

A woman with grey hair, wearing a patterned short-sleeved shirt, a long white skirt, and a long necklace, is walking on a paved surface. To her right is a large, silver, diamond-shaped reflector mounted on a black tripod. In the background, there is a concrete ledge with various items including a yellow bag, a water bottle, and a black bag. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting an outdoor setting.

CREATIVE MALTA

MPA/MEIA RECOMMENDATIONS 2024

A woman with her hair tied back, wearing a plaid shirt and a lanyard with the ARRI logo, is focused on adjusting a professional camera rig. The rig is mounted on a tripod and includes a large lens, a microphone, and various cables. The background shows a studio environment with a tiled wall and a framed document.

BUILDING A THRIVING AND VIBRANT SCREEN SECTOR TOGETHER

This document is a joint effort between the Malta Producers' Association (MPA) and the Malta Entertainment Industry and Arts Association (MEIA) in consultation with their respective members.

These recommendations aim to ensure that public funds are utilised effectively, fostering an environment where domestic screen production can thrive and contribute significantly to Malta's cultural and economic landscape.

Together, we propose several recommendations for Creative Malta. While not exhaustive, they highlight some of the most pressing issues Maltese screen practitioners face today and suggest a variety of long-term goals that would facilitate the effective delivery of the fund.

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FINANCIAL INTERVENTIONS AND INCENTIVES

For producers to take advantage of emerging opportunities, the fund must consider the characteristics of the global market and formulate an appropriate strategy that can have the greatest impact. This section demonstrates how the right financial incentives can encourage growth in our sector. Arts Council Malta has the potential to create the right incentives for local screen production, which would put local producers on a level playing field with their foreign counterparts.

GBER

After extensive lobbying from both organisations, Malta's audio visual support schemes now comply with the EU's state aid regulations.

Malta's alignment with the EU's General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER) on state aid for the audio visual sector marks a significant step in ensuring that support schemes are in harmony with EU rules. This compliance ensures that state aid does not distort competition and trade within the EU, adhering to the principles that govern the internal market. The GBER allows for specific categories of aid deemed to fulfil the objectives of common interest without the need for prior notification to the Commission.

For Malta, this means that its audio visual support schemes can operate more smoothly and with greater certainty, fostering cultural and creative projects that contribute to the diversity and richness of the European cultural space.

Maintaining this compliance is crucial for the continued growth and development of Malta's vibrant audio visual industry, which ben-



efits from the clear framework that EU rules provide. This regulatory environment encourages investment and innovation.

Moreover, retaining the film fund under GBER lends towards the sustainability of Maltese film companies, which would be severely undermined if the fund starts to fall, once again, under the deminimis regulations. Should this latter occur, it would indicate a significant step backwards for the local industry due to the capping of 200,000 euros over three years, which would curb the potential of audiovisual production companies to raise money through alternative sources, including through inward investment by means of international coproduction agreements.

RECOUPMENT CLAUSE

A recoupment clause, which traditionally requires profits from funded films to be re-invested in upcoming projects, had been a topic of debate in the Maltese film industry until recently. In 2022, the removal of this clause by the Malta Film Commission for the Creative Malta calls was seen by the industry as a positive step towards fostering the growth of local screen production.

The Maltese domestic industry is still in its infancy and, therefore, recoupment at this stage in the evolution of the sector would stifle any potential for growth. The elimination of the recoupment requirement allows for more financial freedom and flexibility for filmmakers, potentially leading to an increase in creative output and investment in the industry.

This aligns with the efforts of Arts Council Malta to promote and support the local film community. The impact of such policy adjustments could contribute to the economic vitality of the Maltese film sector and enhance its competitiveness on an international scale.

FUND INCREASE

A commitment to increase the budget for domestic screen production to €2 million was outlined in the electoral manifesto of the Labour Party (PL) in 2022. This reflected a commitment to bolstering the local film industry.

While the promised €2 million has not been fully realised, we acknowledge that the government has made strides in supporting the domestic sector. However, for the industry to evolve further, further investment is necessary. A further proactive step would be to make €2 million available by 2025, with the possibility of raising this amount further down the line on the evaluation of the fund's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Further investment could lead to more diverse content creation, talent development, and international co-production opportunities. This increase could significantly contribute to the sustainability and expansion of Malta's film industry.

MINORITY CO-PRODUCTION

Collaboration with other nations is essential for screen production in today's market. Therefore, local companies should be allowed to apply for funds to promote national and transnational partnerships through co-production.

Eligible projects can be filmed either in Malta or outside of Malta, with the incorporation of Maltese cast and crew members. Co-production financing should also be available for post-production services, and Maltese companies should be granted minority co-production status.



The concept of minority co-production is widely used in the European film industry. The goal is to focus on filmmakers from diverse regions and bring their unique stories to a global audience.

Minority co-production funding not only encourages European producers to invest in high-quality projects originating from partner nations but also promotes cultural diversity and strengthens the creative and economic ties between Europe and filmmakers from around the world.

SKILLS AND CONNECTIONS

The EUR 200,000 funding available for the development of audiovisual talent through Arts Council Malta represents a significant opportunity for the cultural sector, particularly in enhancing professional skills and creating valuable connections within the industry.

This investment aligns with the council's strategic focus on nurturing creative potential and supporting continuous professional development, as outlined in their Training and Development Support Scheme. Such initiatives not only bolster individual artistic careers but also contribute to the cultural capital of Malta, fostering a vibrant and sustainable creative ecosystem.

Moreover, the emphasis on training and networking is crucial for the adaptation and growth of the arts in response to the evolving demands of the global cultural landscape.

COLLABORATION AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The establishment of a cohesive National Film Policy through collaboration between the Malta Film Commission and Arts Council is essential for the unification of screen production efforts. Currently, the division of responsibilities between different ministries and entities leads to a fragmented approach, which can hinder the growth and development of the audio visual sector.

A unified policy would streamline processes, foster better resource allocation, and enhance Malta's attractiveness as a filming destination. It would also support the creative vision of local filmmakers by providing a more structured and supportive environment. Therefore, it is imperative for these bodies to work together to overcome the challenges posed by the current system and to harness the full potential of Malta's film industry.



LEGAL STATUS

The MPA and the MIEA had requested the integration of Creative Malta, formerly known as Screen Malta, into the Malta Film Commission ACT through a legal notice; this would be a strategic move that would underscore the importance of the creative industries in Malta.

We believe that the fund's status should still be formalized within the framework of an official ACT, as it not only ensures that there is legal certainty and regulation but also legitimizes the domestic creative output as a significant cultural and economic asset. This step is crucial for the development of the sector, providing a structured and recognised foundation for its growth and sustainability. It reflects a commitment to nurturing and promoting the cultural heritage and creative future of Malta on both a national and international stage.



DEFINITION OF 'DIFFICULT FILM'

The ACM's approach to defining what constitutes a 'difficult audiovisual production' should align with the definition given by other European film funding bodies. A "difficult film or production" typically refers to projects that may not have broad commercial appeal and, therefore, face challenges in securing funding.

These can include short films, documentaries, low-budget films, low-budget long-form series, and works by emerging filmmakers. The European Union leaves the precise definition of what constitutes a difficult film to the discretion of individual Member States, allowing them to set national parameters that reflect their unique cultural and cinematic landscapes. This categorisation is crucial as it often qualifies such films for specific funding support aimed at preserving cultural diversity and fostering new talent within the European film industry.

This approach ensures that a wide variety of voices and stories can reach audiences, enriching the cultural tapestry of European cinema.

ANNUAL REPORTS

The implementation of State Aid for film and other audiovisual works is a significant step in supporting the creative industries. However, the effectiveness of such measures can only be fully understood through regular and thorough evaluation.

A biennial assessment, as suggested, would provide valuable insights into the impact of State Aid on the film industry. This process should indeed be transparent, involving a panel of experts and extensive consultation with key industry players and stakeholders.

The findings should be made accessible to the public to ensure accountability and to foster an environment of continuous improvement within the sector. Such evaluations are crucial for informing policy decisions and for the strategic development of the film industry, ultimately contributing to its sustainability and growth.



OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES

The Arts Council Malta is an essential entity that supports and promotes various artistic expressions and cultural sectors' growth in Malta. The council will now be the primary source of support for those looking to produce domestic screen content.

The following section highlights how ACM can integrate domestic screen production into its scope and create a favourable environment for the thriving Maltese screen industry.

BUDGET FORMAT

Creating a budget for screen production requires a meticulous process that ensures every financial detail aligns with the specific project's requirements. The acceptable formats for budget application forms vary, but they often include detailed spreadsheets or specialized software - principally, Movie Magic Budgeting - designed to handle the complex calculations and categorisations needed in film production.

For instance, using spreadsheet programs like Google Sheets or Microsoft Excel can be beneficial for smaller productions, while larger projects might require dedicated film budgeting software to manage union-specific requirements and detailed account tracking (such as Movie Magic). It's essential to choose a format that not only adheres to the production's needs but also facilitates a clear understanding of the budget for all stakeholders involved.

PAYMENT METHODS

In the film production industry, efficient and reliable payment methods are crucial for maintaining smooth operations and strong business relationships. While cheques are used as a form of payment by ACM, their usage has declined due to the efficiency and security offered by electronic methods like bank transfers.

These electronic payments ensure immediate and verifiable transactions, which is essential in an industry where cash flow management is critical. Adhering to payment timeframes is equally important; it demonstrates professionalism and respect for contractual obligations.

Film production companies often operate on strict schedules, and delayed payments can disrupt the entire production process. Therefore, clear communication about payment schedules, typically outlined in the production contract, is vital. This not only helps in managing the budget effectively but also in maintaining trust among all parties involved, from cast and crew to vendors and investors.

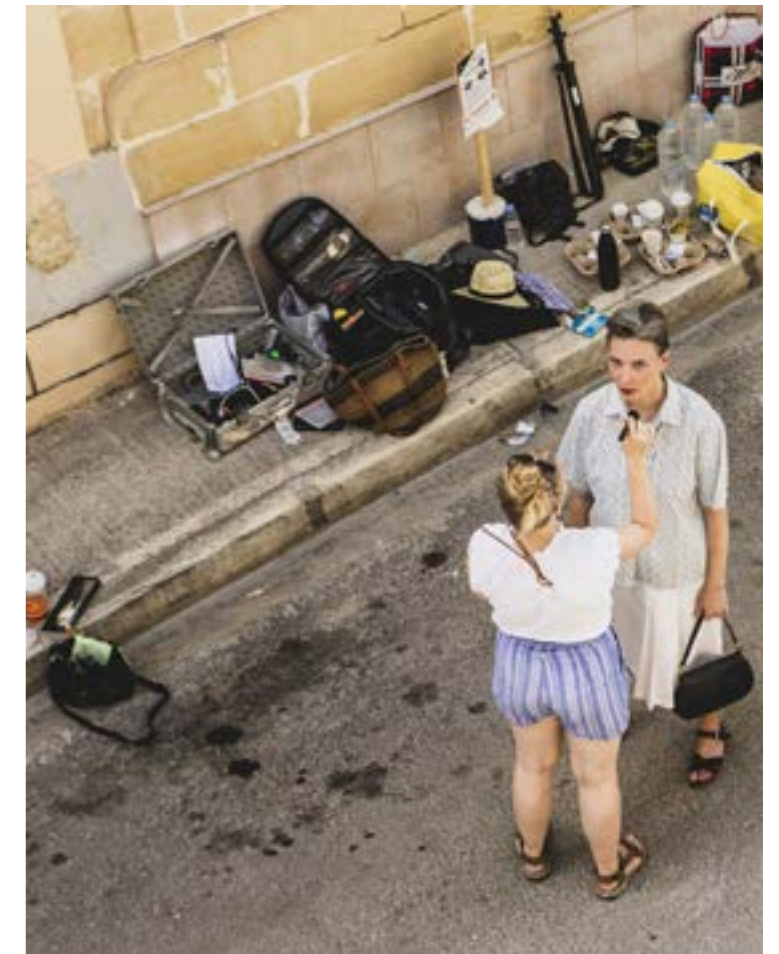


PERCENTAGE DIVISIONS

The timing of funding disbursements in production projects is a critical factor that can significantly impact cash flow and the overall financial health of a project. It's not uncommon for producers to experience delays in receiving funds, which can create challenges in maintaining the momentum of the project and ensuring that all contributors are compensated in a timely manner.

A more strategic approach to the timeline for deliverables and disbursements could alleviate these issues. For instance, an initial reimbursement of 80% could provide the necessary capital to support the production process, while the remaining 20% upon finalization would ensure that the project is completed to satisfaction before full payment is issued.

This structure not only aids in better financial planning but also instils a sense of security among the workforce, knowing that their efforts will be rewarded without undue delay. Careful consideration and potential restructuring of funding timelines could lead to more efficient production cycles and a healthier industry overall.



EVALUATION PANEL

The establishment of an independent international assessment panel for the selective granting of funds is a commendable approach to ensure fairness and diversity in the selection process. By engaging external experts with a wealth of experience in the screen industries, the panel can provide a well-rounded evaluation of projects.

The emphasis on first-hand experience in creating both long and short form independent films, coupled with a deep understanding of the international market, sets a high standard for candidate selection. Moreover, the requirement for each evaluator to bring a unique area of expertise aligns with the diverse nature of projects that the fund aims to support.

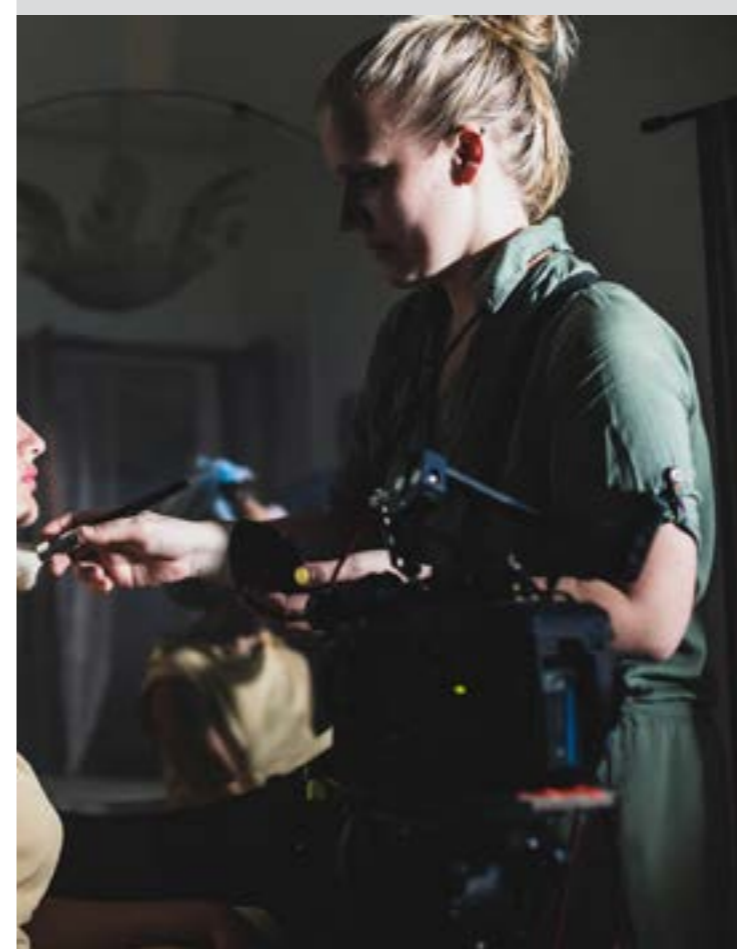
Regularly revising the panel every three years fosters a dynamic and up-to-date assessment process, reflecting the ever-evolving trends and needs of the screen industries. This structured yet flexible framework ensures that the fund supports projects with the potential to make a significant impact in the field.



PROJECT CHANGES AND EVALUATION

Incorporating flexibility within contract clauses is essential for the dynamic nature of project management. Beneficiaries often require the ability to make minor adjustments to projects to accommodate unforeseen circumstances or to optimise outcomes. Therefore, clauses that permit non-substantial changes without a formal amendment process can be beneficial.

However, for significant modifications that could alter the scope or outcome of the project, a structured appeal process for final decisions ensures that all stakeholders have a voice in the change management process. This balanced approach respects the original contract terms while allowing for necessary evolution and adaptation of the project.



FUNDING STREAMS



In the realm of content creation, funding streams are vital for nurturing diverse projects across various formats.

Traditional content, such as feature length films—be it narrative, animated, documentary, or hybrid forms—requires substantial support for screenwriting, project development, and production.



Similarly, digital content, including scripted episodic dramas and factual series, benefits from grants that facilitate not only creation but also skills development and promotion.

Short films, often seen as a stepping stone for emerging talent, also need financial backing for co-production and distribution. A comprehensive support structure that encompasses these different streams ensures a rich and varied cultural output, fostering creativity and innovation in the industry.

WRITER'S GRANT



In the realm of film production, Documentary Features and Narrative Features are increasingly being recognized for their unique contributions to cinema. As such, it's becoming common practice for to be eligible for similar funding opportunities.

When producers apply for financial support, it's advisable to request a comprehensive treatment that outlines the vision, structure, and content of the proposed documentary. This document should provide a clear picture of the project's intent, its narrative arc, and how it plans to engage with its subject matter.

A shooting script, which is a detailed blueprint for production, may not be necessary at this stage unless the project's nature specifically requires one. This approach allows funding bodies to assess the potential of a documentary feature based on its conceptual merits rather than its readiness for immediate production.

DOCUMENTARY



The Writer's Grant should be designed to support the creative process of writing. It should also prioritise collaborations with script editors. This approach recognises the critical role that script editors play in refining and enhancing a writer's work.

Our proposal for a separate fund, named The Workshop Fund, is a strategic move to ensure that professionals have access to dedicated resources. Those who apply can receive up to €10,000, which they can use towards attending a recognised workshop.

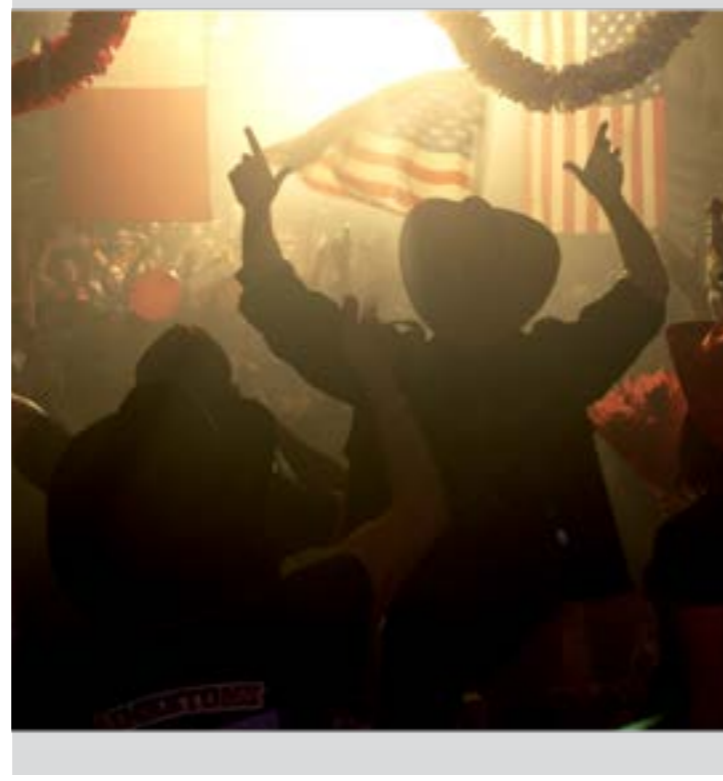
This funding is contingent upon the project being selected for a workshop within a two-year period. If not utilised, the funds are recycled, enabling the ACM to organise local workshops, thereby fostering a vibrant literary community within Malta.

This structured funding approach not only streamlines the allocation of resources but also encourages continuous professional development among writers and editors.



The timeline for documentary production can indeed be highly variable, often due to the nature of the subject matter and the availability of key interviews or footage. It's crucial to maintain flexibility and adaptability in both the project's schedule and budget to accommodate these changes.

EPISODIC/ LONG FORM



The animation industry has indeed faced challenges with funding, which has impacted the quality and relevance of local output thus far. Improvements in the guidelines for animation can open new avenues for animators to create content that resonates with current market demands.

ANIMATION



In the rapidly evolving landscape of media production, episodic and long-form series are indeed becoming increasingly popular on a global scale. The demand from digital platforms has highlighted the need for a structured development process that can nurture the creation of high-quality content.

To facilitate this, a two-stage development approach is beneficial. In the first stage, the focus would be on crafting a series mini bible, writing a complete pilot screenplay, and producing a pitch video. This foundational work sets the tone and direction for the series.

The second stage involves the creation of detailed episode outlines, a comprehensive series bible, and the completion of the screenplay for the second episode. This methodical approach allows for a deeper exploration of characters and plot, ensuring a robust framework for the series to thrive and resonate with audiences worldwide.



FUTURE VISION AND INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Establishing a five-year strategic plan for Creative Malta can significantly impact the domestic screen industry. For short films, the goal could be to nurture emerging talent by funding a diverse range of projects that push creative boundaries. In feature films, the focus might be on supporting scripts that have strong potential for international success, thereby boosting the local industry's global presence.

Television objectives could include investing in original series that reflect cultural identity and can attract global streaming platforms. Lastly, scholarships are crucial for sustaining innovation and excellence; they should aim to provide opportunities for underrepresented voices and foster new skills in cutting-edge areas of filmmaking, such as virtual reality or interactive storytelling. Each of these goals not only supports artistic endeavours but also contributes to the economic vitality of the film and television sectors.

COLLABORATION WITH PBS AND INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS

Collaboration between the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and industry associations has proven to be a strategic approach to bolster domestic screen production in other countries, especially low-capacity countries like Malta. Such partnerships are essential in an era where streaming video-on-demand services are reshaping the media landscape. By pooling resources and expertise, public broadcasters can co-produce content that resonates with both local and inter-

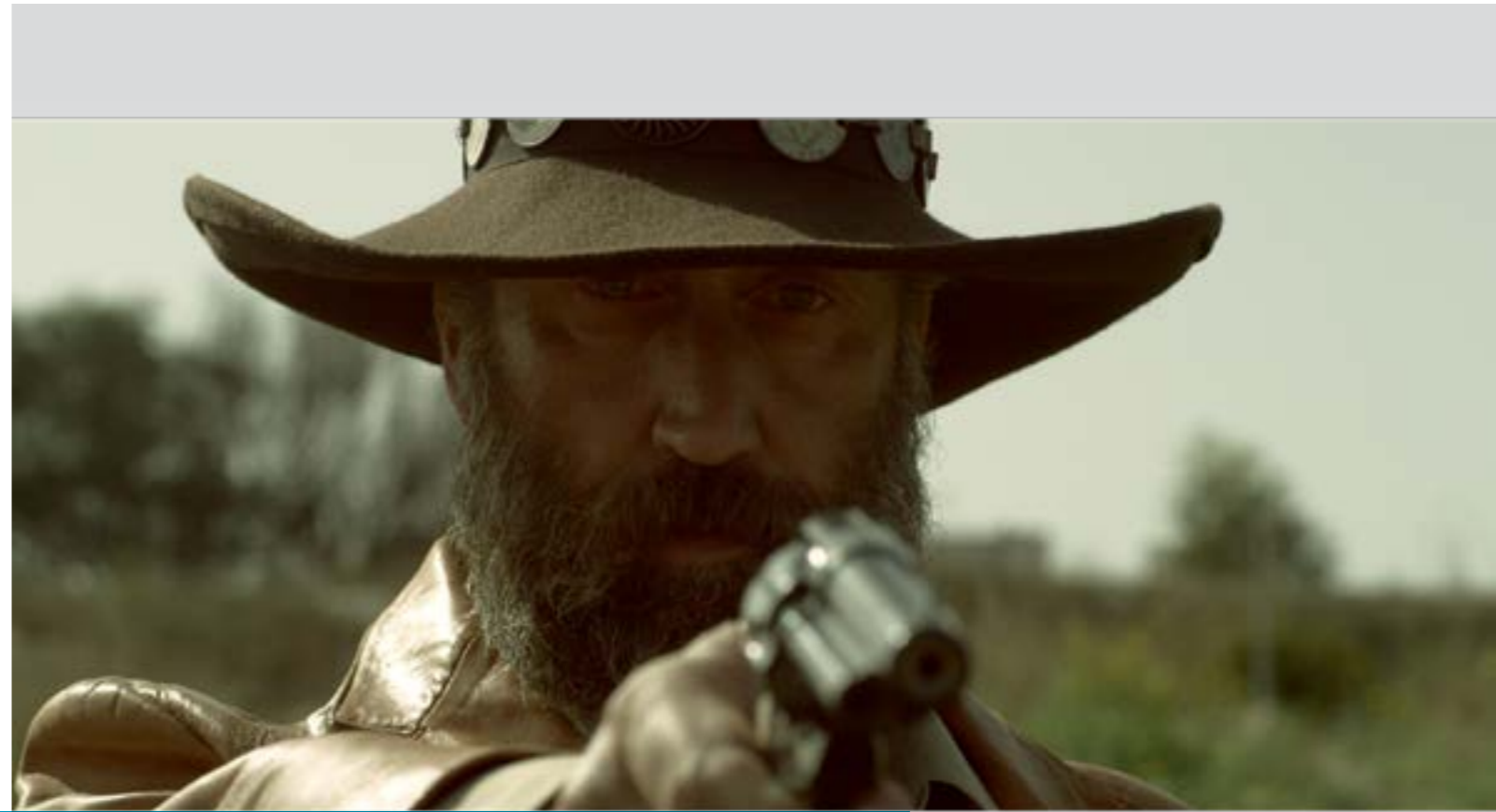


national audiences, ensuring the survival and relevance of public media. Alliances in other countries have set a precedent for successful co-productions that appeal to a broad audience. Furthermore, there has been a global trend for public broadcasters uniting with other funding bodies or relevant organizations to amplify their public service missions and invest in their creative industries. These initiatives not only support the domestic screen industry but also promote national culture, showcasing the power of collaboration in the face of global media giants.

CONSULTATION AND TRAINING

Engagement with industry stakeholders and continuous professional development are crucial for the Arts Council Malta to remain abreast of the rapidly evolving international screen production landscape. Regular consultations can provide valuable insights into the current trends, challenges, and opportunities within the film and audio visual sectors.

This proactive approach fosters a collaborative environment and ensures that the policies and initiatives implemented reflect the industry's needs. Moreover, investing in professional development programs can in turn equip local talent with the necessary skills and knowledge to compete on an international stage, thereby enhancing Malta's audiovisual output.



ACTION ITEMS

- Develop a detailed breakdown of funds and establish a minority coproduction fund.
- Clarify recoupment clauses and streamline the Arts Scholarship fund.
- Define 'difficult film' and set clear timelines for documentaries.
- Standardize budget application formats and payment methods.
- Establish clear criteria and procedures for fund distribution.
- Define evaluation panel composition and roles.
- Set goals for short films, feature films, television, and industry development.
- Collaborate with PBS and industry associations for knowledge exchange.
- Implement reimbursement procedures and ensure continuity in project evaluation.
- Schedule regular consultations and training sessions with stakeholders.