government entities to increase opportunities for documentary making

Revised Strategy

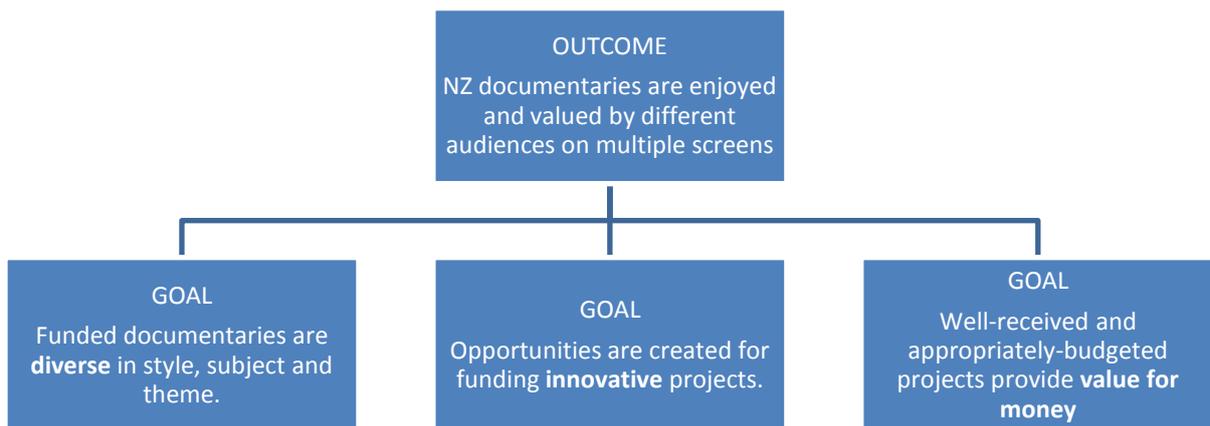
The strategy will come into effect from October 2013 and be progressively implemented thereafter.

This strategy should also be read in conjunction with NZ On Air's wider funding policies, such as the:

- Investment Principles (refer to [Statement of Intent](#))
- [Pacific Content Strategy](#)
- [Digital Strategy](#)
- [Te Rautaki Maori](#)

Documentary investments will be made in accordance with the strategy summarised below in Fig 1:

Fig 1: Summary of NZ On Air's documentary strategy



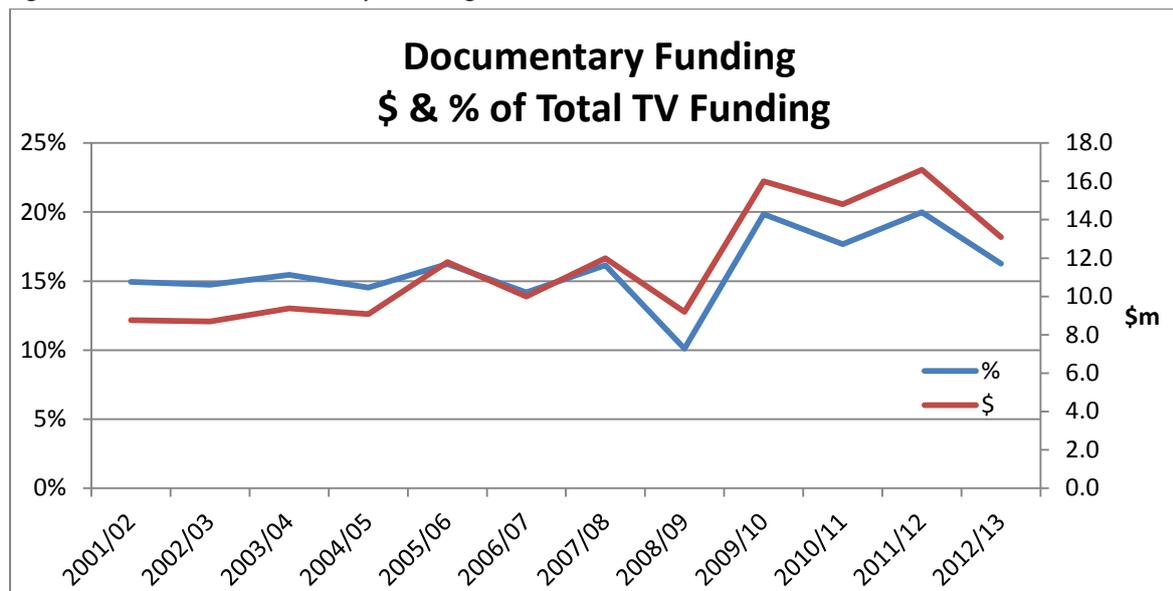
Background

Documentary funding has been a core focus for NZ On Air since 1989. It is a crucial cultural genre that informs audiences through a variety of storytelling techniques.

Documentary funding forms a significant part of total NZ On Air television spend, an average of just over \$15 m per annum between 2010-2013 or 18% of total television funding.

Fig 2 outlines documentary spend between 2002 -2013. This funding is unlikely to increase significantly, given the current economic climate.

Fig 2 – Television Documentary Funding – 2002-2013



Broken down by channel type, 2013 documentary funding can be shown as outlined in Fig 3:

Fig 3 – Television Documentary Funding by Channel Type- 2013

Breakdown of 2012/13 Documentary funding:		Number of projects	Hours	Funding (\$m)		
Type of documentary	Size of Channel Audience	Platinum Fund	5	18	\$4.5	33%
		Type 1 - Large	2			
		Type 2 - Medium	3			
		Series	15	82	\$7.4	55%
		Type 1 - Large	12			
		Type 2 - Medium/Small	3			
		One off	11	13	\$1.6	12%
		Type 1 - Large	1			
		Type 2 - Medium/Small	10			
TOTAL		31	113	\$13.5	100%	

There have always been competing tensions at play for this important genre which include:

- prime time scheduling requirements significantly shape the type and style of funded documentary (fast, colourful storytelling that grabs and holds a sizeable audience in a fiercely competitive environment)
- some stories benefit from being told in a more thoughtful, discursive or analytical way
- some documentary makers want to tell their stories in a different way and at a different pace than required by television programmers
- audience numbers are bigger for popular factual programmes than documentary, which means broadcasters tend to be more interested in this type of format
- ratings are not the only measure of success, but critical success is harder to quantify
- online and transmedia options exist but New Zealand audiences remain relatively small

Television documentary production in New Zealand flourished in the 1990s then began to wane as audiences became harder to attract. Environmental changes in the last decade or so include the arrival of Maori Television and Prime; the introduction, then removal, of the TVNZ Charter; the rise of specialist documentary pay channels; the rise of internet options; and the arrival and departure of TVNZ7.

During this period, NZ On Air has extended funding opportunities - projects can now be submitted with backing from Prime TV, FOUR and Maori Television, as well as TVNZ and TV3. In addition we added a Platinum Fund option for high quality docudramas and short-run series.

Mainstream broadcast scheduling practice has also changed. At the turn of the millennium an 8.30pm documentary hour was the norm; in 2013 one-hour strands of single documentaries on TV One and TV3 have all but disappeared as audiences for these programmes diminished. While some one hour documentary series still continue to screen at 8.30pm, a 9.30pm slot is more usual and early evening half-hour programmes are often preferred by broadcasters.

Review Process

The [discussion document](#) issued in June 2012 provided funding and screening data, discussed various issues around documentary funding and proposed a refreshed funding strategy including draft goals and ideas to encourage feedback. In May 2013 a [telephone survey](#) of 1000 television viewers was commissioned to obtain more detailed feedback.

The 2012 discussion document did not try to define “documentary”. Instead it took the view that the term encompasses documentary and factual programming that is not regular news, current affairs or magazine-style programmes and which may include some dramatisation. This is a common approach internationally, where no universally agreed definition exists. Industry and public respondents to the discussion paper and research project also had differing views on what constitutes a documentary.

From NZ On Air’s perspective a definition is less important than a clear-eyed focus on seeking diversity in programme subject and style.

Feedback on the 2012 discussion document was received from a wide range of industry practitioners including broadcasters, producers, industry organisations and commentators. In summary, this included:

- broad support for the goals proposed by NZ On Air, although many thought they were not achievable.
- a belief that the discussion paper understated the place of the viewer.
- a perception that NZ On Air has moved too far into the broadcaster’s corner.
- more innovation needed in the genre.
- disagreement on the proposal to use specific categories as a funding device (“popular”, “blue chip” etc)
- popular factual programmes should be separately funded to documentary.
- some concern that funding should be on a level playing field irrespective of channel size (audience)
- ratings must not be the only measure (of success).

- online options are still only a marginal activity (and disadvantage rural viewers in particular).
- a general preference for fewer hours with better budgets (possibly augmented with some low cost innovation strands of critical worth).
- a view that the main problem for documentary proper is its invisibility.
- NZ On Air needed to be a stronger advocate for documentary.
- NZ On Air should have a role in building a community of world-class documentary makers.

Viewers' feedback from the 2013 telephone survey can be summarised as follows. Respondents -

- considered documentary in terms of "non-fiction" or "real-life" events and building knowledge. Topics should be interesting or relevant.
- reinforced the importance of documentary.
- preferred one-hour long documentaries, with a reasonably even split between series versus one-offs.
- provided a list of the most commonly requested topics - nature and geography, history and science and technology
- acknowledged the quality of New Zealand documentary, particularly noting good production values and presentation.

NZ On Air has developed the documentary funding strategy taking into account the responses received.

In light of feedback, and NZ On Air's wish to define documentaries broadly NZ On Air will not introduce descriptive funding categories such as "popular", "factual" "blue chip" etc. However, in order to encourage diversity, NZ On Air will continue with its policy of funding content according to channel size (Type1 -larger audience, Type 2 - smaller audience). NZ On Air will seek different and diverse content for Type 2 channels of a type not seen on Type 1 channels. Online options will remain under review as part of NZ On Air's digital strategy.

Rather than adopting a position of funding fewer hours with better budgets, as suggested by some respondents, NZ On Air will retain flexibility in its funding requests but monitor the outcomes annually for diversity and innovation and address any gaps as outlined above. We note the call to help build a community of documentary makers. We believe our significant financial investment in documentary making is a key input to help develop talent. We will also support various industry events and initiatives, which contribute to talent development.

The refreshed strategy is set out below.

Television Documentary Funding Strategy

Mission

NZ On Air's mission statement is to champion local content through skilful investment in quality New Zealand broadcasting.

To ensure sound investment, our values have remained constant:

Innovation – encouraging new ideas, creativity and quality production standards

Diversity (in projects, people and platforms) – promoting difference and competition to support the best ideas for the widest range of New Zealanders

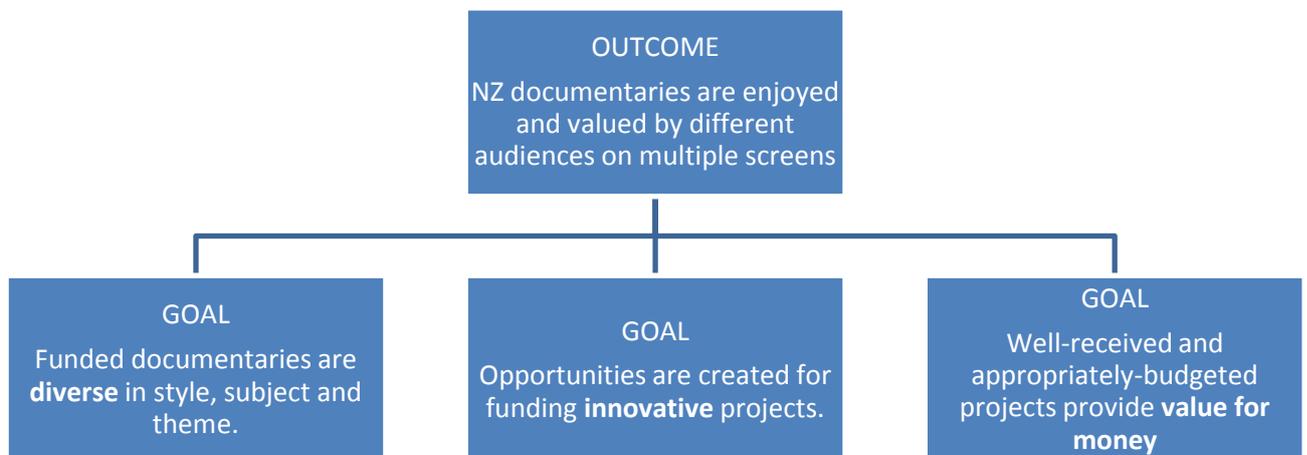
Value for money – making sure cost-effective projects are enjoyed by significant numbers of relevant people

Goals

Outlined below are NZ On Air's goals and strategies for supporting documentary funding:

NZ On Air will:

- Seek **diverse** documentary programming to provide for different audiences and tastes: programming that reflects New Zealand stories and perspectives, our bi-cultural base, our multi-cultural society or our place as a Pacific nation
- Encourage **innovation** by supporting broadcasters to take more risks in backing a wider range of documentary programmes and programme makers; and also by considering other platforms
- Maintain **value for money** for taxpayers by ensuring documentary programming is appropriately budgeted and well-received



Goal 1: Funded documentaries are diverse in style, subject and theme

Audiences can find documentaries that they enjoy.

Actions	Rationale	Measures	Outcome
Continue to fund diverse documentaries for varied audiences.	NZ On Air is charged with providing programmes for both mainstream and special interest audiences.	Number and diversity of programmes on different channels.	The preferences of different types of audiences are met.
NZ On Air focuses on documentaries that are clearly different to network funded programmes.	Avoid funding duplication.	Clear distinctions between NZ On Air and network-funded documentary/factual programmes.	The audience is provided with more diverse content choices.
NZ On Air will continue to differentiate between broadcasters (Type 1, Type2)	To promote range and diversity of programmes.	Funded documentaries on Type 2 channels are a different nature than on Type 1.	A wider range of documentary is supported.
Assess documentary diversity by channel and publish the results in each NZ On Air annual report.	Ensure that diversity is regularly monitored and the outcomes published.	Documentary diversity assessment in each annual report.	Stakeholders are fully informed about NZ On Air documentary funding and our quest for diversity.
Issue a targeted RFP if insufficient diversity is evident.	To ensure that diversity is maintained if regular funding rounds do not lead to this.	Diversity targets are met.	A better range of documentary programmes are broadcast.
Actively promote the screening of documentaries funded by NZ On Air.	To help audiences find documentaries that meet their needs.	Promote each documentary through appropriate mechanisms (website/social media etc).	Audiences are aware of the range of documentaries funded and those relevant to them.
Continue to support documentary research, as appropriate.	Greater understanding of audience needs.	Research undertaken and availability of results.	Documentaries funded meet audience needs.

Goal 2: Opportunities are created for funding innovative projects

We support documentaries that take risks. Audiences can find documentaries on a variety of platforms.

Actions	Rationale	Measures	Outcome
Introduce retrospective funding of up to \$75,000 per broadcast hour for unfinished self-funded programmes which have secured an adequate broadcaster commitment. Online projects not eligible. Other criteria will apply.	Reward successful risk-taking by programme makers.	Number of retrospective funding applications that are broadcast.	Increasing innovation by producers and broadcasters by lowering a barrier to entry.
Funding maximum of four series for popular factual programmes continued.	Funding cap encourages innovation through development of new projects.	Popular factual programmes do not receive funding for more than four series.	Opportunities are created for new content.
Continue to pursue opportunities for collaboration with other government agencies.	Working collaboratively with other agencies will increase opportunities for new ideas.	Each collaboration results in well received documentaries that find an audience.	Wider opportunities for diversity and innovation through collaboration.

Goal 3: Well-received and appropriately-budgeted projects provide value for money

Funding is invested skilfully which leads to strong audience engagement.

Actions	Rationale	Measures	Outcome
Work with government and stakeholders to increase documentary funding over the longer term, including joint ventures.	Audiences consistently value documentaries highly.	Quality, diversity and number of documentaries.	Quality, diversity and number of documentaries funded meet audience expectations.
Ensure documentary funding is consistent with NZ On Air Investment Principles.	Consistency across NZ On Air funding strategies.	Documentary funding consistent with both documentary strategy and Investment Principles.	Projects are value-for-money
Ask producers to report back post-broadcast on success factors such as awards, prizes, online presence, public feedback and research where it exists.	Audiences are central to NZ On Air's mandate and ratings are not the only means of measuring audience feedback.	Measured through ratings and critical feedback.	Audience measurement is improved.
All documentaries aim to screen on two or more platforms.	To widen accessibility for audiences given budget investment.	Documentaries broadcast on more than one platform, where possible.	Audiences find documentaries when and where it suits them.