

Documentary Lab – FAQ

Frequently asked questions about Firelight Media’s Documentary Lab. This document will be updated as needed. [Last updated 03-26-24 11:25am ET]

[The Documentary Lab](#) is Firelight Media’s longest-running program. This 18-month fellowship is designed to nurture underrepresented non-fiction storytellers working on their first or second feature film. The Documentary Lab provides holistic support for the fellows’ projects and careers through professional development retreats, customized mentorship, and a \$25K project grant. Throughout the Lab, filmmakers build a network within the documentary ecosystem, connecting with the fellows and alumni, as well as forging industry relationships across the field.

More than just a workshop, the Documentary Lab is unrivaled in its representation of diverse filmmakers, creating a network of talented, unique storytellers that receive ongoing support from a project’s conception to its completion. Over the last decade, the Documentary Lab grew from a mentorship program to a robust artist development initiative that has supported over 100 emerging filmmakers and granted over \$600k toward productions and distribution.

1. WHEN IS THE APPLICATION OPEN CALL?

- a. The Documentary Lab application will open on Monday, April 1, 2024 and closes at 11:59pm (ET) on Monday, May 13, 2024.

2. WHERE CAN I FIND THE APPLICATION?

- a. During an open call, the Documentary Lab application link may be found on the [Firelight Media website](#) and on our Submittable page. The application will only be accessible during the open call dates.

3. WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO APPLY?

- a. The Documentary Lab eligibility requirements are as follows:
 - i. Only the director of the film is eligible to apply and enter the program. We can accept co-directors if they meet all eligibility requirements. If you're applying with your co-director, please indicate that in your application. We cannot accept more than 2 directors per project.
 - ii. Filmmaker must be from an underrepresented community and reside in the United States or U.S. territories (Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, U.S. Samoa, Guam/Northern Mariana Islands).
 - iii. The project must be a long-form/feature-length documentary; the Lab does not accept short documentaries, series, or fiction projects of any kind.
 - iv. Film must be a work-in-progress. We accept films from early production through production or post-production. We do not accept films in pre-production or completed films.
 - v. Filmmaker must be an emerging documentary filmmaker (working on their first or second feature-length documentary).
- b. Filmmakers are not eligible to receive support through one or any of Firelight Media's artist programs if:
 - i. The filmmaker is applying with a project that is a student film or related to ongoing coursework.
 - ii. The filmmaker is re-applying to a program they previously received support from.
 - iii. The filmmaker is contracted with another Firelight Media artist program and has not completed the final deliverables by the time they are selected for this program.

- iv. The filmmaker is employed by Firelight Media or PBS as an officer, full-time employee, or is a member of the board of directors.
- v. The filmmaker does not hold the majority of the intellectual property of the film.

4. CAN I APPLY WITH A CO-DIRECTOR?

- a. Yes, you may apply with a co-director as long as both directors meet our eligibility criteria. In the application, it's good to also delineate your roles and discuss the creative partnership.

5. WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER FEATURE-LENGTH?

- a. Firelight Media's definition of a feature-length film is in alignment with the industry standard, which is 40 minutes or longer. Usually, Documentary Lab films end up being from a broadcast hour to 90 minutes in length.

6. WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER EARLY PRODUCTION?

- a. Generally, early production is when you have finished research and development to some extent, have envisioned where you'd like the story of the film to lead, and have your characters secured. Because our application requires a work sample, you need to have already started production/filming. It's good to give us some context if you have limited footage so we understand your plan to get back on track with production.

7. DO I HAVE TO HAVE FUNDING ALREADY IN PLACE IN ORDER TO BE ELIGIBLE OR HAVE A COMPETITIVE APPLICATION?

- a. No, you do not need to already have funding in place, but it's good for us to know your fundraising strategy and that you've

done your work thinking about where else you'll be looking to apply for funds.

8. DO YOU WANT US TO NAME THE SPECIFIC GRANTS WE PLAN TO APPLY TO IN THE APPLICATION?

- a. Yes, you should summarize fundraising strategies, especially if you have pending grant applications that have already been submitted or that you plan to submit.

9. COULD YOU EXPAND ON THE "MOTIVATION TO APPLY" SECTION OF THE APPLICATION? WHAT KINDS OF INFORMATION WOULD BE HELPFUL HERE?

- a. This is a critical portion of the application. We hope to glean information about why you want to be in the Documentary Lab Fellowship, why you want to be a part of the Firelight Media community, and what you hope to accomplish over the 18 months. What challenges would be addressed by being in the Documentary Lab and Firelight community? This includes not only what you hope to get out of the program but also what you hope to give back to the community as an alumni of the Documentary Lab.

10. DOES THE 10-MINUTE MINIMUM WORK SAMPLE NEED TO BE ONE 10-MINUTE LONG SEQUENCE, OR CAN IT BE SEVERAL SHORT SEQUENCES ADDING UP TO 10 - 30 MINUTES?

- a. The work sample does not need to be one long sequence. The work sample length and format may depend on where you are in the production or post-production process. Longer work samples (around 30 minutes) tend to be submitted by those further along in the process and working on their rough cuts.

11. WOULD FIRELIGHT MEDIA HAVE SHARED COPYRIGHT OVER THE FILM CREATED?

- a. Documentary Lab fellows would need to credit Firelight Media with a logo placed among the other funders and a credit, but in no way would Firelight Media be sharing the copyright with the filmmaker of the project. All of our fellows retain copyright and all editorial control over their films.

12. HOW MANY FELLOWS WILL BE CHOSEN?

- a. The Documentary Lab usually selects around 12 projects to participate in the program. Of those 12 projects, roughly two are directed by a pair of co-directors.

13. WHAT IS THE REVIEW AND NOTIFICATION TIMELINE?

- a. The review and notification timeline is as follows:
 - i. Application review period - May-August 2024
 - ii. Panel review - August 2024
 - iii. Finalist Interviews - September 2024
 - iv. Final Notifications - October 2024

14. WHEN DOES THE FELLOWSHIP PERIOD START?

- a. The 18-month Documentary Lab program begins in late October.

15. WHAT ARE THE TIME REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DOCUMENTARY LAB FELLOWSHIP?

- a. The 18-month Documentary Lab fellowship requires that fellows attend three retreats (spring 2025, summer/fall 2024, and winter 2026). Retreat dates will likely be provided to applicants at the finalist stage.