

2010 GUIDELINES AND FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The National Screen Institute must receive your application by **WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2010, 4:30 p.m. Central Time. No extensions.**

There is a \$50 non-refundable application fee.

More questions? Call (204) 956-7800 or (800) 952-9307, or email featuresfirst@nsi-canada.ca

OVERVIEW

Building on over a decade of NSI Features First, the National Screen Institute - Canada (NSI) offers an ambitious training program emphasizing both the professional development of emerging filmmakers and the final development and packaging of their feature film projects. Since the inception of NSI Features First in 1997, over fifty feature film projects have been developed through the program. Many of those have gone on to be produced, theatrically released, and have garnered numerous awards.

Here's what some of our NSI Features First grads have to say:

"The NSI Feature First Program was a great experience for both of us and gave a fantastic boost to our project.

-Danishka Esterhazy and Stephanie Chappelle
2006-07 participants

"Being a part of this program has enabled me to make leaps and bounds in my confidence, knowledge and skill set. It's been invaluable. Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity.

- Adria Budd Johnson
2004-05 participant

"The NSI Features First team has done their homework and made sure I had what I need to work towards being a career filmmaker."

- Ken Hegan
2003-04 participant

"There was a lot of practical training, and what was even better was that there was a choice in the type of training we specifically wanted."

- Timo Puolitaipale
2005-06 participant

"The program gave me access to professionals in the industry willing to answer questions and let me pick their brains. In turn I feel like I've become a much better writer with a greater understanding of what it takes to make a good screenplay a great one."

- Chris Charney
2004-05 participant

"At the risk of turning into an even bigger cliché than I am already, I have to say once again, job very, very well done. Does it get boring to keep hearing that? Perhaps, but put very simply I think I may be in love with NSI."

- Iain MacLeod
2007-08 participant

"The program continually challenged me to improve all aspects of the project and not to rush into the marketplace prematurely."

- Claire Querée
2004-05 participant

WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIVES OF THE TRAINING PROGRAM?

NSI Features First has two main objectives:

- To provide participants with training opportunities that will enhance the knowledge base and skill sets they will need to make a first or second feature film.
- To work closely with the filmmakers to help prepare their projects for financing and the marketplace.

WHAT PROFESSIONAL AND PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES DOES NSI FEATURES FIRST OFFER?

You need some time with a professional DOP to go over your shot list. You want to understand production cost reporting a little better. You'd like to hear your script work-shopped by professional actors to help with the rewrite process. Perhaps attending a market immersion would solidify your understanding of independent distribution. You'd love to spend some time with a distribution company understanding the process by which they bring a film to market. Create a list of the things you wish you knew, and NSI Features First will work with you to get some first-hand answers.

Training begins with an orientation session focusing on script and story development.

Your team will attend **NSI Features First Boot Camps** in Winnipeg and Toronto. Sessions are designed to provide team members with essential skills. You'll have the chance to assess your skill levels and learning gaps and design a customized professional development guide in consultation with the NSI Features First Program Manager and Program Consultant.

Successful teams will put together a detailed budget that will cover both training sessions and project-specific costs. Project costs can be wide-ranging from working with a script editor to preliminary budgeting, scheduling, creating a financing plan, creating marketing and sales plans and any other preparatory work specifically required to bring your project to the market. Please note that the engagement of an experienced story editor is mandatory and funds will be allocated from your team budget to cover the expense.

Where possible, learning opportunities will be developed in your team members' home region. If another institution that meets the team members' needs offers an existing professional development course, we'll send you there.

Project development funding includes participation at the initial orientation sessions, the boot camp sessions and, for those teams whose projects are ready, partial funding to attend the Toronto International Film Festival in support of the project.

WHAT IS THE FORMAT OF THE TRAINING PROGRAM?

The principle of NSI Features First is to create customized professional and project development opportunities for each team. In order to adequately prepare for the initial training sessions, a considerable amount of work needs to be done within the first month of the program. Each team will work with the NSI Features First Program Manager and Program Consultant to develop a training guide, budget and a list of potential story editors.

Phase one

- Attend the NSI Features First orientation session.
- Attend a series of intensive training sessions at NSI Features First Boot Camps in Winnipeg and Toronto.
- Rewrite the script with the assistance of an experienced story editor. Note: To be considered for phase two teams will have to complete the re-write phase by March 31, 2011.
- Market research - where does your film fit into the marketplace? Who will buy it? For how much? Who's the audience? How do you answer these questions?

- Financing - who are your potential partners? How does it all fit together? Learn about distributors, banks, agencies, funds, private investors and tax credits.
- Preliminary budgeting - you've got an idea about what the film is worth and how you might finance it. But what does it cost?
- Attend workshops identified as part of your individual training plan.
- Further develop the project marketing and promotion plan to be considered for the Jim Murphy Filmmakers Bursary (details on page 16).

Phase two pre-requisites:

- Successful completion of all activities in phase one.
- Materials delivered are subject to review. Only projects that have advanced creatively *and* demonstrate an understanding of where they fit in the marketplace, how they might get financed, how much they will cost to produce, etc., will be eligible to take part in phase two.

Phase two activities will be determined by the specific needs of your project but can include:

- Customized training for all team members in their chosen fields.
- Budget preparation with a qualified Line Producer or Production Manager.
- Working through the script with an experienced Director of Photography.
- Developing a cash flow with a qualified Production Accountant.
- Script readings with actors.
- One-on-one meetings with industry players - directors, producers, distributors, broadcasters, bankers, sales agents, etc.
- The team that is awarded the Jim Murphy Filmmakers Bursary will begin to implement the marketing initiatives outlined in their marketing plan (details on page 16).

Toronto International Film Festival:

- Projects and teams are subject to review. Only teams that demonstrate a proven readiness to take the project to the marketplace may attend the Toronto International Film Festival in support of their film.
- Those teams that require further professional and project development will continue with activities started in phase two.

Program timeline (Please note ALL dates are subject to change)

November 19 th	Selected Teams officially announced
Dec 3 rd - 5 th	Story Analysis & Orientation
Dec 6 th	Story Editors selected and contracted Teams begin working with Story Editors Market research begins
Feb 7 th - 11 th 2011	All teams attend Boot Camp 1 in Toronto - Phase 1 interim report to be handed in

February 12 th	Teams continue with Story Editors Market research continues
March 11 th - 14 th	All teams attend Boot Camp 2 in Winnipeg
March 31 st	Phase 1 Deadline - New draft of scripts handed in - Phase 1 final report handed in - Marketing plans submitted for the Jim Murphy Filmmakers Bursary
April 1 st - 9 th	Assessment of scripts/teams for Phase 2
April 10 th	Phase 2 selected teams announced Phase 2 commences - Customized training begins
July 31 st	Phase 2 Deadline - New draft of scripts handed in - Phase 2 final report handed in
August 1 st - 8 th	Assessment of scripts/teams for TIFF
August 9 th - Sept 4 th	TIFF prep commences for selected teams - Teams prepare pitch packages - Packages sent out - TIFF schedule/plans set up - Customized training continues
Sept 2011	Selected teams attend TIFF in support of projects.
November 2011	Program completion date

WHAT DO I HAVE TO COMMIT TO THE PROGRAM?

Although we recognize the need to keep your day job, you are going to have to make considerable time available for the program. Project and professional development plans will be created with the maximum flexibility given to each team member's particular circumstances, but unavoidably, many of the professional development opportunities will take place during the day.

Prior to selection, short-listed applicants must make themselves available for interviews between November 12 - 18, 2010 (dates TBC). Interviews will be held in major centres throughout Canada and via conference call. Attendance at the orientation session and Boot Camp sessions are mandatory for selected applicants.

You will work with the NSI Features First Program Manager and Program Consultant to plan both the professional development opportunities as well as the milestone dates for project development work, but those deadlines must be met. NSI Features First is a *training* program not a *funding* program and by applying you are agreeing to meet the deadlines identified for you under the program.

Any team member who fails to honour the professional development plan created for him/her will ultimately disqualify their team from further support from NSI Features First. In order to be eligible to continue to take part in the activities of the second phase of the program, all activities in the first phase must be completed. In order to attend the Toronto International Film Festival, as part of the NSI Features First program, teams must be able to demonstrate that their project is ready to be taken to the marketplace.

A contract will be signed with each team outlining the professional development plans, team and NSI commitments.

Preparing a feature film for financing and production is a huge amount of work - throw in some professional development and get it all done in 10 months. You are going to be busy. If you don't think you can commit the time, apply when you know you can.

WHO CAN APPLY?

We have developed some assumptions about the minimum skill sets for applicants as follows:

Producer

- Must have production or craft experience, or business affairs/legal experience, or marketing/distribution experience, or some combination of the above.
- Cannot have made more than one feature in a producing capacity (producer, co-producer, etc.)
- Note that considerable weight will be put on the pitch documents in the application package - proposed budget, financing plans, marketing plans, etc.

Director

- Must have directed several short dramas which have had some exposure (festival/broadcast), or directed television drama, or directed 2nd unit drama, or some combination thereof.
- Cannot have more than one produced feature film credit as a director.
- Past work must demonstrate technical competence and storytelling ability (notwithstanding budgetary constraints.)
- Cannot be a performer/actor in the film (for the purposes of NSI Features First training).
- Cannot be a producer on the film (for the purposes of NSI Features First training).

Writer

- Script is the key qualification.
- Previously produced credits (short or long drama) an asset.
- Cannot have more than one produced feature film credit as a writer.

All applicants

- Must be Canadian citizens or landed immigrants, reside in Canada and be over the age of 18.
- Must maintain creative and financial control over the project as well as technical ownership.
- Must demonstrate ownership of or option on all underlying rights (if any) and of the screenplay.
- **Must have determined ownership and decision-making control between themselves. Must identify which team member officially owns the project.**
- Must not currently be enrolled in any full-time school or university program.
- Applicants with more than one feature credit (in the role applying for in NSI Features First) are not eligible
- **Applicants will only be accepted from complete production teams (writer, director, producer) of two or three people in the following combinations: writer, director, producer (three person team) OR writer/director, producer (two person team)**

Note: for the purposes of NSI Features First training, a director or writer cannot participate in the program as a producer as well.

In terms of the minimum skill levels required, please bear in mind that the object is not to qualify on some technical level for the program but rather to demonstrate that the team has sufficient craft and technical experience to realistically be considered capable of a feature film project.

WHAT PROJECTS ARE ELIGIBLE?

- Scripts must be advanced to at least 2nd draft stage and be capable of being assessed for production potential.
- Projects must be feature length (over 80 minutes) and be intended for commercial international theatrical release.
- Projects must be narrative (experimental or documentary films are not eligible.)
- Projects can be completed on any medium provided it can be projected theatrically and meets standard broadcast requirements.

- Theme and subject matter are up to the applicants, although NSI will not accept into the program any projects that contain excessive violence, sexual violence or sexual exploitation.

Projects will be selected based on their creative and commercial potential. Both projects and team members must be suitable for the program (it is possible to have a good project, but a team which is not yet ready to move to feature level, or a great team with the wrong project).

HOW DO I APPLY?

Only fully completed applications will be considered. This means that you must fill out ALL sections of the application form in full and must include ALL the documents listed below.

Your application will be immediately disqualified if any of the sections are incomplete or missing. Please check all copies of your application very carefully before you send it to us. It is your responsibility to ensure that the application is complete and delivered on time.

- **Synopsis** - a one-paragraph pitch summary.
- **2nd draft script** - projected running time must be feature length.
- **Script notes** - Writer's notes on your proposed plan for subsequent drafts.
- **Director's notes** - provide detail on stylistic approach, overall tone, etc.
- **Preliminary development and packaging plan** - provide us with a list of the activities you believe you need to complete in order to get your project into shape to take to the marketplace. Please provide supporting documentation for each of the activities as necessary.
- **Preliminary marketing plan** - demonstrate a clear idea of the film's target audience and your understanding of its market potential. Include your plans for an innovative and dynamic approach to marketing & promoting your film for consideration of the Jim Murphy Filmmakers Bursary (details on page 17).
- **Proposed production budget** - a preliminary production budget. Please do NOT only send top sheets.
- **Proposed financing structure** - your proposed sources of revenue for financing the project.
- **Chain of Title documentation** - i.e.: option agreement, transfer of rights agreement, and/or publisher's agreement. Please include a Writer's Agreement - regarding underlying rights acquisition (if any) and screenplay. The Option Agreement must include proof of ownership. Applicants must have determined ownership and decision-making control between themselves. **Applicants must identify which team member officially owns the project and provide proof in writing.**
- **Name, address, phone number, email address and resume** for each of the writer, director and producer applicants.
- **A description by the applicant team of their expectations and objectives** in applying for NSI Features First - why do you want to participate and what do you hope to get out of it?
- **A CURRENT letter of reference** for each team member from professionals working in the industry - this letter should help identify why the writer feels you are ready to take the step up to feature length production.
- **Description of the formal relationship between team members** - have you incorporated a company? Have you worked together before? How confident are you that you can work together on this feature?
- **Evidence of development funding to date** - if you have previous or current development funding from other sources, please submit copies of their commitment letters. **Note: *You do not need other development funding in order to apply to NSI Features First.***

- **DVD of support material** - specifically work from the director that complements the style/genre of the submitted project. Two Films Maximum. Do NOT send demo reels.
- Your application must contain **TWO SINGLE SIDED COPIES** of the **COMPLETE PROPOSAL** (this means one original set of ALL documents, including your original application form, and one photocopy of everything, including the application form). Please **DO NOT** staple your application - **USE BINDER CLIPS**.
- **\$50 non-refundable entry fee** - make your cheque or money order payable to the National Screen Institute - Canada. Cash will not be accepted.

WHAT IS THE JIM MURPHY FILMMAKERS BURSARY?

Along with his friends and colleagues, NSI established the Jim Murphy Filmmakers Bursary in memory of the former NSI Features First program manager who passed away in 2007.

In keeping with Jim's incomparable film distribution, marketing and promotion contributions to the Canadian industry, and his commitment to training, a \$2,500 award is presented to a team going through the NSI Features First program.

Teams selected for the program will have the opportunity to further develop their marketing plans during phase one of the program. Following the conclusion of the first phase, marketing plans will be reviewed. The team that has developed the most original, innovative and dynamic marketing plan that complements and showcases their feature film project will be awarded the bursary.

Bursary funds will be awarded in the amount of \$2,500 and may only be applied to marketing initiatives outlined in the selected team's marketing plan. A text credit must be included in the bursary-winning team's closing credits in their completed film. Details of credit size, NSI Features First program & Jim Murphy Filmmakers Bursary investors, etc. will appear in the contract on their projects. Only teams who applied to and are then selected for NSI Features First are eligible for the Jim Murphy Filmmakers Bursary.

The NSI Features First 2008/09 project *Hunter Hunter* by the Winnipeg team of writer/director Shawn Linden and producer Megan Heke was the inaugural recipient. In 2009/10 *Heaven's Door* by the Vancouver team of writer/director Geoff Redknap and producer Katie Weekley won the bursary.

HOW WILL TEAMS BE SELECTED?

The NSI Features First Program Manager and Program Consultant will assess projects for eligibility and completeness. Incomplete applications will be rejected.

Up to four teams with projects will be selected by the NSI Features First Program Manager and Program Consultant in consultation with Canadian film and television industry representatives. Teams will be selected based on the strength of the creative and market potential of their projects, the demonstrated readiness of the team members to move onto feature production and a firm resolve to commit the required time to fully participate in the program.

Short-listed teams will have an opportunity to pitch their projects in person or via conference call to the NSI Features First Program Manager and Program Consultant.

WHEN WILL WE KNOW IF WE HAVE BEEN SELECTED?

Selection will be complete by November 19, 2010 (Date subject to change). Only those teams selected for NSI Features First will be contacted. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified by mail.

WHAT ABOUT INTER-PROVINCIAL TEAMS?

It is **not** a requirement that all members of the team reside in the same city. However, the teams must be able to demonstrate how they will overcome physical distance barriers as they proceed with their final stage development and production planning.

WHO IS THE NSI FEATURES FIRST PROGRAM MANAGER?

Brendon Sawatzky

Brendon has been with the National Screen Institute for over eight years. He was originally contracted to manage the cross-country movie-camp for teens NSI Movie Camp, co-ordinate the feature film development program NSI Features First, and program industry centre workshops for NSI FilmExchange.

Brendon is currently the program manager for NSI Features First and the program co-ordinator for NSI playWRITE.

Prior to joining NSI, Brendon spent five years as production and training coordinator for the Winnipeg Film Group where he oversaw the development and implementation of a number of training programs and workshops, coordinated production and development funds and juries, and coordinated production on dozens of short films. He also wrote, directed and produced four short films which have screened at festivals across North America.

Brendon is an experienced film and television producer, having produced Sean Garrity's award-winning film [Inertia](#) (Best Canadian First Feature, Toronto International Film Festival, 2001), Matthew Bissonnette's second feature film [Who Loves The Sun](#) and season one of [House Party](#), a half-hour sitcom for The Comedy Network.

WHO IS THE NSI FEATURES FIRST PROGRAM CONSULTANT?

Marguerite Pigott

Marguerite is Creative Development Group Lead for [Super Channel](#), Canada's only national pay television broadcaster. In addition to her work for Super Channel, Marguerite is also an independent consultant focusing on script development and project marketability. Recent clients include Alberta Filmworks, Amaze Film + TV, CBC, CTV, Screen Sirens and Slanted Wheel.

She has story edited many films including [Poor Boy's Game](#), [Walk All Over Me](#), [One Week](#) and [Luna: Spirit of the Whale](#), and she is accepted by Telefilm Canada as a market expert.

In 2006 and 2007 Marguerite was a programmer on the Canadian Feature Film selection committee for the Toronto International Film Festival.

Previously, Marguerite was Vice President of Development and Production for Odeon Films, an Alliance Atlantis Company where she oversaw the evaluation, selection, development and production of Canadian projects acquired for distribution.

She executive produced [Saint Ralph](#), [Fubar](#), [waydowntown](#), [Flower & Garnet](#) and others.

Marguerite has taught across Canada and been a guest speaker at Toronto International Film Festival, Vancouver International Film Festival, Atlantic Film Festival, the Canadian Film Centre, the National Screen Institute and sat on numerous juries. She sits on the board of directors for World Literacy of Canada and formerly for WIFT-T, and is on the advisory board of Reel Canada.

WHAT ARE THE EXACT DATES OF THE PROGRAM?

The formal program commences on December 1, 2010 and runs for approximately 10 months. Team members are expected to dedicate maximum efforts during that period and must make time available for the various professional development opportunities as well as the development and packaging work required on their projects.

WHAT STRINGS ARE THERE ON THE DEVELOPMENT MONEY?

NSI and the NSI Features First program investors will receive a tail credit on all copies of the film and prominent credit on all publicity materials related to the project.

Details of credit size, NSI Features First program investors, etc. will appear in the contract to be signed between participating teams and NSI.

WHAT RIGHTS DOES NSI HAVE ON THE PROJECT?

NSI and its sponsors will retain the right to exhibit (non-commercially) completed productions for promotion and will notify the producer of any such screening prior to its occurrence. NSI will have the right to screen completed productions in the same terms as other films selected by NSI programmers. NSI may also use productions' publicity materials and film clips to promote NSI Features First, and NSI.

WE HAVE FINANCING/DEALS LINED UP - HOW DOES THAT AFFECT OUR APPLICATION?

Any application that can demonstrate deals already made by the marketplace is clearly a viable project. However, all creative and financial controls must still remain with the applicant team (except for such approvals as are customary in the industry from distributors, financiers, investors, etc.). And while having some financing or distribution lined up helps the project's credibility, it doesn't guarantee that you will get selected for the program.

ARE INTERNATIONAL CO-PRODUCTIONS ELIGIBLE?

Yes, provided the project is being written and developed in Canada with a Canadian director attached (no foreign nationals may be part of the NSI Features First team.) Essentially, if a project plans to raise financing by co-producing with a production company in another country, the project will still be eligible for NSI Features First.

Co-production projects will be assessed based on the spirit of the program, which is to support the development of Canadian writers, directors and producers making their first or second feature film.

ARE INTER-PROVINCIAL CO-PRODUCTIONS ELIGIBLE?

Yes, a project which proposes to raise financing by co-producing with a production company in another province would be eligible for NSI Features First.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NSI AND THE SUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS?

All copyright in the project shall belong to the applicant. The relationship between the applicant and NSI shall not be deemed to constitute a partnership or joint venture. The applicant shall not have the right to incur any debts nor make any commitment of or on behalf of NSI.

CAN I SUBMIT MY APPLICATION BY FAX OR EMAIL?

No. All applications must be mailed, couriered or hand-delivered to the NSI office in Winnipeg.

WHERE DO I SEND MY APPLICATION?

Complete applications (forms and support materials) should be mailed/couriered to:

NSI Features First
National Screen Institute - Canada
Suite 400-141 Bannatyne Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 0R3

NSI must receive your application by **WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2010, 4:30 p.m. Central Time.**
No extensions.

I HAVE MORE QUESTIONS. WHO DO I CONTACT?

Email your question with *NSI Features First question* in the subject line to featuresfirst@nsi-canada.ca. Our NSI Features First Program Manager will answer your question and if you like, add you to our mailing list so you can keep up-to-date on NSI goings-on including NSI Features First.

NSI Features First is made possible by Presenting Sponsor Telefilm Canada; Program Partners The Brian Linehan Charitable Foundation and Canwest; Strategic Sponsor Corus Entertainment Inc.; and Service Sponsor William F. White International Inc.