

Kerry Short Film Bursary - Submitting a Competitive Application

Your Screenplay

Completing your screenplay is the first step in making your application for funding. It's also the most important step – if you don't have a great script to begin with no amount of carefully balanced budgeting, location photos or visual notes is going to land you a spot on a competitive shortlist. So, carefully follow all of the advice on how to get your script right and spend as much time as you need to make that as strong as it possibly can be before you start your application.

This is so important it's probably worth stressing again in a whole new paragraph. And highlighting in bold. **Your screenplay is the most important part of your application.** Everything else forms part of your **supporting material**. Good supporting material will not rescue a bad script, but a good script can be doomed by bad supporting material. It's important to treat it seriously if you want your project to be treated seriously.

Before we get into the nuts and bolts of how to prepare the supporting material for the Kerry Short Film Bursary, let's pause for a moment to consider why you have been asked to provide it in the first place? Understanding why you are being asked to supply all of the additional requirements can be very useful to keep in mind as you create your supporting documents.

It turns out there are quite a few reasons why your supporting material may be important.

Firstly, no matter how well written, your script can only convey a certain idea of how you would envisage your film. Everyone who reads your script will have their own impressions of what you are aiming for, and those impressions may be very different to your intentions. Your supporting materials should help to address this by providing the reader with the right information they need to interpret your script the way you want them to. Clarifying the tone and style of your film is important. Don't assume it will be read as a comedy, or a surrealist drama, or a mirror-to-society satire because it's obvious to you. It's up to you to ensure you provide enough information to allow the readers to best assess your screenplay in the context you intend. So, the first reason you are providing additional material is to **allow you to clarify your creative intentions for the screenplay you have submitted.**

Secondly, you will have the chance to show that your project is practically feasible on the resources that are available. Ambition in storytelling is important, but without some explanation an ambitious screenplay may be assessed as unrealistic for the funding available. It's one thing to write an epic sweeping period drama set in the 1800s, but entirely another to shoot it. Or a creative interpretation of a Celtic Fairytale. Or a dystopian sci-fi. You may have all of this covered and know exactly how you'll achieve the costumes / locations / vfx / production values / etc that you'll need – but if you don't outline it in your application don't assume anyone assessing your project will believe it's possible. That may leave you with a credibility question over your project that doesn't need to be there. So, use your supporting material to **reassure the readers that you have a coherent, rational and feasible plan to realise your creative ambitions.**

Thirdly, your supporting should outline the experience of you and your team. While the film bursary is intended to help filmmakers at an early stage of their career find funding, this objective has to be balanced with a reasonable expectation that the completed film will be worth the trust and support placed in it (at the expense of every other project that will not receive funding). Remember, the more experience you have on your team the easier it is for a panel to see that you can credibly deliver your film to a high standard. So, your application should give the reader an idea of who are you, what have you done (in film), and **help a reader to reasonably assume that the team in place will be capable of practically finishing the film to the high creative standards you will have outlined in your application** and would be expected of a bursary winner.

Fourthly, you can demonstrate that your project fits the brief of being filmable in Kerry – which is a key requirement for funding under this award scheme. Can you show that you have thought about the locations available and identified how they would work to benefit your story? Is your film naturally enhanced by Kerry locations, or is it just a generic project which could be shot anywhere? Which one do you think makes a better impression? So, use your application to **show that you have already figured out how to genuinely integrate Kerry into the story.**

Finally, it's important to state that when a reader is reading your script and application they are really hoping that its brilliant. They want to recommend projects they genuinely feel will become great films. They want the bursary funding to be spent supporting talented filmmakers with clear, creative visions and solid plans for production. No one ever starts reading an application hoping it's bad, or looking for reasons to place it on the "pass" pile. When they pick up your project they want to like it. They want to be able to recommend it. It's up to you to give them the script and the material they need to be able to make that recommendation. **Remember competitive funding, like the bursary, is competitive.** You can't do anything to influence how any other project is assessed, but you can improve your own.

The checklist of information that you are asked to provide is the essential, minimum required to allow you to make your best case for why your project should be supported over every other project submitted. But you may have other material available to you, or a project that can be supported with more detailed submissions – so give it your best shot. After all, everyone else will be.

Before You Begin

Here are a few things you should think about before putting your supporting material together:

1. Identify the strengths of your project.

We know you like it, after all, you created it! But why would somebody else like it? Why would they want to watch it? What would make them want to recommend it to a friend? (*You're not allowed to say "because its great"*). Is it original? If so, in what way? Is it timely and current? If so, what's the issue and how are you dramatizing it? Is it for a defined audience? If so, who are they and what makes the story resonate for them? Is it visually dynamic? If so, what does that mean? And how will a panel understand your vision?

2. Identify your own (potential) weaknesses

Can you think about the real or potential weaknesses other people might see in your project? This will help you ensure you explain your solutions before they even have the question. For example, if your entire film is set in one location can you make that visually interesting for the whole duration? If you have health and safety requirements for stunts or water scenes, have you put a realistic figure in your budget to cover this? Do you need a lot of production design? If so, have you identified a good production designer for your team? If your script has a period setting, do you know if the available locations will be suitable for filming? Will your production cost more than the available bursary? If so, where will the extra funding come from? And so on.

3. Identify your theme.

What is your film about? Not a synopsis or a step outline, or scene by scene breakdown. Beneath all of that, can you identify what your film really deals with? Is it about finding love in unexpected places, overcoming shyness, rural isolation, or how to survive a zombie apocalypse? Ultimately, this gives your film its meaning, its reason for being and it will provide a clarifying thoughtline for you as you create your support material.

4. Identify what makes this a good fit for the Kerry Bursary Scheme

Is there a real, genuine reason why this film should be made in Kerry? Or have you just changed the name on the town where your film is set and pressed send on the submission? The better you can identify how and why your project suits *this* fund, the better reason a panel will have to select your project for consideration.

5. Identify *WHY* you want to make this film.

Is there a reason why this film resonates with you? Or do you just want to make any film? If there is something that excites you about this particular project it can be useful to identify what that is for you. You'll create much stronger support material for your project if you can communicate your enthusiasm, passion and reasons for making *this film*.

These are not questions that should be answered directly on your supporting material. This is not a checklist to be ticked off. But, having clear answers for yourself before you begin will help you to create a more focused and directed application.

Your Supporting Material

As stated above, the list of supporting material you are asked to provide with your application is the **minimum** you should aim to include. Without it your project won't be eligible for consideration so do make sure you have this basic information covered. But, **to be competitive you may need to go beyond the minimum** requirements.

The previous sections here covered why that's important. Now let's take a closer look at how to do it.

First things first. Every project is different so there's no one "right" way to provide support material. You'll have to use your own best judgement, knowing your own project better than anyone, to decide what material will best clarify your project intentions for an independent panel. That said, there are some useful tools for presenting your thoughts that might help you.

In particular, film "lookbooks" or "project books" are becoming very common as ways to support projects looking for funding. These books allow you to present your ideas in a detailed and visual manner. They allow you the space to show reference photos, sketches, artwork, locations, cast headshots, costume styles, colour palettes, visual influences, or anything else that might uniquely aid you. You can grab reference images from films that influence you in different ways, stock images, photos you have taken yourself, or any combinations of these that are useful. Along with the written information you'll provide they can be extremely useful for panellists attempting to assess your project.

If a picture paints a thousand words then a good lookbook is your best, quickest and most effective way of communicating the way you see your project. Conversely, a bad lookbook can seriously damage your project so think carefully about how you'll go about putting yours together. Randomly grabbing images from the internet and stuffing them into a Word document is likely to do you more harm than good. Instead, think carefully about your project and spend some time finding the reference images that will best support your vision.

No matter how you decide to proceed it's always useful to have some sections of your support material that cover:

- 1. Logline**

1 or 2 sentences (max) that accurately summarise your film.

- 2. Short synopsis (150 – 200 words)**

Think of this as your "back of the DVD" version, or your "festival programme" listing. It needs to be long enough to tell your story, short enough to stay interesting, and exciting enough to make a panel want to hear more.

- 3. Writer's Statement / About The Film**

This is where your theme may become important. It's an opportunity to talk explain why you think the story is important/relevant/timely/funny/whatever.

4. Director's Notes

Going beyond simple story now, what's important to the director in how they want to make the film. Good notes should absolutely cover visual style, but might also cover thoughts on production design, editing, music, sound design, etc. if these are particularly strong elements of the creative vision that would not be apparent from the script alone. Again – reference pictures here will help enormously.

5. Producer's Notes / Production Notes

If the director and writer's notes are about the creative elements of the project, the producer's notes should deal with the practical. Of course the producer should also be creative, but they'll be the ones responsible for ensuring a practical project plan so their notes should cover this. Make sure there's a good budget that accurately reflects the shooting requirements of the film. Are there any significant production issues that need to be covered? Health and Safety requirements? Child safety? Key dates impacting production? VFX? Only you know what needs to be covered, but

6. Characters / Cast

Do you have particular cast attached, provisionally or otherwise, to project? If so include those details. Otherwise, you might consider a casting "type" if that is important to you.

7. The Creative Team

CVs or professional biographies of the core creative team.

8. Shooting Locations

This is particularly important to consider for the Kerry Film Bursary. You'll want to start outlining your ideal shooting locations. Preferably you've already identified where this might happen. In some cases, you may have reference photos or images from those locations as you'd expect to use them.

9. Any Other Relevant Material

Do you have a significant cast member, composer, editor or other key attachment on your project?

If additional funding is required, do you have letters of support from any other funding sources?

Do you have significant offers of support from Equipment Suppliers, Post Production Facilities or established Production Companies that can help you complete the film?

Is the story based on an existing work? If so, did that receive any awards or acclaim that could help your project?

Again, this is not a prescriptive list.

You may provide more, or less, than the type of items outlined above. You may decide not to create a lookbook or project book but to supply other information instead. It's not a requirement for funding because it doesn't suit every project. Every project is different and the type of support needed will be different in each case. But, it may be good to know that

other applicants will be supplying their versions of this type of information in the form that best supports their projects.

At the very least you should remember that bursary funding is very competitive and all applicants are advised to consider carefully the best ways in which they can provide support material for any projects they submit.

Good luck!

Great example of Lookbook style material:

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