

Application Instructions

Estimated reading time: 25 minutes

The AFS Grant is administered in two application cycles, one for feature films and one for short films. These instructions are for applying to the 2026 AFS Grant for Short Films.

The AFS Grant for Short Films is open to documentary, narrative, animation, and experimental film projects under 40 minutes in length and in any of the following stages of production: pre-production, production, or post-production.

The AFS Grant for Short Films deadline is **Thursday, August 27, 2026, 6 PM CT.**

AFS Grant deadlines are firm, and we do not grant extensions.

Applicants will be notified of their final application status by mid-December, and grant disbursements will be made shortly after.

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2026 AFS Grant for Short Films Partners



I. WHAT YOU CAN APPLY FOR

Filmmakers can submit one application per grant cycle. If eligible, applicants can apply for any of the following cash and in-kind awards in this 2026 AFS Grant for Short Films cycle. Please read carefully, as some grants have their own eligibility requirements.

AFS GRANT FOR SHORT FILMS — CASH GRANT

Filmmakers may apply for up to \$10,000 cash for **pre-production, production, or post-production** through the AFS Grant for Short Films. Total cash support from the AFS Grant will not exceed \$10,000. However, applicants can apply to receive in-kind awards in addition to the \$10,000 cash grant limit.

The following awards are in-kind awards for goods and services offered through the AFS Grant for Shorts Films (See [Glossary](#) for the definition of in-kind):

MPS CAMERA AND LIGHTING AWARD—IN-KIND AWARD

The MPS Camera and Lighting Award is granted to one filmmaker per application cycle in the form of a multi-day camera package rental from MPS Studios with a value of up to \$10,000. The award must be used by the awarded project and cannot be transferred or sold. Granting of the MPS Camera and Lighting Award is contingent upon the Grantee securing insurance that meets MPS' minimum specifications. Because these requirements reflect professional-set standards, the cost of coverage may be higher than basic liability insurance. Make sure to factor this possible cost into the amount of funding that you are requesting. Package rental is subject to availability and must be used within two years of receiving the award. MPS must be acknowledged in the film's credits.

TBD POST COLOR AND CONFORM —IN-KIND AWARD

The TBD Post Color and Conform Award will give its recipient a finishing package that includes a color session with one of their professional in-house colorists and a session to conform all final assets into festival deliverables, including a digital, unencrypted DCP. The award includes a final watchdown in a studio equipped with 5.1 theatrical sound in their Austin facility. The value of this package is \$12,000. One award will be granted in this cycle, and TBD Post must be acknowledged in the film's credits. Scheduling sessions will be dependent on TBD's production schedule. Please note that peak times at TBD Post are from November through March.

II. ELIGIBILITY

Please review all [eligibility requirements](#) before starting your application. Applications that do not meet eligibility criteria will not advance in the review process.

In order to be eligible to apply for an AFS Grant, you must meet eligibility requirements at the time of application. If selected to receive an AFS Grant, you may be asked to confirm your eligibility at the time of the offer.

Once you've created an account in Submittable, and before you can access the full application, you will be prompted to fill out an eligibility quiz to help ensure that you meet AFS Grant eligibility before applying.

III. APPLICANT RESPONSIBILITIES

All applicants are required to do the following after submitting their grant application:

- If you are awarded an AFS Grant, you are required to carry out a project consistent with the proposal submitted.
- If your project changes significantly from your proposal, you must immediately send AFS a written request to change the scope of your project before the expenditure of grant funds. Approval isn't guaranteed.

IV. APPLICATION PREPARATION

Applying for the grant is entirely an online process. Applications and all supporting materials must be submitted via an online portal at www.austinfilm.org/afs-grants-applications. Unless marked as optional, all parts of the application are required. Please refer to the application form instructions below for more information on the required materials. See our Tip Boxes for additional advice on the sections below.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact us at filmmakersupport@austinfilm.org. Keep in mind that as the application deadline draws closer, response times will be longer. We cannot guarantee that we will respond in time before the deadline. Please plan accordingly.

GENERAL APPLICATION TIPS:

- Start your application early. It's a lot to tackle in one go, and planning ahead will work in your favor. You are able to save and edit your application before submitting it, so you don't have to complete the entire application at once.
- We highly recommend composing your application materials in a word processing document before uploading or pasting them into the application fields. This way you have a backup of your application, and you can repurpose materials for future applications.
- Please note that word counts reflect a word maximum and not a word number requirement.
- Not sure what some of the terms in our application mean? Refer to our [glossary](#).
- Consistency is key to making a strong impression. Make sure that all of the various parts of your application work together to paint a clear picture of your film and your plan for bringing it to life.
- Don't be afraid to reiterate key points about your film throughout the application, as the reviewer needs to have a clear understanding of the entire film.

V. APPLICATION FORM INSTRUCTIONS

SECTION 1 - GENERAL INFORMATION

Fill out this section in its entirety. Here are a few things to note:

- Primary Applicants must meet all [eligibility requirements](#).
- To add information about co-directors, a second name field will appear once you answer "Yes" to "Are you applying with a co-director?"
- Upload one of the following acceptable forms of proof of Texas residency:
 - Utility bill, mortgage statement, or renter's insurance policy with your name and address, dated within the past six months.
 - An active (unexpired) Texas voter registration card with your name and address. (A screenshot from your county registrar's office, which includes these details, also suffices.)
 - Current student registration at a Texas college or university.

- Do **NOT** submit credit card or bank statements, passports, Texas driver's license, or any state-issued identification card, as they do not count as proof of residency. If you do not have one of the above-listed forms of proof of residency, but live in Texas, please email filmmakersupport@austinfilm.org.

SECTION 2 - PROJECT INFORMATION

- **Project Title:** Feel free to use a working title if you know the title will change.
- **Project Logline (50 words max):** See our [glossary](#) for more information.
- **Brief Project Summary (75 words max):** Write a brief project summary that best captures your project's intent. Think of what your logline can not capture.
- **Has the project received an AFS Grant in the past?** Check all that apply for this and previous projects.
- **Has either the director or co-director of this project received previous AFS funding for other projects?** Check all that apply for this and previous projects.
- **Project Website:** If a website exists for your film, please include it here. Social media accounts are also accepted.
- **Project Length:** Fill out a runtime for your film, even if it is an estimate or projection.
- **Format:** Please select whether your film is a narrative feature, documentary feature, animated narrative feature, animated documentary feature, or an experimental feature.
- **Current Project Stage:** Let us know what stage your project is in right now. You are not required to ask for funding for a specific stage; however, we only fund expenses tied to pre-production, production, and post-production. The AFS Grant for Short Films does not fund development or distribution.
- **Does the project have a producer or producers attached that are not also directing?** If you are directing and producing the proposed film, do not add your name in this field.

SECTION 3 - PROJECT ESSAYS AND ATTACHMENTS

A. PROJECT ESSAYS

Please complete each essay prompt with information about your project. We've included each prompt verbatim from the application, followed by instructions and guidelines. Please note that for this section, we're looking for essay-style paragraphs rather than bullet points or lists. Sparse bullet points or lists may deem your project as incomplete, and therefore ineligible.

PROJECT ESSAY AND ATTACHMENT TIPS:

- Check all word count limits before starting your essays. Keep in mind that these are word count limits, not word count requirements.
- Clarity and brevity are key. You want to keep your reviewer's attention as they read your materials.
- Have a friend or colleague read your answers so you can make sure you're being clear and concise.

- **Story / Content (200 words max)**

Please describe the content of your film, introducing key characters or subjects, essential story beats, and any major themes you are exploring. Make sure to state the format (documentary, narrative, experimental, animation), the genre, and the intended tone of the film.

- Tell your story in a clear and engaging way. Stick to the main points. You can expand on the full plot or story details in your Story Treatment.
- Introduce key characters or subjects and, using the active voice, describe what they're doing and why.
- Describe the obstacles your characters face, how they overcome them (or don't), and how everything ties into the themes, ideas, critiques, or issues that you're exploring.

- Don't be afraid to give away the ending. The reviewer needs to know the story that they're funding.

- **Artistic Approach (200 words max)**

Explain what inspired the film, why it should get made, and why you're the best person to direct it. Provide details about the stylistic approach you're taking. Share details about your visual goals and other artistic choices like (but not limited to) the following: pacing, sound design, and visual effects.

- Share your passion for this story and why you're the right person to make this project.
- Feel free to share personal connections or experiences to show the depth and authenticity of your proposal.
- Describe the cinematography, production design, sound design, and your creative approach so that the reviewer knows what the finished film will look and feel like. If you're making a documentary, what types of material are supporting the story? For example, do you plan to utilize vérité, talking heads, or archival material?
- When citing films that compare to your proposed film, emphasize your unique vision in order to avoid sounding derivative.

- **Production Status and Plan (200 words max)**

Where are you currently in the production process, and what do you still have ahead of you? Please provide any insight about your plans to bring your film to fruition.

- Let us know where you are currently in the process and how you plan to make it all happen. Are you about to start casting with the hopes of filming in the next two months? Are you 14 weeks into your post-production schedule but need a little more time with your documentary subject to finalize the ending of your story?
- Consider any resource limitations or specific needs. Let us know what or who you have access to.
- Cross-check your production plan to ensure consistency across your materials. For example, if you say that you will be traveling to Australia for six weeks, the cost of travel should appear in your budget, and trips should be listed in your Project Timeline.

- **Project Goals (200 words max)**

What are your goals for the completed film, and how will the funds help you reach

those goals? Discuss intended audience and distribution plans and why this is the best next project for you.

- What goals do you hope to accomplish through this film?
- How will the AFS Grant funds be used to move your project forward?
- Explain how this project will move your career and craft forward.
- Describe your film's audience and how you plan to reach them.
- Outline the distribution strategy you have in mind to accomplish your goals. Will you submit to film festivals, post your film online, or are you pursuing another creative route? What are your backup plans if the best-case scenarios don't work out?

- **Status Report(s) (200 words max)**

Required for past AFS Grant recipients only. Please provide an update on previously funded project(s).

- Explain any progress that you have made since receiving funding.
- Explain your anticipated timeline for films not yet in distribution.
- If your previously funded projects were completed, please let us know when and where they premiered and any screenings or distribution outlets to note.

B. PROJECT ATTACHMENTS

The materials below must be uploaded to your online application as PDFs. Individual PDF files can not exceed 10MB. Please use the following naming convention for each upload: **Project Name_Last Name_Attachment Name.pdf**.

- **Project Timeline (1 page max)**

Upload a project timeline above. It must not exceed 1 page.

- Outline the key stages of your production with the time allotted to each and anticipated dates. It's helpful to see these in a bulleted list.
- The timeline should cover the project from its development all the way through distribution, regardless of the stage of production that you are in.
- While specific dates aren't required, please include the month/year of key activities or events so reviewers can see what's been accomplished and what's to come.

- **Team Bios (1 page max)**

Upload bios for you and your key creative team. Must not exceed 1 page.

- Write up to 1 page detailing the bios of you and your key creative team.
- Make sure to include the team members' names, the title of their role on the project, and at least a paragraph about their experience.

- **Story Treatment (3 pages max)**

A story treatment is required for every project and must be included with your application. NOTE: We are not looking for visual treatments, lookbooks, or pitch decks in this section. You can include those in Section 6 "Optional Materials."

- The goal of the story treatment is to provide a detailed summary of a screenplay, documentary, or film project.
- Write a story treatment focusing entirely on the story and characters or subjects.
- Walk us through each scene as if we're watching the story unfold on screen.
- Still not sure what a story treatment is? Refer to the definition in our [glossary](#) for more details and see sample treatments provided in the [AFS Grants Application page](#).

SECTION 4 - AWARD REQUEST, FUNDING, AND BUDGET INFORMATION

A. CASH AWARDS

Use this section to state the amount of funding that you are requesting and to opt into specific cash awards if you are eligible for them.

- **Total Cash Request Amount:** Your AFS Grant cash request should not exceed \$10,000. Your total cash request should only include cash, not in-kind totals.
- **Briefly explain why you are requesting this amount (75 words max):** Be specific, but keep your responses short and concise.

B. IN-KIND AWARDS

Use this section to opt into any in-kind awards that fit your project's needs. You must request a cash award in order to be eligible for in-kind awards. (See [Section I. "What You Can Apply For"](#) for more information. See [Glossary](#) for the definition of in-kind.)

- **MPS Camera and Lighting Award:**

- Opt into this in-kind award to be considered for a multi-day camera package rental from MPS Studios with a value of up to \$10,000.
- Keep in mind that you will have to meet MPS' minimum insurance requirements, which may be higher than basic liability insurance. Make sure to factor this possible cost into the amount of funding that you are requesting.
- Package rental is subject to availability and must be used within two years of receiving the award.
- Briefly explain how you would use the MPS Camera and Lighting Award. **(50 words max)**

- **TBD Post Color and Conform Award:**

- Opt in to this in-kind award if you are applying for post-production and want to be considered for a finishing package that includes a color session to conform all final assets into festival deliverables, including a digital, unencrypted DCP.
- Scheduling sessions will be dependent on TBD's production schedule. Please note that peak times at TBD Post are from November through March.
- Briefly explain how you would use the TBD Post Color and Conform Award. **(50 words max)**

C. BUDGET INFORMATION

- **Budget Total** - Fill this in after completing your Detailed Budget. **Do not include In-Kind costs in your total.**
- **Total Cash Secured and Anticipated** - Fill this in after completing your Funding Sources list below. **Do not include in-kind goods or services in your total.**
- **Funding Sources** - List funding sources and amounts of cash, noting which amounts have been secured or are anticipated to be secured from each source.
 - Example:
 - Crowdfunding - \$5,000 - Secured
 - Producer contributions - \$3,000 - Secured

- Personal contribution - \$5,000 - Secured
- Other individual contributions - \$10,000 - Anticipated
- AFS Grant for Short Films - \$10,000 - Anticipated
- Fundraising Events - \$10,000 - Anticipated
- **In-Kind Support** - Describe the in-kind support that your project is receiving in case additional context needs to be given for either donated labor or expenses in the attached budget. See [Glossary](#) for the definition of in-kind.
 - Example:
 - Our location budget may seem on the low end, and that is because our Producer has access to a bakery owned by their family. They are allowing us to use it at no cost since they are only open from 5 AM-12 PM. Additionally, our camera person owns their own camera equipment, and they are giving us a discounted rate on the rental. We have also received a generous post-production grant from The Make Believe Pitch Competition that will cover our sound mix.
- **Detailed Budget** - Upload a detailed budget using either your own format or our template here: [AFS Blank Detailed Budget Form](#). It must not exceed 3 pages. Please check your PDF for legibility before uploading.
 - Provide a detailed budget that includes line items for all phases of production: pre-production, production, and post-production, regardless of what stage you're in.
 - You may use an existing budget sheet or download our template from our website. Not all line items in our template will be relevant to your production, so feel free to omit the unnecessary ones.
 - Export a PDF and ensure your export is legible and appropriately scaled onto the page. Please make sure that your columns or rows are not cut off across various pages.

BUDGET TIPS

- While there are no hard budget limits, we are looking to fund projects where the AFS Grant will make a meaningful impact, so be sure to show us where you need support.
- Complete your "Detailed Budget" first so that your cash request is backed up by numbers you've calculated for your entire film, from pre-production through distribution.
- Complete your "Detailed Budget" first so that your cash request is backed up by numbers you've calculated for your entire film, from pre-production through distribution.
- Make sure that your detailed budget reflects the proposal that you've laid out in your other materials. For example, if you describe a cinematic vision with a lot of Steadicam moves, but the budget has none of that priced out, the project's execution might seem unrealistic.
- Keep your rates reasonable and aligned with the scale of your overall budget. For example, if your budget total is \$10,000, it would not make sense to list full union rates in your budget.
- Not sure what to pay your crew? Research by asking people for their rates, searching online, and consulting with indie producers.
- Double-check your math and balance your budget.

SECTION 5 - VIDEO SAMPLES

A. REQUIRED VIDEO SAMPLE (6 minutes max)

Your Required Video Sample is the most important part of your application, so think strategically about how you will curate it, based on the instructions below. Please allow ample time for your upload to process and for the re-exporting of files that may be over the size limit.

- **Technical Requirements** - The Required Video Sample is uploaded directly into the online application form and must satisfy the following requirements:
 - Have a total runtime of 6 minutes or less.
 - Be uploaded as an H.264 .mp4 in 1080p resolution that is no larger than 400MB.
 - Samples can consist of different scenes or clips, but you must submit one continuous video piece. Feel free to use brief title cards between segments or separate clips by fading to black.

- **What to Include in Your Required Video Sample** - Your Required Video Sample should include at least **two consecutive minutes** of one of the following types of **scenes**:
 - **If you've already shot the proposed film**, submit **scene(s)** from the film you're requesting funding for.
 - If you've already shot your film, or even some of it, reviewers will expect to see scenes from the film for which you are requesting funds.
 - Ideally, you will be able to submit a polished scene to give reviewers a good sense of what your project will be like, but rough scenes are acceptable if you're in an early stage of editing.
 - **If you haven't shot the proposed film**, submit **scene(s)** from previous work directed by the applicant.
 - Include scenes from previous work that showcase how you direct.
 - Put your best work forward here. Do not save it for the optional sample.

If you do not submit one of the two types of materials above, you are not eligible to apply to the AFS Grant for Short Films.

- **What not to Include in your Required Video Sample** - Please do not submit any of the following as your Required Video Sample, as they do not effectively demonstrate how you direct a film.
 - **Submitting either of the following video samples as the Required Video Sample may result in your application being deemed ineligible for review:**
 - Pitch videos or crowdfunding videos.
 - AI-assisted or AI-generated proof-of-concept videos for projects in which the final product will not be created in the same way. Note that any AI use in video samples must be disclosed; see instructions in Required Video Sample Description below.
 - Director's reels, mood reels, sizzles, and trailers.

- Live performances or stage plays

- **Required Video Sample Description**

Give context to what you are showing and how it connects with the project for which you're applying for funding.

- Briefly ground the viewer in what they are watching.
- Explain the connection to the proposed project. This will help reviewers see where you're coming from and where you're going. If the proposed project is noticeably different from previous films, take some time to explain how your vision will carry over to this new material or what you're trying to do differently this time.
- Indicate anything that is incomplete about the sample (e.g. rough cut, unmixed sound levels, temporary music, temporary voiceovers, or uncleared music — whatever the disclaimers may be).
- Any generative AI use in samples must be disclosed in the sample description.

REQUIRED VIDEO SAMPLE TIPS

- Choose scenes and clips that highlight your directing skills and that align with your project's style and themes. Do not randomly select the first 6 minutes of your film, unless that is your strongest work.
- Do not save your best work for the Optional Video Sample.
- Select scenes that demonstrate continuity in your filmmaking voice and growth in your craft.
- Some of the most successful video samples have included 1-3 strategically selected scenes as the Required Video Sample and either a rough or fine cut of a film in its entirety as their Optional Video Sample. NOTE: Reviewers are not required to watch optional samples in their entirety.

B. OPTIONAL VIDEO SAMPLE (no time limit)

You may submit one link to an optional video sample in the field below. This sample does not have a time limit and can include multiple samples, including a complete film directed by the applicant and/or other footage that will support the application.

NOTE: Reviewers are not required to view the Optional Video Sample in its entirety.

- **Technical Guidelines**

- The Optional Video Sample is submitted as a link in the application form.

- Downloadable links are recommended for additional work samples where possible.
 - This sample does not have a time limit.
 - If your optional video sample includes multiple samples, please be sure they are edited in one timeline, as you may only include one link.
 - Do not submit links that require a username to log in.
 - Keep your link active until January 2027. AFS will not reach out to repair inactive links.
 - You may password protect the film and include the password below. Make sure the password stays the same until January 2027. AFS will not reach out for a new password.
- **Recommendations of What to Include in Your Optional Video Sample**
Your Optional Video Sample should also support your project's goals. Below is an outline of what you can include, listed in AFS's order of preference, starting with the highest priority.
 - **If you have shot the proposed film and have a cut of it**, submit **a rough, fine, or completed cut of the film** that you're requesting funding for.
 - **If you *haven't* shot your film but have other completed films that you've directed**, submit **a rough, fine, or completed cut of previous work** directed by the applicant.
 - **Additional ideas:**
 - Submit more selected clips from previous work that are not already in the Required Video Sample, and that will support your application.
 - Submit previous work from other key members of the production team not already showcased in the Required Video Sample and that will support your application.
 - Any other footage that you feel will support the materials provided in the application and that could supplement the Required Video Sample.
 - This is where you are welcome to share trailers, teasers, or pitch videos.

- **OPTIONAL VIDEO SAMPLE DESCRIPTION**

Give context to what you are showing and how it connects with the project for which you're applying for funding.

- Briefly let the reviewer know what they are watching.
- Indicate anything that is incomplete about the sample (e.g. rough cut, unmixed sound levels, temporary music, temporary voiceovers, or uncleared music — whatever the disclaimers may be).
- If the sample showcases another crew member's work instead of your own, let us know whose work it is and include a description of the project.
- Any generative AI use in samples must be disclosed in the sample description.

SECTION 6 - OPTIONAL ATTACHMENTS

The materials below are optional to submit. They must be uploaded to your online application as PDFs. Reviewers are not required to view your optional materials in their entirety. **Individual PDF files cannot exceed 10MB.** Please use the following naming convention for each upload: **Project Name_Last Name_Attachment Name.pdf.**

- **Additional Support Materials (3 pages max)**

Upload up to 5 pages of additional materials like (but not limited to) storyboards, news articles, or other production materials.

- You may submit reviews, articles, storyboards, or images that help put your project in a favorable light.
- All materials must be uploaded to the online application as a single PDF.
- The next module allows you to submit pitch decks or lookbooks, but if you do not have one and you have not shot your film yet, we encourage you to use some or all of these pages to visually communicate the look and feel of your film.
- Documents that exceed the page length will not be looked at in their entirety.

- **Pitch Deck or Lookbook (10 pages max)**

Upload either a pitch deck or a lookbook that is up to 10 pages in length. The uploaded document may be up to 20MB in size.

- If you have not shot your film yet, we highly encourage you to upload either a lookbook or a pitch deck so that reviewers get a better idea of what you hope to bring to the screen. See our glossary for how we define pitch decks and lookbooks.
 - If you are submitting a pitch deck, it should have a lookbook or a previsualization component that communicates the look and feel of your project.
 - Documents that exceed the page length will not be looked at in their entirety.
- **Script (no page limit)**
Scripts are not required, but we encourage you to upload a draft if a) one already exists and b) the proposed film has not been shot and submitted to us. There is no page limit. If your film has already been shot and you've submitted a cut, do not submit a script.
 - For narrative projects, submitting a script in addition to the treatment is optional.
 - This is not a screenplay competition, and early drafts are fine. You can indicate any rewrites you plan to do in your “Production Status and Plan” essay or “Project Timeline” attachment.

SECTION 7 - SUBMITTING YOUR APPLICATION

You'll receive a confirmation email from us once you submit your online application and supporting materials. If you do not receive a confirmation email within an hour after submitting, it is possible that we did not receive your application OR that your email preferences need to be adjusted. We advise checking your spam folder first. If it's not there, contact our team at filmmakersupport@austinfilm.org.

QUESTIONS?

Questions regarding the application will be answered during regular business hours, Monday–Friday, 10 AM–6 PM, via email at filmmakersupport@austinfilm.org. We do not respond to phone calls. If you'd like to speak with us by phone, please send an email request with the best number to reach you and the times that you are available, and we will try to accommodate the call.

As we get closer to the deadline, response times will be longer. We cannot guarantee that we will respond before the deadline. Please plan accordingly.

AFS Grant deadlines are firm, and we do not grant deadline waivers or extensions.

Applicants will be notified about their status by mid-December. AFS Grant award announcements will be posted on our website shortly after. Applicants whose projects are not selected for a grant may request written feedback on their application by filling out the Feedback Request Form included in their declination letter.

See a full list of previous recipients and other funding opportunities [here](#).

GOOD LUCK!