

## **Small Budget Production Initiative (SBPI) Frequently Asked Questions**

The SBPI is designed to better support emerging Washington State filmmakers by offering funding assistance for projects with budgets between \$20,000 - \$1M. Washington Filmworks has curated a number of resources to help you navigate the program and application process.

[SBPI Guidelines and Criteria](#): All the nitty gritty and details about the program.

[SBPI Application Questions](#): A preview of all the questions asked in the application so you can prep materials!

FAQ: A curated list of often asked questions that provide context about the program and application process.

Still have questions after reviewing all these documents? [Email us!](#)

### **Q: Is SBPI funding a grant?**

A: No. SBPI is technically a “film incentive” which is a tool designed to encourage film production in a jurisdiction. Like most film incentives, SBPI provides cash back as a percent return on what an approved production spends hiring Washington Resident cast and crew and working with Washington State businesses. Incentives such as these are often referred to as rebates.

### **Q: When will an approved SBPI project receive funds?**

A: Approved projects that have received a certified funding letter of intent will receive a funding payment once production is complete, the project has submitted a completion package that verifies all qualified Washington State production expenses, and the completion package has been reviewed by the Washington Filmworks team.

### **Q: What kind of content qualifies for SBPI? Do Documentaries? Animated Projects? Web Series?**

A: Most types of motion picture content are eligible for consideration which includes but is not limited to feature films, short films, episodics, commercials, documentary projects, animation projects and XR projects. Exclusions to be aware of:

- News or current events or programs that include weather or financial market reports as a material portion of the programs
- Talk shows, game shows or contests
- Sports events or activities
- Award shows, galas or any production with the purpose of soliciting donations
- Political advertising
- Video games
- Productions produced primarily for industrial, corporate or institutional purposes

### **Q: I am still developing my project, what if my screenplay isn't finalized yet?**

A: To the extent the shooting script is not final upon the date of application, the most current draft available will be accepted. If the final scripts are not available for episodic series, the pilot episode script and story outline for the remaining episodes must be submitted at the time of application. The final production script for both motion picture projects must be delivered to Washington Filmworks no later than one week prior to commencement of physical production. If filming a commercial, story/shooting boards are acceptable.

### **Q: How developed does my project need to be to apply for SBPI? How do I even begin the process?**

A: Projects approved for an early phase funding commitment (also known as a conditional funding letter of intent) must secure financing for their project within six months of approval. Upon successful fundraising, the project will then receive a certified funding letter of intent and must go into production within 120 days.

Each motion picture project has its own timeline for development, but if the filmmaker is ready to talk to potential investors about the project and go into production within four months of securing funding, it's likely that their ready to apply for SBPI. Please note the following information is also required at the time of application.

- Completed screenplay draft for narrative films or episodic pilots
  - Detailed story outlines or shooting boards for other types of projects
- Detailed budget with anticipated qualified Washington spend clearly indicated
- Crew size and scope finalized
- Key locations identified
- Fundraising plan or if fully funded, proof of funding.

**Q: Do I need to be fully funded to apply for the SBPI?**

A: No, projects do not need to be fully funded at the time of application, however projects that are not fully funded must wait for an application window to submit their applications. Visit [the Washington Filmworks Small Budget Production Initiative page](#) for more information on application deadlines.

Fully funded project may apply to the SBPI program at any time during the calendar year as long as there are funds available for the program. To find out if there are funds available visit [the Washington Filmworks Small Budget Production Initiative page](#) or [email our team](#).

**Q: What does it mean to be “fully funded”?**

A: Washington Filmworks considers a project fully funded when all of its financing for the pre-production, production, and post production phases has been secured. Because any SBPI funding assistance payments are received after the project is complete, SBPI funding cannot be considered a portion the project's financing when applying for a certified funding letter of intent from Washington Filmworks.

**Q: I have already started filming, can I still apply to SBPI?**

A: SBPI is designed for projects that have not commenced principal photography.

We understand that you may have already filmed *something*: a teaser, a pilot episode, a key interview, or a scene from the script to help raise funds - but don't worry as we allow exceptions for these types of things!

Be prepared to answer questions about the previously filmed footage during the application process. That said, expenses for the previously filmed content will likely not be eligible for a return on qualified spend.

Eligible expenses are only allowable if incurred three (3) months prior to the date of the certified funding letter of intent, all federal, state, and local laws were followed, and were purchased from a Washington State business for use during pre-production, production, or post production in Washington State.

**Q: You said that SBPI is designed for projects that have not commenced principal photography, but I have already started filming a series, can the SBPI cover future episodes?**

A: Yes. You can apply for funding assistance to support additional episodes of a series. Be prepared to answer questions about the previously filmed footage during the application process. Only unfilmed episodes are eligible for a return on qualified expenses.

**Q: Can I have a volunteers as cast or crew?**

A: [Per Washington State's Department of Labor & Industries](#): A volunteer freely gives their time and talents without expectation of pay. A volunteer can only work for an educational, charitable, religious, state or local government, or non-profit organization. For profit businesses cannot have volunteer labor and must be paid at least minimum wage for their work. All approved SBPI projects must follow federal, state, and local laws including labor laws. Any volunteer labor or in-kind services are not eligible as qualified expenses towards funding assistance.

**Q: Can I have interns on my project?**

A: Washington Filmworks encourages educational experiences and training in the film industry, however, all approved SBPI projects must follow federal, state, and local laws including labor laws. Interns cannot replace or displace the work of paid cast and crew. [The Federal Department of labor provides guidance](#) on what constitutes an intern rather than an employee including, but not limited to, the extent to which the intern's work complements, rather than displaces, the work of paid employees while providing significant educational benefits to the intern.

**Q: Does my project need to “go union” to be eligible for SBPI?**

A: No. Washington Filmworks does not require any project to sign contracts with unions or guilds to qualify for either the SBPI or the Production Incentive Program (PIP).

The PIP contains a benefits provision which requires productions to make payments at industry standard rates towards health and retirement benefits for all positions typically covered by a collective bargaining agreement. PIP projects may sign agreements with unions or guilds to fulfill this requirement, they may also make payments to qualified third party benefit providers. SBPI does not have this same benefits provision requirement.

**Q: How do I know which program the Small Budget Production Initiative (SBPI) or the Production Incentive Program (PIP) is a better fit for my project?**

A: While both the SBPI and the PIP offer funding assistance to motion picture projects, each program has separate requirements.

The SBPI is designed to support emerging Washington State filmmakers by offering funding assistance for projects with budgets between \$20,000 - \$1 million. 85% of the production's principal photography days must be filmed in Washington State. The project must have a minimum of two Washington residents in the positions of director, producer, screenwriter, or lead actor. The applicant of record for the motion picture must be a Washington resident producer or director. Applicants with projects that are not fully funded may qualify for an early phase funding commitment intended to help facilitate additional fundraising for the project. If approved for the program, projects have six months to complete fundraising or the early phase funding commitment will expire. The applicant of record may not have received funding from the SBPI previously.

The PIP provides funding assistance to commercials filming in rural Washington as well as feature films and episodic series filmed anywhere in Washington State. In order to qualify for funding assistance, the applicant must meet the following minimum in-state spending thresholds: \$500,000 for Motion Pictures, \$300,000 per episode for Episodic Series, and \$150,000 for Commercials. The production must make payments at industry standard rates towards health and retirement benefits for all positions typically covered by a collective bargaining agreement, and the project must be fully funded at the time of application.

Visit <https://www.washingtonfilmworks.org/programs-landing-page> for more information on each program.

**Q: I have lots of projects lined up between \$20,000 and \$1 million, why can I receive funding from SBPI only once?**

A: It's true a project is ineligible for SBPI if the applicant of record (which must be a Washington resident producer or director) has received funding from the SBPI previously. Washington Filmworks has limited funding available for SBPI and wants to give as many local filmmakers as possible the opportunity to access SBPI funding. Our hope is that successful SBPI filmmakers will grow their reputations and careers and that future projects may be a fit for the PIP program.

It's important to remember that filmmakers can continue to apply to SBPI until they successfully complete a project for which they received a certified funding letter and funding assistance payment.

**Q: What happens if I fundraise more than the budget I submitted in my application?**

A: In order to receive a certified funding letter of intent, a project must provide proof that it's fully funded and verify that the project has not undergone significant changes since the time of application which could include a change in the budget level of the project. If a significant change occurs, the project may need to reapply.