CHICKEN & EGG FILMS

2026 (Egg)celebrator Lab Program & Application Guide

About this document

This PDF serves as a comprehensive guide to our (Egg)celerator Lab program. Use it to learn more about how the program works. The guide also functions as a step-by-step support for you as you apply for the program.

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About the program

The (Egg)celerator Lab supports nonfiction filmmakers or filmmaking teams working on their first or second feature-length documentary.

In this year-long program, filmmakers receive:
- $40,000 USD in grant funding for the production of their feature-length film
- Mentorship with Chicken & Egg Films team members
- Two creative retreats focused on career building and creative development
- Tailored industry meetings and funder connections
- Peer support from their cohort

The (Egg)celerator Lab is generously supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, and through general operating support from our wonderful community of donors and grantmakers.

Applicant eligibility

Filmmakers must meet the following criteria:

1. Identify as a woman or gender-expansive filmmaker. Co-directing teams, where one director is a woman or gender-expansive filmmaker, are also eligible. If a prospective applicant does not meet the targeted demographic criteria, we will accept and evaluate the application based on merit/strength of the proposed project.
2. Be directing their first or second feature-length (48 minutes or longer) documentary film (hybrid docs are eligible).
3. Be based anywhere in the world, except for countries/regions which are under comprehensive US sanctions. Further information about US sanctions can be found here.

Project eligibility

Applicants to this grant must submit a project for consideration that meets the following criteria:

1. Must be a documentary or nonfiction film (including hybrid docs). VR, interactive, branded content, or fiction films are not eligible.
2. Must be intended as a feature-length (48 minutes or longer) film. Short/medium-length films or series are not eligible.
3. Must be in early to mid-production at the time of applying. We recommend that you have between 10-60% of your footage shot by the date of application.
4. Must be independently produced. Works-for-hire and student films produced in an undergraduate or graduate program are not eligible. If you started a film in school and are now independently working on the project, we can consider your film for the Lab.

Project eligibility

- You do not need a fiscal sponsor to apply for this program. However, if you are awarded, you must secure a US fiscal sponsor or be a 501(c)(3) to receive the funds. We can advise on this if granted.
- You cannot apply with the same project for both the Research & Development Grant and the (Egg)celerator Lab in the same year. We will disqualify your Lab application without review if you have also applied for the R&D grant with the same project in the same year. These opportunities fund different stages of a project.
- Please only apply with the one project that you feel is the best fit for this program. Read our guidelines and look at past films we have supported to get an idea of our interests. If you cannot choose between two projects, email us at egglab_opencall@chickeneggfilms.org for our advice. This advice will not impact your application.

First-time vs. second-time director

A first-time director has never completed a feature-length documentary film and is currently working on their first feature-length documentary/nonfiction film. A second-time director has already completed and premiered one feature-length documentary film and is currently working on their second feature-length documentary film. If a director has completed and premiered one feature-length documentary film and currently has one or more works-in-progress, the project they submit will still be considered their second feature as long as it has not been completed or premiered.

You are still considered a first- or second-time director even if you have the following experience:
- You have directed multiple shorts or a web series
- You have directed feature-length narrative film(s)
- You have produced feature-length documentary film(s)

Project stage: early-to-mid production

As a general guideline, you are in a sweet spot to apply if you have between 10–60% of footage for your film shot.

If you are still in development/pre-production, then your application will likely not be as competitive within the pool. Similarly, if you are in late production and/or aiming to reach the rough cut stage by the end of 2025 or by the first quarter of 2026, your project is most likely too advanced.

Only projects in production are eligible to apply because we want to ensure that we have the greatest opportunity possible to make an impact on the production of the project and on the development of the director's career during the program year. That said, we understand production timelines are dependent on many factors and may change from what you indicate in your application.

Work samples

All work samples must be in English or have English subtitles.

- First-time directors must submit a sample of the project with which they're applying and may *optionally* submit a prior work sample.
- Second-time directors must submit a sample of the project with which they're applying *as well as* a prior work sample from their first feature-length documentary (on which they served as director or co-director).
- Co-directing teams must submit a sample of the project with which they're applying *as well as* a prior work sample from the first- or second-time director, if your co-directing team consists of one first- or second-time director and one more experienced director. Co-directing teams may *optionally* submit a prior work sample if all directors are first-time directors.

Current work sample requirements

Length

- Should be 7-20 minutes of material from the project with which you are applying. We encourage applicants not to spend extra resources creating a brand new sample for this application if they already have one they have been using to apply to other funding opportunities.
If your current sample is longer than the maximum length of 20 minutes, you can provide time codes to the portion of the sample that you would like reviewers to watch and that best reflects your intended style and approach and that you would like to highlight.

Content

- Can consist of a combination of 2-3 scene selects/excerpts, character strands, and a trailer/teaser/sizzle reel. Submitting a trailer alone will not be competitive. We encourage first-time filmmakers to ensure that their work samples include constructed scene selects/excerpts.
- Scenes/excerpts do not need to be in chronological order. We encourage you to put your strongest material first, since first round reviewers are required to watch up to the first 10 minutes of the project sample. Work samples will be viewed in full in subsequent rounds.

Current work sample requirements

Important notes on content

- Trailers: Trailers may not always give us an accurate sense of your film's tone, character development, or story structure. If you're submitting a trailer, we encourage you to also attach a couple of additional scenes. This will help us understand how you approach the construction of a scene, as well as your style and pacing. This will also give us a better feel for your characters, access, relationship to the material, and potential narrative arcs.

- Character strands: If you've been following a character over time and want to show their evolution or development, you might want to string together scenes that show the character's progression.

A character strand doesn't require formal transitions or the scenes to be interwoven with others, but it should demonstrate a character's story arc, what makes them unique, and your depth of access to them. Please do this only if the character is your lead and a major part of the story.

- Scene selects/excerpts: If you are a bit further along, you can send us a selection of edited scenes or an excerpt of an early assembly of the film. These can be edited together or intercut with black in between. Scene selects/excerpts should provide us with a feel for how your story will play out; they should also offer a sense of your tone, pacing, and cinematic language.

Notes on prior work samples

The purpose of a prior work sample is to give us a sense of the director's visual style, storytelling ability, ambition, and follow-through. Prior work samples are optional for first-time directors*. They are required for second-time directors.

If submitting a prior work sample:
- It must be a documentary, fiction-nonfiction hybrid, or other form of nonfiction.
- It can be a short or feature-length film, including web series, animation, or experimental.

Fiction work, music videos, commercial work, and PSAs are not accepted as prior work samples, as they do not allow us to see the author's voice and vision as a documentary filmmaker.

*First-time directors may submit previously directed work that is not a feature-length film, but this must still be nonfiction, such as a web series, animation, or experimental film. You may also submit a work sample from a project in which you held a prominent creative role during production (i.e. Producer, A.D., cinematographer, editor). Please specify your role in the creation of the completed work submitted. Note that samples of work directed by you are strongly preferred.

Budget requirements

- Each application must upload a current budget formatted via PDF or Excel.
- Your budget should address the following film production costs: crew salaries, equipment, travel and housing expenses, post-production, office and admin costs, music, and legal fees. We should be able to follow your budget in tandem with your narrative material.
- Include a line item for directors' and producers' salaries.
- Provide budget notes for any areas that may be viewed as out of the ordinary or require further explanation.
- If you don't already have a budget and would like some guidance on how to create one, we recommend reading this article.
- We welcome you including additional line items such as mental health support for yourself, your team members, and your participants, as well as caregiver support that you might need.

Evaluation criteria

Priority will be given to films committed to creating social change and/or uplifting underrepresented stories that challenge mainstream narratives. We support a broad range of issues from the personal to the political that explore a variety of artistic approaches, such as personal, experimental, animated, essayistic, archival, and beyond.

Evaluation criteria

1. Subject matter and positionality: The project explores compelling and clear subject matters, themes, and questions, with an awareness of their relevance to our current moment. The story and/or approach aligns with Chicken & Egg Films' mission and challenges mainstream narratives, conversations, or perceptions. The director demonstrates critical thinking and reflects on their own perspective and biases regarding the subject matter and approach

2. Story and concept: The film features a clear and compelling narrative trajectory or concept, including character arcs where applicable. The director acknowledges the elements that remain unknown and outlines how they will address these gaps. They express a vision for weaving together various elements and arcs into a cohesive and engaging feature.

3. Artistic approach: The project shows a distinct and compelling creative vision which conveys a confident directorial voice. The work sample reflects the intended story, style, subject matter, and other project elements. The sample evokes an emotional response and conveys a tone that enhances the storytelling, demonstrating strong use of visuals, sound, music, pacing, and editing.

4. Access and accountability: The director articulates their access and connection to the story, its participants, and the community involved. They welcome and integrate community feedback and thoughtfully implement processes for accountability that consider physical, mental, cultural safety and beyond. Furthermore, the director reflects on the potential impacts and consequences of the filmmaking process on participants, audiences, crew, and other stakeholders during and after filming.

5. Feasibility: The application outlines realistic and appropriate activities and a timeline that aligns with the film's concept and artistic vision. It includes a carefully considered fundraising plan, and the budget is appropriate, reflecting the needs of the proposed activities and timeline.

Accessibility

If you require technical assistance to navigate the application platform due to a disability, please contact egglab_opencall@chickeneggfilms.org. We kindly ask that you make your request for assistance as soon as possible, no later than Monday, April 7, 2025.

Application guide

What follows is a reference of the contents of the application. You must first fill out the pre-application form here to confirm your eligibility. If eligible, you will receive an email with your account login information and the link to the application platform. Applications must be submitted through the online platform.

Do not wait until the deadline to fill out the pre-application.

Project information

Project title: Please do not include quotation marks on your title

Logline: Please provide a brief summary of the project that captures the most important elements — setting, participants, and central conflict. *325 characters max.*

Co-directorship: Is the project co-directed? (Yes/No) If yes: How did you start working together? How do you approach this collaboration as co-directors? *1000 characters max.*

Story or concept summary: Give an overview of your story, introducing the main participants and potential plot points. Describe the anticipated story and narrative trajectory or potential character arcs for your film. If your project is non-narrative or not character-driven, what is your project's concept, and how is it constructed? Give an overview of the subject matter and your primary questions and ideas to be explored. Please be clear about the elements of your film that remain unknown or unclear and highlight the questions that may steer the direction of your film. *6500 characters max.*

Connection and access: What is your connection and access to the story (i.e., participants, community, location, archives etc.)? Why are you the best filmmaker(s) to tell this story? *1625 characters max.*

Accountability: Describe your relationship with the participants or community being filmed? What are your processes of accountability, including consent, transparency, feedback, and any other steps being taken to ensure the participants or communities that are featured in your film have agency in the filmmaking process, from pre-production through distribution? *1625 characters max.*

Power and positionality: What is your power and positionality in relation to the story and/or those featured in it? What unique lens, perspective, insights, or bias do you bring to the story – i.e., your values, interests, underlying assumptions, worldview, or motivations? *1625 characters max.*

Project information

Change statement: Documentaries have a unique ability to move and transform people. They contribute to our collective understanding of issues, people, and the way the world is constructed. They often inspire us to think differently. Chicken & Egg Films see documentaries as one of many tools that are necessary for creating narrative, cultural, and social change. We seek to support nuanced narratives that inspire individual and societal transformation for a better world. Therefore, we want to understand what kind of change your film seeks to make.

How will your film challenge mainstream narratives, conversations, or perceptions? What would change as a result of the film if you are successful? Please note: we are not asking for an impact campaign idea or activities, but rather your overarching goal(s) for creating change with your film. *1800 characters max.*

Creative control: Who has creative control and, if applicable, ownership of the project? *325 characters max.*

Artistic approach: Describe your creative vision for the finished project. What are the visual and audio elements that will bring your film to life? Explain your intended use of artistic devices or any particular creative approach that informs the storytelling (e.g., animations, re-creations, transitions). *3250 characters max.*

Project information

Project stage and timeline: Outline the projected production timeline from the project's current state to the anticipated completion date. Your timeline should detail major project activities, production schedules, and anticipated post-production and release dates. 3250 characters max

Note: Keep in mind that the program will take place January—December 2026. If you plan to have a rough cut by the end of this year or by the first quarter of 2026, then this program is not for you.

Prior applicants (optional): If you have applied to the (Egg)celerator Lab previously, please share the year you applied and how your project has progressed or evolved since then. Please note any changes to story, participants, artistic approach, etc. *1300 characters max.*

Forums and markets: List the forums and markets where you have participated with this project, even if there was no cash award.

Geographic region (dropdown): Please indicate the primary region where your film takes place.

Subject matter 1 (dropdown)
Subject matter 2 (dropdown)
Subject matter 3 (dropdown)

Project's website (optional)

Key creative personnel

Contact information: For co-directing teams, all directors must be listed as a contact. Please note that at least one director on the project must be a first- or second-time director. Please see the FAQ section of the program page for further information on how we define experience level.

If you have a producer(s), please also add them as a contact. Please provide complete contact information including a valid email address, telephone number, and mailing address (in the country's format). Please fill out the following information for the lead contact (you) using the edit button. Please press "Add Contact" for any additional points of contact you wish to list. Contact information should be valid until at least November 2025.

Bios of key creative personnel: You do not need to include bios of director(s) or producer(s) here. They should be added to the contact record via the 'Add Contact' button above. Please provide brief biographies of other personnel such as editor, cinematographer, and executive producer(s). Include title of film(s), notable credits and/or major recognition or award information. For each team member, include information about relevant expertise and the individual's role in the project. Bullet list the names and titles of any attached advisors and/or consultants. If you do not have other team members at the moment, please write N/A. *Approximately 1300 characters per bio.*

Financial information & budget

Fundraising strategy: Describe the overall fundraising strategy for the film. *1300 characters max.*

Funding to date: Provide a list of all sources and amounts raised to date. Distinguish between potential sources of funding and secured amounts. List the status of other sources of funding (planning to apply, application pending, funding committed, or funding received).
- **Sources:** Enter the name of the investor/donor providing the funds
- **Amount:** Enter the expected or received amount of funding in US dollars; numbers only
- **Type of Source** (dropdown): Foundation; Individual Donor; Broadcaster or TV Streaming Service; Corporation; Crowdfunding; Equity Investment; Cash from Filmmaker; Cash from Producer; State or Federal Funding; Other Government Entity
- **Status (dropdown):** Planning to Apply; Application Pending; Funding Committed; Funding Received

Percentage of total budget: Please indicate what percentage of the total film budget that each funding source represents. Estimated Film Budget: Enter the amount in US dollars using just numerals. Include only costs up through completion.

Comprehensive line-item expense budget (upload): Please provide a breakdown of your project's projected expenses, from development through release, in US dollars, including a budget total. Provide budget notes for any areas that may be viewed as out of the ordinary or require further explanation. Upload your current budget in the format you have. There is no need to create a new one.

You can reference several budget best practices via page 14 of this guide.

Work samples

Before submitting work samples, please review pgs. 10-13 in this guide for requirements regarding current project and prior work samples.

Current work sample

The following are the subfields when you select 'Add Current Work Sample':

URL: Submit one link only in the text box. Please make your work sample downloadable.

Password
Running time

Description: Specify what type of sample(s) you are submitting: trailer; scene select(s) or excerpt(s); character strand(s). What should reviewers be looking for in your sample? Explain what is present and absent in the sample, and how it will differ as a finished film. Describe how it is representative of the intended story, style, subject, or other aspect of the project. Please provide time codes of the portions of the sample that best reflect your intended approach. *1300 characters max.*

Content warnings (optional but encouraged): Please note below if the footage you have provided contains any content that may be triggering for reviewers, and the timestamps where it occurs. This information will be used as an advisory to reviewers, but has no effect on your application or the reviewing process. Items to flag include, for example: Violence, Bodily Harm/Mutilation, Domestic Violence, Sexual Violence/Abuse, Suicide, Depression, Nudity, Drug addiction, Alcoholism, Paedophilia, Sexual abuse, Suicide, White supremacy, Police brutality.

Prior work

The following are the subfields when you select 'Add Prior Work Sample':

Film title
Director name
Year completed

URL: Submit one link only in the text box. Please make your work sample downloadable.

Password

Running time: There is no time limit for your Prior Work Sample. Please provide a link to the complete film.

Festivals and Awards: Describe any recognition that your film has received via festivals, awards, etc. *650 characters max.*

Description: Describe the sample you are submitting for consideration, including its narrative, aesthetic, or communication intentions. Discuss the relevance of the work to the current project, if any. If the current project is a departure from the prior work, how will this film differ? If you wish the panel review a specific section of your prior work, note the start and end running times of a 10-minute section that you'd especially like to highlight. If the film was co-directed, specify the name of the co-director. If you are not the director, please specify your role in the completed work submitted. *1300 characters max.*

Content warnings (optional but encouraged): Please note below if the footage you have provided contains any content that may be triggering for reviewers, and the timestamps where it occurs. This information will be used as an advisory to reviewers, but has no effect on your application or the reviewing process.

Supplemental questions

How long have you known about the (Egg)celerator Lab open call?
- Less than a year
- 1-3 years
- 3-6 years

How did you hear about this year's open call?
- Referred by Chicken & Egg Films team at a festival/forum
- Referred by fellow filmmaker/peer
- Chicken & Egg Films newsletter or social media
- Other industry newsletter or social media
- Other -> please specify

Project still: Please upload a still image that is core to your film's story line. (file name must end with .jpeg, .png, or .tiff). If possible, please crop to a 2:3 aspect ratio (vertical) and a size no larger than 1400 x 2100.

Questions

If you have questions that aren't answered by this guide or the FAQ, please contact egglab_opencall@chickeneggfilms.org.

We check our inbox regularly and no question is too small!