



DANISH FILM INSTITUTE

**INTERNAL GUIDELINES FOR
FILM COMMISSIONERS**
VALID FROM 10 DECEMBER 2012

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THE COMMISSIONER'S WORK

The following guidelines describe the film commissioner's work and the most important procedures for the film commissioner's processing of cases.

The commissioner's work consists in prioritising the subsidy funds allocated by the state to secure "the continual production and dissemination of different types of films, so that the overall range of films, in terms of artistic quality, diversity, volume, and audience appeal, sustains and develops Danish cinema and film culture, domestically and internationally." (From the Purpose section of the DFI's Subsidy Terms.)

The term "commissioner" refers to a person who is a film commissioner at the DFI. Subsidy funds must be prioritised in accordance with the intentions of the Film Act and the performance contract between the DFI and the Ministry of Culture.

The commissioner scheme is based on individual case processing. Hence, the commissioner's work very much involves engaging in close dialogue with the applicant about the artistic development of the film project. In this respect, the commissioner's work is about acting as a consultant to the applicants. The dialogue between the applicant and the commissioner revolves around the project's strengths and potentials, its weaknesses and challenges.

In the development process, the commissioner acts as a sparring partner, questioning the project and pointing out weaknesses and problems. The commissioner does not, as a principle, propose concrete solutions. It is up to the applicant to decide how the identified problems and challenges should be solved.

The vast majority of the film commissioner's work far consists in reading applications and screenplays and getting acquainted with supplemental materials. The commissioner writes qualified responses to applications, has meetings with applicants, and writes minutes of the meetings. The commissioner prepares recommendations to the management about projects to prioritise for subsidies.

When the projects receive production subsidies, the commissioner acts as a sparring partner throughout the production process. For example, the commissioner can sit in on readings or visit the set. The commissioner also attends screenings of cuts (rough cuts and fine cuts), final mixes, etc.

The short and documentary film commissioners furthermore view films to be purchased for Film Institute distribution.

Besides processing cases, the commissioner participates in the day-to-day work at the DFI, helping to ensure the continual development of the institution's cinematic and film-policy visions.

The commissioner's work furthermore consists in having a public profile, for example by giving industry-related lectures on the film commissioner's practice.

The commissioner also participates in the most important public/official events in the film community, e.g., industry meets, hearings, premieres, film festivals (domestic and international), etc. DFI film commissioners meet at least once a year with their fellow commissioners from the other Nordic film institutes.

These activities are an opportunity to engage in a more overarching discussion on film-policy perspectives and development opportunities and participate in a more general dialogue with the film community on the business and art of film.

The commissioners focusing on the areas of children and youth moreover will often engage in debates on film issues with the other actors in the area of children and youth culture.

Mentor programme for newly hired commissioners

When a commissioner is hired at the DFI, a mentor is appointed to him or her. The mentor will typically be

another commissioner or a DFI producer, who is assigned to support and guide the commissioner for the first couple of months.

This guidance may involve helping the new commissioner navigate the internal workflows at the DFI instructing them about meeting applicants and writing recommendations and rejections. In the beginning, the DFI producer or the mentor sits in on the newly hired commissioner's meetings with applicants, while the new commissioner also has the opportunity to sit in on his or her mentor's meetings with applicants. The specific course and duration of the mentor programme is agreed by the commissioner and the mentor.

Transferring projects to a new commissioner

When a commissioner leaves the DFI, he or she has certain tasks and obligations relating to his or her applicants as well as to the commissioner who will be taking over from him or her. Thus, all current projects have a clear indication from the commissioner who is leaving as to whether they will move on or whether the subsidy to them will be discontinued.

Projects that have received script or development subsidies should, as far as possible, submit their results before the new commissioner takes over. If this is not possible or expedient, the project is transferred to the new commissioner. The outgoing commissioner makes a list of the active projects that will be submitting their results after the change of commissioner and writes a note for each of them, detailing their goals and ambitions. The notes can include meeting minutes and past recommendations.

As a starting point, the new commissioner takes over everything, including projects that are in production. For this and other reasons, the new commissioner is entitled to as much hand-over information as he or she needs, including from the outgoing commissioner. The DFI's producers and coordinators will keep the new commissioner up to speed on viewings and other deadlines. For the first couple of months of the new commissioner's employment, the DFI producer participates in the commissioner's meetings with applicants. After each meeting, an assessment is made.

Applications and applicants

A newly appointed commissioner typically receives 100-150 applications over the first year. Later on, the amount may drop slightly. Most applicants initially apply for subsidies for screenplay-writing or for development, but there will also be first-time applications for production subsidies

The applicant can be a screenwriter, a director, a production company, or a constellation of them. It is not a requirement for research or screenplay subsidies to have a director or production company attached to the project.

The application can consist of a pitch, a breakdown, a treatment, or a screenplay. The point to which a project has progressed before it is first submitted varies greatly.

Procedures for case processing

The Commissioner Scheme is an opportunity to process applications in a way that accommodates the singularities of the individual applicant. Still, the case processing is bound by certain basic and standardised procedures, primarily to ensure that all applications are treated equally.

The commissioner is often subjected to considerable pressure from the applicant to make a promise of subsidies before actual case processing has taken place. The fixed procedures for dialogue and cooperation with applicants are designed to counteract that, as well.

The commissioner only considers written applications and then has meetings with applicants based on those applications.

The commissioner may also have informal meetings with potential applicants. At such meetings, no discussion

of specific projects or future applications may take place.

A project can only be processed in one place at the DFI at any given time. The applicant must personally determine to which subsidy scheme and commissioner to apply. If an applicant receives a rejection from one commissioner or one subsidy scheme, he or she is welcome to apply elsewhere.

If a previous application for the project has been made, or in the case of a second-opinion application, the commissioner can acquaint him or herself with the past processing of the case in the DFI file, where all correspondence about a project is registered and archived.

Responding to applications

Immediately after an application is received, this is confirmed by a letter from the project coordinator, who also indicates the expected response time for an actual reply from the commissioner. The response time is usually 4 weeks for first-time applications and 2 weeks for second-opinion applications. In the case of ongoing projects that are complying with the agreed deadlines for submitting performance reports, the response time is 2 weeks. Projects that are not complying with the agreed deadlines should expect a case-processing period of 4 weeks.

The commissioner's response to the application is always in writing.

Assessing an application

The application is first assessed based on its content and the artistic potential of its concept and story. Next, the potential of the people who wish to realise it is assessed.

Meeting with an applicant

If the commissioner sees potential in a project, the applicant is called to a meeting, so that the commissioner can become further acquainted with the project. In the meeting invitation, the commissioner provides his or her comments, both on elements that are assessed as positive and on those about which there are reservations. These comments serve as an agenda for the meeting, allowing the applicant to prepare. The invitation may distinguish between a creative meeting, a clarifying meeting, and finally, a recommendation meeting if the commissioner is convinced that the project should be supported.

Projects that have neither a director nor a production company attached are urged to remedy that before the project has progressed too far, rendering it probable that the project can later be realised in a satisfactory manner.

In some cases, the commissioner's enthusiasm for a project is so unconditional that a promise of screenplay subsidies is immediately made. Usually, however, the commissioner awaits the outcome of the meeting before making a final decision on a possible engagement in the project. The outcome is sent to the applicant in writing, together with the commissioner's summary of any decisions made at the meeting. This summary can later form a basis for the commissioner's recommendation to the DFI's management for subsidies.

The commissioner writes a recommendation to the management for subsidies. The recommendation includes the commissioner's motivations for supporting the project along with a recommendation to award development or production subsidies. It outlines the project's content and its current stage in the development process and includes assessments of the project and the artistic potential of the key creative individuals.

If one director/screenwriter is attached to several films

Many directors (and screenwriters, too, to some extent) worry that it might be a problem to have several projects under consideration simultaneously, or in parallel development tracks, at the DFI. That, however, is

entirely within the lines of the DFI's subsidy policy, which specifically aims to perform ongoing assessment and qualification of many film projects, the most promising of which are selected to receive production subsidies. Should several projects from a single applicant be on a collision course, the commissioner may, of course, be forced to choose between them. Up to that point, however, several projects can very well be assessed and developed in parallel.

Adaptations

A special category of applications involves adaptations, typically from books but sometimes also from stage plays. A good rule of thumb here is to evaluate the project based on the potential of the applicant's special twist on, and creative approach to, the adaptation. That the literary or dramatic source is good does not in and of itself qualify a film project for subsidies. For that reason, many commissioners make a virtue of not familiarising themselves with the source, which can make it easier to distinguish between the qualities of the source and the qualities of the adaptation. For the same reason, the commissioner will usually require a treatment of the project to have been made before moving to subsidise an adaptation.

Subsidies should not be awarded to acquire adaptation rights before the applicants have shown that they have a good idea for an adaptation. Finally, a project can only receive subsidies if all copyright issues have been cleared up and documented.

Non-Danish-language films

Some Danish feature-film producers and directors try their hand at English-language films. In these cases, the DFI's general approach is putting a priority on helping such projects get started by issuing screenplay and development subsidies. If the project is to be realised as a Danish majority co-production, the commissioner can only subsidise the film if it is expected to have a Danish audience as well.

Rejecting applications

Rejections must be in writing and be qualifying and clear. Furthermore, the commissioner should strive to phrase the rejection in terms that are as considerate and constructive as possible, since a rejection can be quite a blow to the applicant. Moreover, some applicants intend to continue with the project elsewhere despite the rejection.

In the case of a rejection, the commissioner should not encourage the applicant to apply for subsidies elsewhere at the DFI. This could give the applicant the false impression that the project has received a special recommendation or that it has a particularly good chance of receiving a subsidy.

At any point in the process, the commissioner can consult with the DFI's producers and promotion consultants regarding economic, financial, and production conditions.

Three subsidy funds

The commissioner has three funds at his or her disposal from which to recommend subsidies: the screenplay fund, the development fund, and the production fund. In the case of shorts and documentaries, screenplay and development subsidies are gathered into one fund.

The screenplay fund for features

The screenplay fund is of a size that makes it possible to go into far more projects than will ultimately receive production subsidies. A commissioner typically has 25-30 projects in screenplay development.

The purpose of the screenplay fund is to enable the commissioner to evaluate a project over one or more

phases before making a final decision to prioritise the project for development or production subsidies.

As a rule of thumb, a project qualifies to receive subsidies from the screenplay fund if the commissioner sees so much potential in the project that it could, in the most fortunate of cases, qualify for later production subsidies.

The fund moreover represents an opportunity for the commissioner to express interest in a project without committing to a later production subsidy.

One could call it a deselection process. The commissioner initially rejects a very high percentage of the submitted applications. A small percentage are selected to take part in a screenplay development process. These projects receive screenplay subsidies, often over several phases, reflecting the standard process of producing different types of texts and making several screenplay revisions. After each phase, the commissioner can decide to award supplemental subsidies or call a halt to further development.

The amount of the screenplay subsidy only occasionally reflects the actual amount of work involved in producing a particular type of text. A large start-up amount may be granted, if the commissioner right away judges the concept and the constellation of people to be of a high level. However, there is no reason to award a large subsidy amount to a project that the commissioner is basically prepared to give only one shot or that, conversely, is judged to have to clear a lot of hurdles before it finds its ultimate form. When the applicant submits a new version of the screenplay, it is up to the commissioner to assess whether enough has been happening with the project relative to the subsidy already issued and whether the project qualifies for an additional subsidy.

Subsidies can be awarded to a director and/or a screenwriter even if no production company is involved in the project yet. In some cases, the screenplay subsidies can be awarded for the purpose of attaching a dramaturgical consultant to the project.

Shorts and documentaries may have very different development needs. For example, while some applications involve shorts and fiction series that solely need screenplay development, other applications involve documentaries and documentary series in which the initial research, photography, and editing of a pilot are essential to assessing whether the film can and should be realised.

Commissioners generally operate with the following types of subsidies, which are drawn from the development fund for shorts and documentaries:

Research and script subsidies	DKK 25,000-50,000
Development subsidies	DKK 50,000-500,000

Often, supplemental development subsidies are awarded. It is not uncommon for a project to have received two or three development subsidies before reaching the point where application for a production subsidy can be made.

The feature film commissioner generally operates with the following types of subsidies from the screenplay fund:

Breakdown subsidies	DKK 30,000
Treatment subsidies	DKK 80,000
Screenplay subsidies	DKK 100,000
Supplemental screenplay subsidies	DKK 50,000

Finally, subsidies can be awarded to research in connection with developing the screenplay.

Supplemental treatment and screenplay subsidies are often awarded. A project that makes it into production has typically received screenplay subsidies of DKK 250,000-300,000.

The development fund

Development subsidies are aimed at illuminating and unfolding aspects of a film project that cannot be read from the screenplay or treated in screenplay form. The subsidy is awarded if "development is judged to be significantly important to strengthen the project artistically, financially, or production-wise, or in terms of the film's target groups or distribution potential" (from the DFI's subsidy terms).

Development subsidies serve a dual purpose. The subsidy should primarily qualify the project so that it is better conceived when the film goes into production. Secondly, the subsidy should give the commissioner a more qualified foundation for performing a general assessment of the project.

Investing in this step of project development is risky for the production company, as well, because it takes place at a time when the project has not yet secured production subsidies. The part of the development that takes place after a production subsidy has been awarded is called pre-production and is included in the film's financed budget.

There are no formal limits dictating what development projects can receive subsidies. Typical development projects might involve testing out technical solutions or visual style issues, exploring financing opportunities, plus in the case of

- documentaries: e.g., scriptwriting, dramaturgical reviewing of recorded research materials, casting, access, test shots of subjects or locations, testing narrative devices, pilot, financing materials, attending financing forums, animation tests, urgent shoots, and graphic design.
- features: e.g., casting, readings, improvisations, research of special locations, producing moodboards, screenplay translation, and shooting individual scenes or a pilot.

A development subsidy can basically serve many different purposes and ends, and if the applicant wants to take a nontraditional path, that is only a good thing.

The commissioner assesses whether there is a basis for performing case processing of a development application. Then, the DFI producer is called in. The development project is identified and defined by the DFI and the applicant together (a production company is required). Next the producer prepares a budget. This budget is assessed by the DFI producer, and it is adjusted: opinions will often diverge as to how expensive the development project should be. Opinions may also diverge as to how large a share of the costs should be covered by the DFI. It is often the case that the DFI wants to divide the development project into several phases, giving the commissioner multiple options for terminating the project along the way.

The final setting of the subsidy amount is done by the DFI producer in consultation with the commissioner. Then, the commissioner writes a recommendation to the management. The recommendation can be supplemented by the DFI producer's review and assessment of production and finance aspects of the development project.

The production fund

At the end of the day, only very few projects make it to the point of actually applying for production subsidies. The commissioner independently decides if and when a project has matured, content-wise and artistically, to the point where the DFI can begin the actual case processing to determine the amount of the production subsidy. This is a potential point of conflict in the case processing, since the applicant often disagrees with the

commissioner's assessment.

In the case of features, it is important that the commissioner judges the screenplay to be essentially finished, implying that no fundamental changes to the plot or characters need to be made, and that the commissioner has a clear image of how the director wants to realise the screenplay. Issues involving casting and crew are of major significance here.

The commissioner should not recommend a project for a production subsidy until all artistic elements of the film have fallen into place. Other elements, like financing, budget, and production conditions, can be emphasised in the recommendation as requirements to receive subsidy.

Many important conditions affecting the project's realisation can be read from the budget with the help of the DFI producer. Reviewing the budget, the producer often helps to determine whether there is consistency between the commissioner's and the applicant's perception of the film as expensive or inexpensive, and especially whether ambitions of content and form are in reasonable proportion to the finance and production framework.

Once the commissioner has decided to award production subsidies to a project, processing of the application transfers to the DFI producer, who from then on is the DFI's main person in charge of the project. Still, the commissioner should continually be informed and to some extent approve decisions.

During a film's production period, the commissioner may visit the set, but the applicant often has less of a need to engage in dialogue with the commissioner at this point. The dialogue is often picked back up during the editing phase, and the commissioner is asked to screenings.

Assessing subsidy needs

The producer's most important task is to evaluate the film's budget and financing plan and advise the commissioner as to whether there is consistency between the artistic intentions and the budgeting. Furthermore, the film's distribution opportunities and audience potential are assessed in cooperation with the promotion consultant.

It can be relevant for a commissioner early on to find out what financial scale the production company has in mind for the project – that is, the total budget of the film. In these cases, it should always be emphasised that this does not imply that the commissioner has made a decision regarding the size of the budget or the amount of a possible DFI production subsidy. This caveat should be repeated in the resulting meeting minutes.

The commissioner never discusses specific budgets and financing plans with the applicant, nor may the commissioner mention specific subsidy amounts to the applicant.

A lot of pressure is often put on the commissioner by producers and directors to get the commissioner to make concrete promises of production subsidies. A smile or an arched eyebrow by the commissioner is sometimes interpreted as a sign that the commissioner has accepted a subsidy amount mentioned by the producer. Such pressure can strain the dialogue with applicants. Thus, the commissioner should always in advance stress that the DFI producer has to be present, if any economic specifics are going to be discussed.

Minority co-productions

Many foreign film production companies apply for subsidies from the DFI's co-production schemes via a Danish co-production partner.

The DFI can contribute a limited production subsidy to the very best of these projects, if, in compliance with the Film Act, they are judged to contain a special artistic or technical effort that helps to advance cinema and film-culture in Denmark.

In the case of applications for the minority co-production scheme for features, the commissioner performs an

artistic assessment as a guideline for an internal editorial decision.

In the case of shorts and documentaries, the individual commissioner independently judges which films to recommend for co-production subsidies. The projects are compared and discussed with the other commissioners, the development producer, and the head of Production & Development.

DFI Production & Development

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