

Originate Comedy Guidelines

Essentials

About this program

Originate Comedy is a dynamic development incubator designed to support and amplify the wealth of comedy storytellers in Victoria. The three-stage program spanning five-months will elevate four projects from early concept to performance ready pilot scripts culminating in a live reading event at the 2027 Melbourne International Comedy Festival.

Stage 1: Masterclasses

Selected individuals or writing teams will take part in a series of online mentoring seminars designed for writers seeking to strengthen their approach to developing premium television comedy projects. Sessions will focus on advanced story craft, including strengthening concept, refining structure, deepening character, sharpening episodic storytelling, and positioning projects for the international marketplace. The seminars will also provide practical guidance on navigating industry feedback, collaborating with creative and financing stakeholders, and understanding the development process for premium television.

Stage 2: Mentorship and Script Development

Participants will be paired with a dedicated script editor and mentor to support the project to pilot script. This tailored development phase brings together participants with experienced international television writers and script editors to help refine projects for the global marketplace.

Mentorship will be tailored to the specific needs of each project, while also strengthening participants' writing craft and understanding of the television development process. Participants will receive a \$12,000 stipend per project and are expected to develop their scripts independently between scheduled mentoring and script editing sessions.

Stage 3: Table Read Workshop

The four pilot scripts will be further developed through a table read performed by local comedy actors for a select audience of industry professionals. The read-through will provide an opportunity to test the material and gather constructive creative and market feedback. Insights from the session will inform a final round of revisions, culminating in polished draft scripts for delivery to VicScreen and the Melbourne International Comedy Festival for final assessment.

Pilot Showcase at Melbourne International Comedy Festival 2027

Up to two projects will be selected for staged readings at the 2027 Melbourne International Comedy Festival in front of a live audience. Performed by a cast of prominent Australian comedy performers and festival headliners, this event will provide a high-profile platform for projects to be showcased to both the public and industry, including producers, commissioners and investors.

What are we looking for?

- Bold and distinct adult narrative comedy series concepts in either of the below formats:
 - Half-hour live-action series and;
 - Primetime animation series.
- Stories that feel rooted in Victoria and/or can be produced here.
- Applications that clearly address all the Assessment Criteria.

Who is eligible?

- Applicants must be a Victorian writer or writing team. View our [Terms of Trade](#) for eligibility requirements.
- Individual applicants or at least one member of an applicant team must also meet one of the following eligibility pathways:
 - Comedy writers who can demonstrate at least one of the following within the last five years:
 - » Writer credit on an adult live-action or animated narrative series or feature film that has been:
 - Commissioned or acquired by a broadcaster or recognised commissioning platform, or
 - Theatrically released or screened at a major film festival.
 - Received development funding or successfully participated in a development initiative from a recognised screen agency or market player (assessment of this prior support will be subject to the discretion of VicScreen).
 - Participated as a writer in a scheme run by a major screen agency, organisation and/or broadcaster in Australia, such as: AWG Pathways, Digital Originals, Fresh Blood, Untapped, Impact Australia.
 - Performed a full-length comedy show (minimum 10-show run) as part of a major comedy festival including the Melbourne International Comedy Festival, Edinburgh Festival Fringe, or Just For Laughs.
 - Victorian finalists of the 2026 Melbourne International Comedy Festival Funny Shorts program.

- The winner of the VicScreen Greenlight Award (presented as part of the Melbourne International Comedy Festival Awards) will automatically be shortlisted to the assessment phase to determine the four selected projects.
- Applicants must be available to fully participate in all stages of the program, meet the script delivery timeline, and be able to attend in-person events including the table read workshop and live-event if selected to participate in the showcase. Applications are limited to one project per person i.e. applicant cannot be attached to multiple projects whether as an individual or as a member of a writing team.

What projects are eligible?

- Adult narrative comedy series concepts in either of the below formats:
 - Half-hour live-action series and;
 - Primetime animation series.
- Projects where the applicant owns, or is in control of, the underlying rights.
- Projects should not have producers attached and would preferably be unencumbered in terms of having other key creatives (directors or non-writing performers) formally attached to the project.
- Preference will be given to projects that have not previously received VicScreen funding.

Who and what is not eligible for this program?

- Non-Victorians.
- Students currently enrolled in a tertiary course.
- Projects that do not meet the formats listed above.
- Sketch comedies, panel shows, or dramatic comedy concepts.
- Projects with significant First Peoples content without appropriate First Peoples representation in the writing team.
- Applications are limited to one project per person.
- Other exclusions as per [Terms of Trade](#).

Our commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

VicScreen is committed to building a thriving and inclusive screen industry that celebrates diversity in both content and people. Applications are expected to authentically reflect a diversity of voices across storytelling, teams and audiences. Applications should demonstrate how the diversity represented in their content is meaningfully reflected within the creative team or that collaboration is embedded from the earliest stages of development. Applicants must outline their commitments

to diversity, equity, and inclusion in their applications. Before applying, please read [VicScreen's DEI Roadmap to 2033](#).

Who can you talk to about this program?

- Senior Grants Officer - [Susannah Britt](#), 03 9660 3206
- Development Coordinator - [Kate Darrigan](#), 03 9660 3203
- Manager, Development - [Mackenzie Lush](#), 03 9660 3232

VicScreen acknowledges that barriers may prevent writers from underrepresented communities from accessing our programs and offer a confidential discussion about individual circumstances and/or access needs.

The Details

Key program dates

- **Stage 1: Online Masterclasses** - November/ December 2026 (Dates TBD)
- **Stage 2: Mentorship and Script Development** - December 2026 to February 2027
- **Stage 3: Read-Thru Workshop** - March 2027 (Date TBD)
- **Pilot Showcase:** The date for the projects selected for the staged reading as part of the 2027 Melbourne International Comedy Festival to be determined but will take place between 25 March and 18 April 2027.

What documents do you need to apply?

You must submit:

- Completed application form.
- One-page synopsis of the project.
- Up to 15 pages of a script-formatted writing sample.
- Optional: Additional relevant materials, e.g. link to website/stand-up videos.

What happens after you apply?

- Funding is competitive. Decisions will take into account the ***Assessment Criteria*** listed below, VicScreen's availability of funds, diversity of the current slate of projects and teams across all platforms, as well as the perceived need for VicScreen funds by the applicant.

Assessment Criteria

- Story
 - The strength and distinctiveness of the narrative, with an emphasis on bold comedic storytelling. The execution and quality of the submitted materials.
- Market Viability
 - The proposal reflects current market trends in the narrative television comedy space and demonstrates an ability to attract market partners.
- Talent & Capability
 - The ability of the individual or project writing team to commit to and manage the development process with multiple creative partners and progress the creative forward
- Diversity
 - How the application addresses diversity across one or more core areas:
 - » Meaningful on-screen representation of diversity in main protagonists, themes, and narratives.
 - » Key creative.

How long until a decision is made?

- You can expect a decision by the end of October 2026, via email or phone.

What happens if you get funding?

- Successful applicants will enter into an agreement with VicScreen, setting out the terms and conditions of participation.
- VicScreen will provide a grant of \$12,000 per project towards the Participant's delivery of a pilot script.
- To improve access and increase participation, applicants who face barriers or challenges to attend the in-person events will be eligible to receive additional financial support. Depending on the individual circumstances, the financial contribution can be applied towards transportation costs or other reasonable costs that will enable full participation in these activities.

What happens if you don't get funding?

- We will contact you to let you know if you have been unsuccessful in obtaining funding.

What will help your application?

- Read these guidelines and the [Terms of Trade](#) which set out the core terms on which VicScreen conducts its business. Terms underlined in black appear in the website glossary.

- Review the online application form – make sure you have all required document ready to be submitted with the application.
- Make sure your application speaks to the Assessment Criteria (set out above)
- Read our [First Peoples Content Statement](#).
- Read our [DEI Roadmap](#).
- Get your application in on time and check the deadline date for this program. Applications are due by 11pm AEST on the deadline date unless otherwise stated on the program page on VicScreen's website. Applications not received by the deadline will not be accepted, as per our Terms of Trade.