

SPADA Masterclass Series Podcast

Three Cs of TV (Transcript)

Nau mai haere mai - Welcome to the Podcast Edition of the SPADA Masterclass Series. In this episode "The Three Cs of TV" we have a range of perspectives from the world of television, including Producer Julian Arahanga of Awa Films, Commissioners Kay Ellmers from RNZ and Tony Manson from TVNZ, Writers Agent and ED of the NZ Writers Guild, Alice Shearman, and Amie Mills from NZ On Air. Join the panel as they discuss how to approach producing stories for TV with host, Producer and former Commissioner, Irene Gardiner.

00:00:01:12 - 00:00:28:07

Irene Gardiner

Kia ora everyone, nau mai, haere mai, welcome to creativity, clarity and courtesy - a beginner's guide to platform and funder liaison. Also known as the three CS. This is a SPADA Masterclass for new and emerging television producers. So if it's not what you were expecting, you can leave now you can walk out of your room. I won't even know that you've gone unlike a live event.

The format for the session is that I'll do a kind of a formal address talk speechy bit, to break up my voice a bit, though, I will be joined by a group of special guest stars and then we'll do a panel discussion, and then we will answer your questions at the end.

So before I get going, I would like to introduce my panel from the world of commissioning. I have Kay Ellmers from RNZ, welcome Kay

00:01:00:03 - 00:01:00:05

Kay Ellmers

Kia ora koutou.

00:01:00:05 - 00:01:07:18

Irene Gardiner

And we've got Tony Manson, who is now ex TVNZ commissioning. Welcome, Tony.

00:01:08:13 - 00:01:16:01

Tony Manson

Thank you, Irene, Kia ora. Um, ex sounds so severe. But yes, yes, we've separated.

00:01:16:11 - 00:01:17:11

Irene Gardiner

How many years?

00:01:17:20 - 00:01:25:18

Tony Manson

After 16 years, I went there thinking I'll be there for a couple to learn what it was like on the other side of the desk? And then that happens.

00:01:26:11 - 00:01:39:22

Irene Gardiner

Well, and like myself, Kay and Tony have worked on both sides of the fence, which I think is helpful for tonight. And in fact, I think Tony, you will be doing some freelance executive producing in your new life. So you're kind of a double perspective on what we're talking about tonight?

00:01:40:16 - 00:01:46:08

Irene Gardiner

Also from the producing world, we have Julian Arahanga from Awa films, kia ora Julian.

00:01:47:00 - 00:01:47:18

Julian Arahanga

Kia ora koutou.

00:01:48:12 - 00:02:04:09

Irene Gardiner

And who have I left out? The wonderful Alice Shearman from the Writers Guild Executive Director of Writers Guild. Hello, Alice.

Alice Shearman

Kia ora koutou.

Irene Gardiner

And we also have the most excellent Amy Mill's, head of funding at NZ on Air.

Amy Mills

Tena koutou katoa.

00:02:05:00 - 00:02:20:23

Irene Gardiner

Thank you, Amy. So that's the team that we will be hearing from as we go. In case you don't know who I am, I'm Irene Gardner. I am a long time television producer. I have been a head of commissioning at TVNZ, so I know that world. I'm on the SPADA board and I'm also on the RNZ board. And yes, so I come from both disciplines, which is good for the discussion that we're doing tonight. So let's get going, getting started. So you've got a great idea for a screen project and you want to make it happen.

If you're already working at a production company, you can talk to a development executive or producer there, and they will help shepherd you through the commissioning and funding process. But if you don't have that framework around you, this masterclass is to help you on your way.

First of all, think really deeply about your idea. Can you easily tell people what it is in a simple sentence? That's a good clue that it's something you'll be able to sell to others. If you can't express it in a simple sentence and think some more about your idea, see if you can focus it a little more clearly. What is the main story and what other side stories and issues? Also, think about the various platforms and funding options available at the moment and

where your idea might fit into this. Who is your audience? Who wants or needs to see this program?

Then write a simple one page on your idea. The main idea and then how the story will move out from that main idea. Who are the key characters if it is scripted and who are the key interviewees? If it is unscripted, what form is it going to take? Is it a one off or series? What number and duration of episodes writing this will really help you to focus your mind on what your idea is and what its real essence is. Depending on how experienced you are, you may now want to enlist some help, either by taking your idea to a production company or to an experienced freelance executive producer. Some of the big, reputable production companies in Auckland include Greenstone, Screentime, South Pacific, Imagination, Great Southern and Warners. If you want a production company that specialises in Māori content, Pango are great, as are Tiki Lounge for Pacific content. Top Shelf and Gibsons are Wellington, Whitebait are in Christchurch, and they specialise in children's content. In Dunedin there's natural history in New Zealand. It's lots of others. Look, some of these companies up online. See what you think. What might be a fit for you? Ask around. Likewise, if you want to work on your own. But with the support of an executive producer. Ask around about who might suit you and your project. Come to SPADA. If you need some advice, we can help point you in the right direction.

00:05:18:21 - 00:05:33:17

Irene Gardiner

If you decide to work with a freelancer, you will need to pay them. So ask about this and what their rights are early in the piece. A lot of Eps will give you the first bit of advice for free to get you started, and some won't charge you till your project gets through the development process and into production. But you can't bank on it, so be clear what the expectation is. And again, SPADA can guide you on fair rates. Working with an experienced DP can be a good path for developing producer, it's like a mentorship role and you may feel more autonomous and less sort of swallowed up by a big production company.

A good EP will support you to do the producer role yourself, but within there is your security blanket and constant source of advice. On the other hand, if you think you might prefer the might of a big production company behind you, perhaps one with international connections. This can also be an appealing and good option. At this stage, where you're seeking help from an executive producer or production company, you still only need that simple one or two pager on your idea. Don't do screeds of work at this early stage as it could end up being wasted.

00:06:27:17 - 00:06:41:23

Irene Gardiner

A production company or EP, will be able to tell you if they think you've got a chance of getting your idea to happen and then guide you on your way. Everyone has the great passion project of their life, and I don't want to tell you that's a bad thing. But generally speaking, it pays not to get too wedded to any one idea in the early stages. We work in a very tough industry, and you may well get told early in the piece that your idea has little chance of happening. Don't be put off by that. Let it go for now and try other ideas. A time might still come for the original idea, and don't be frightened of sharing your idea with a production company or executive producer. In my experience of the New Zealand production

community, people are not sitting around, sitting around, just waiting to steal your ideas. You do need a level of trust. There's always a risk that someone might do the wrong thing by you, but it's actually unlikely. And it's generally better not to be too suspicious and controlling of your idea at the outset, as it may put people off working with you.

00:07:31:08 - 00:07:44:17

Irene Gardiner

Be aware that there's a lot of natural synchronicity around. When I was working as a commissioner, it always amazed me how often the same idea came in from different producers at same time. It does help to understand that this can happen. It's frustrating, but sometimes someone just happens to have a similar idea to you at the same time, and they get the knowledge before you do. If you're working with the production company and your idea does become a reality, you can work out your rights at that stage.

00:07:59:22 - 00:08:14:09

Irene Gardiner

What role are you taking on the production? Are you just expecting to be paid for that role or do you want a share of any profits? There are screen industry lawyers and others who can help you with this side of things to make sure you get a fair deal.

Now that's a lot of my voice. I'm going to bring Alice in now, Alice Shearman, executive director of the Writers Guild. My background is more in factual, particularly documentaries, and what I've been saying so far has focused a little on it.

Whereas Alice can talk to us more about what writers should do with a scripted idea or a drama or comedy idea, which is just a slightly different path than what I've been talking about. Factual shows. Over to you, Alice.

00:08:41:02 - 00:08:58:20

Alice Shearman

Thanks Irene. Yeah, absolutely. So from a writer's perspective, they often don't deal directly with the funders that need a producer to help them create the show, especially if we're talking about television. Unless you're looking at a web series. The writers don't generally interact directly with the funders.

So what I'll talk to you about is about establishing the writer and producer relationship that once the writer has this slate and written materials, I have PDFs on both of those two things of how you can do it, and our lovely SPADA team will send it out to you if you'd like it, so email them.

It's onto the fun part how a writer approaches a producer. So Google is your friend. If I see one more person asking on Facebook for a thing and it's on the Google, we might have some problems. So do a Google search for producers and production companies that are making the type of work that best fits your work as a writer. Funding rounds are really good. Place to start, so look at the established companies who are receiving funding. The producers and the producers that are receiving funding from New Zealand and Film Commission make a list and start approaching.

Now this is where I introduce a method that I've developed over the centuries. I'm very old. It's remarkably simple and it works. It really does. Honestly, I've been doing this for a while. It's called the approach to approach, so it's as simple as the writer asking a producer how they would like to be approached and how they would like to receive the writer's materials.

Generally, it's first by email. I don't recommend social media as a first approach. Mostly because most producers and production companies actually have someone who manage their social media pages for them, and they might just bounce you. But it also can be inadvertently rude, especially to more experienced producers who operate via phone and email to in professional spaces. Communication styles are changing, though some producers do accept face contact via social platforms. But you still need to be prepared to use email and make phone calls. This is how we work in our sector. That's not going to change anytime soon.

Things to include in your first approach, email to a producer, as a writer, the types of work that you make and then to ask if that producer is interested in meeting you or at the very least, reading any of your materials. It can take up to six months for some producers to respond to face contact, and a gentle nudge at the most points can be acceptable, but not after 24 hours. And don't be unkind about a non-response. You don't know what that producers working on or if they're even available to accept new materials at that stage.

But as my nanna would say, God loves to tryer (Bible). Perseverance is the key to success in our industry. You've talked about that already, Irene, it truly is. If I had money for the amount of people who had more perseverance than talent. I would be a millionaire. So you need to keep letting the industry know that you're out. There was a writer knocking on doors, tapping on windows and saying hello.

So there are two pathways that follow that approach to approach. The first is rejection, and you'll get that a lot. It could be a non-response. The producers isn't accepting the material, they just don't vibe with your work. And then the second pathway is positive, will produce the response that works and your working relationship is formed.

00:12:07:17 - 00:12:30:02

Alice Shearman

And it's a wonderful thing. This is where we get to hashtag working relationship goals. So honestly, it's as simple as clear, concise and kind communication. Start by ensuring that the writer and the producer are making the same project, being in a good working relationship means that you can have robust conversations together. You can talk about rights, creative direction, funding decisions, roles and responsibilities and the expansion of the creative team because that will happen. And if anything starts feeling off in your #workingrelationship goals. Talk about it straight away and stay professional.

Don't sub tweet. Don't Facebook post. Don't shit talk. Just think of my face, if you start writing that post, she told me not to. Don't do it. In my role and Sandy will agree with this. I've seen the worst of the worst. And while low-key shin kicking is great for weeknight soap operas, it's no fun to actually live through in reality. And I want you to create fabulous long term working relationships. Look around at the creative partnerships that have been

successful and have stood the test of time. You can see them on the Film Commission and New Zealand on your websites, proving that solid creative relationships get the cash.

So here's some key questions for you informing your great creative teams first. Are you making the same project for each person to retell the story?

Is it the same story? That actually works the narrative for documentary as well as scripted. Are you looking at the best type of funding or opportunities for your projects? Don't be applying to EDF if you're making a web series.

00:13:55:24 - 00:14:20:16

Alice Shearman

Can you be open and have frank discussions about you need any element of the project? And finally, are you being kind and are you being fair? Very important. So once it's established, the writer and producer working together positively for the greater good, the rights and any rights assignments need to be established in writing on paper and signed. Writers Guild members can speak to us, and SPADA members can speak to SPADA for starters. And I think that's enough for me. So over to you, Irene.

00:14:30:11 - 00:14:51:10

Irene Gardiner

Thank you, Alice. It was absolutely brilliant and it almost Alice's area almost goes off into another workshop, and she's actually got some really good written material, which we will add to my notes on the SPADA web site. So to get back into the flow of things we've basically been talking about, you've got a great idea. Who do you work with? Executive producer, production company and as Alice outlined, a little bit different, if you were a writer, the next step is getting a network or platform. OK, so who are you working with? You've got your two pager polished and really clearly explaining what your project is.

As I've said, that's a really important document. Make sure it absolutely captures the program you're wanting to make. So, yeah, you might now be working with a Production company, you might be being guided by freelance EP. You might be on your own. Now you need a platform.

Have a think about which platform your idea suits best and try them first and then work out from there? They used to be an informal industry etiquette that you tried one platform at a time and waited for no before you tried the next one. But this has changed a bit in the more platform online age, so you may want to submit to more than one at once. Or maybe start with the two most likely and then try a few others at, but to make sure you personalize your pitch document. Don't send something with three's name on TVNZ, and you would be surprised how often it happens.

Get to know the platform and its audience as best you can before you pitch. Look at the TV guides to help with this. If it's a TV network and you can't watch everything, if it's an online platform, have a good look at the current content and you get a sense from that of what sort of thing they're doing. This will help you then refine the idea and the treatment.

If you can say this will work beautifully for the fair go audience once they've finished watching Pippa and Hayden on a Monday evening, then you're sort of halfway there. When

it's time to send you two pager off to your desired platform. Make sure you find out who the commissioning executive is first. For the bigger TV networks, you should find it online. Otherwise, ask around comes SPADA, and we'll point you in the right direction. If all else fails, find the company concerned and ask them. TVNZ has a team of specialist commissioners.

Smaller, smaller platforms usually just have one or two people in those roles. TVNZ and Māori television have a central proposals at blablabla email address you can use, but it doesn't still know your specific commissioner and copy the admin to check out the TVNZ and Māori television website, since a bit more info on that.

And again, don't invest too much of your time on this initial two page proposal, as you may get a no at this early stage. It, just as I've said before, it just needs to really clearly explain what your idea is and also make sure your email cover note is very clear and very courteous is quite an art to writing a good email, and it is important.

If you get a positive response, you can then supply a more detailed proposal and budget as requested and be guided by what your platform is asking of you. Don't make your proposal any longer than it needs to be just the key information about content, style, key personnel budgets. Network executives are truly very, very busy people, and they won't thank you for hours of extra reading work while you take pages and pages to get to the point. And don't expect to have endless meetings with commissioners and don't feel you need to pitch in person, that actually doesn't happen all that much these days. If the commissioner wants to meet and talk with you, they'll ask. And the same rules apply. Be clear and concise. Be courteous. Don't waste people's time. But also, be excited about your idea, your belief and your enthusiasm will really shine through.

00:19:07:01 - 00:19:24:19

Irene Gardiner

Once you've submitted your idea. Keep track of it and it's progress through the system, but don't over nag as Alice said. Not 24 hours later, a busy network executive won't thank you for emailing or phoning them every day to check things on it, but do check in from time to time to keep things alive. Don't just send and then forget about it.

Your platform commissioner is your client, your customer, and as the old saying goes, the customer is always right because yes, in all your dealings with them, they don't have to take your project down and they don't have to help you. Most of our commissioners here in New Zealand actually are very helpful, but make things as easy for them as you can. Keep all your communication clear and courteous. Make your proposals as focused and clear as you possibly can.

People need to be able to see what the show is about just by reading the first few sentences. Do a fair budget for your proposal, don't ask for more than you need, but don't cut so tight that you won't be able to make the show on budget. You may get pushback from platforms on your budget, and that's fine. There's some give and take, but if you're getting dangerously low, have the confidence to say no. Please do not financially ruin yourself to make a TV show, it's not worth it.

00:20:31:09 - 00:20:43:06

Irene Gardiner

Time for another little break from my voice. I think I'm going to bring in my commissioners. Kay from RNZ and Tony, longtime TVNZ. Tony, what makes a great two pager?

00:20:43:17 - 00:21:01:20

Tony Manson

They come in all shapes and often you don't even get a two pager. You get a line or two. And but a great two pager is a two pager that's usually got the two liner, which really jumps out and grabs your attention and doesn't have a lot of explanation.

And often it helps. If you can say it's a story like something, or it's it's, you know, it's a genre blend of some sort, so that helps position for a commissioner. And it also helps if you've got talent attached. So you can see in the instant you look at it that it's got these people attached to it. You've got exclusive access to something and you understand what the story is as opposed to just the general subject area.

So I think you've got as you said earlier, it's going to be a bit more focused than just just a subject area. Like the one I hate as the the road trip pitch 'we're going to go on the road with these people and it'll be great'. You'd be surprised how often you get there and that could be fun. But it's I'm thinking I'm coming from the prime time television aspect. So so that environment of commercial television. The road trip doesn't quite do it.

So yeah, but while I've got the floor. I'd like to say it's never been, and I think everyone would agree, a better time with so many platforms, so many commissioning options to get your new story on screen. I can't think of a better time because it can go anywhere.

00:22:33:11 - 00:22:54:00

Tony Manson

There's so many options for you. The spin off, the stuff and TVNZ OnDemand so many. And you can publish it yourself on YouTube, so or on social media. So there's so many opportunities for you, and ideas that wouldn't have been made for or founded in the past can be funded now.

And I'm thinking of a couple of recent things that I was involved with Educators and Who Killed Lucy the poodle. Neither of those ideas, what I worked for prime time commercial television. They weren't big enough. They're a bit dangerous and they suited a different platform. So as you said earlier Irene, it's a lot about getting the platform right. And Kent Briggs came in with the idea for Who Killed Lucy the poodle, and he's not a producer, so that's kind of important to talk about. He pitched that through one or two pager and then went with us, and he brought in Orlando Stewart, who was a known producer and someone who I'd worked with in the past. So immediately that gives a network reassurance that the show can be delivered and developed.

So, um yeah. And I like to say it's not just about the two pager and the idea from a network point of view you're looking at how can it be funded and financed and is the idea right for a particular slot. And audience, and then the third thing you're looking at really is, can it be produced? A lot of good ideas can't be produced in our industry and our environment with our resources, and can it be produced on time and on budget?

So from a commissioning point of view, you're looking at all those things and trying to sort of line them all up. It's like having several slices of Swiss cheese and trying to get all the holes to line up to get the idea through. So, yeah.

00:24:44:24 - 00:25:02:13

Irene Gardiner

Thank you, Tony. Will expand on some of those things in our discussion, I think. Yeah. And I'd just like to bring in Kay now. Kay what what are the sort of I mean, I don't want to make it negative, but what are the helpful things and the less helpful things that people do?

What drives you slightly crazy when you're working as a commissioner, you've been on both sides of the fence?

00:25:07:03 - 00:25:20:20

Kay Ellmers

Yeah, yeah. Thanks. Thanks, Irene. And just supporting you most, you know everything that Tony said and and adding on to that, yeah, I think one, one thing, I'll get on to some things that drive me crazy, but don't throw straight to me being negative Irene. You know, this is that one of the things I'd suggest to show that you're aware of what else is out there? It's amazing. Well, this is maybe it isn't a thing that drives me crazy, that people will come and have no idea that there's actually been three things very similar already made in the last, however long. So research, research, what else is out there that might be in a similar line and then explain why yours is different?

And if that is the case, I grab about having some reference projects is helpful. And for me, it's quite important early on if it's a time sensitive project, bring that up early on as to why this needs to be looked at right now if it's not locked to particular events or not, because that can help bring you up the pile. If you want this time sensitive, you know you'll look at it a lot quicker, more quickly.

And I guess there's also two main things, certainly from the way that we would operate, and we're very new to commissioning at RNZ. It's very new process, but you'll see this on other platforms as well. It's quite different with your with your approach and an RFP, which has gone out that's asking for quite specific content and if so, address how it is that your project actually since that RFP and will make those kind. And if if you're not responding to a particular thing, then you need to articulate who is the audience, what's it for, what type of content, how you, you know, are you suggesting that there's quite a distinction there?

Tony mentioned having talent attached, and that's very true. I guess one of the things I've seen is amazing how many times people promise access they don't have. So, you know, not saying that all of your access to all of your relevant talent necessarily is sort of the two page pitch. That might be the point of that. You need to go into the next development stage. You might want to find out that there's even a notion of an interest in your idea and then establish you've got it. But be clear early on, do you have that access yet or not, or is that something that you still need to get? Because I do find that does drive me crazy when they're promising, they've got this person that fits the next person. And then, as it turns out, they

might have been quite central to it. And it turns out I didn't actually have access to those particular people.

00:27:45:18 - 00:27:57:15

Kay Ellmers

Um, over promising. Partly sits within that same line as the access or things like totally unrealistic pitches is annoying when you straight away can see through that is just no way for the budget that's being suggested that that could possibly happen.

And a biggie for me is, who's making that and then having the right team for the right project. So evidencing why when you talk about that key personnel, why, why that team and the right people to be telling that story that might be about access, that might be of just about cultural competency to be telling that project all sorts of things. And it was quite helpful to say, why is your team the right team for that particular thing. And being oblivious to the landscape, and to me is probably what is quite frustrating, and it is a very dynamic landscape and it's difficult and there are a lot of platforms.

And one thing that I had about that particular day, from our perspective, is we're much more frequently also now saying we've got multiple platforms involved on the same project. So, you know, we're having a big advance, as you say, who you approach based and who's going to be primary and who might be up to come on a secondary. And those things do need to be thought about quite early on. And so, yeah, and then just all what you said Irene.

00:29:12:12 - 00:29:32:24

Tony Manson

Can I chime in here for a moment? Just just want to circle back on what Irene mentioned about the synchronicity of ideas and how quite often we will get, commissioners will get a number of ideas that are quite similar and is often that match of talent and capacity is what I think about the people who can deliberate coming together and a good example for people as if they now have the series Casketreers. At TVNZ, we're pitched a number of funeral home, a funeral director stories of stocks over the years, and I can't speak to this directly because it was pitched into my colleague at the time, Kath Graham, but when it came in with Francis Tipen attached who is a natural born entertainer, and that extra cultural layer that was offered through the Māori and Pasifika perspective for their funerals. Suddenly, it was something that had to be done and it stood out. So it had a real reason to be other than here's another one about funeral directors. So it's about having one that's about what it comes with. And I'd also like to point out, don't be discouraged if your idea gets turned down because networks and platforms turned down a lot of really good ideas. It's just the ideas are not right for them or there's not a way of finding the funding right now. So yeah, you might need to shop around, as Irene has suggested.

00:30:42:10 - 00:31:02:04

Irene Gardiner

It's a really important point and I'll actually come to a bit more of that later on. I shall continue on and we'll come back to Kay and Tony when we hit the panel session. We have a secret person on the station tonight, which is the wonderful Ness from SPADA who is helping us, and she just messaged me saying, 'You're rustling your paper on the microphone' so apologies if I have been rustling my paper on the microphone. I also had incredibly noisy

roadworks, which some of you may be hearing up the road, but I'm hoping we're not hearing it now.

Platforms do sometimes fund commercially appealing TV ideas from their own pockets. Don't forget that, or with the support of corporate sponsors. Historically, TVNZ indeed has actually done quite a lot of that, and Three has funded some of its own shows too. This may reduce a little now with the strain COVID 19 has put on network advertising revenue, but it's still a possible avenue for funding of your project if it's something very broad appeal, very commercial in nature. But if your project is something with more of a public good focus that meets NZOA and Te Mangai Pāho's criteria, you will now be at the step of the process where you need to seek the funding. Continue your courtesy and clarity through the funding process.

NZOA and TMP have online submission processes in effect, like a portal on their website where you input your proposals electronically. Get familiar with these in advance of deadline day. Make sure you are registered. Make sure you have everything ready and prepared that you need to submit. NZOA and TMP staff are also generally very helpful people, but don't overburden them with silly questions that you can find out yourself by looking around online or asking others.

You can find the dates for NZOA and TMP rounds on their website, but it's also important to remember that platforms have their own pitching deadlines, so you may think you have plenty of time to the NZOA or TMP deadline, but in fact, the network may have decided which proposals it is backing well in advance of it. That information is also on. The deadlines is usually available either on their website or you can just email and ask the commissioner in advance of each funding round.

If a project doesn't get funding, you can ask why, but do that in a positive and polite and constructive way, and you'll likely get a positive and polite and constructive reply. Get abusive and you won't. It's really old fashioned advice, and I've said it over and over again, but it is amazing where please and thank you will get you. As Tony was just saying, if you do end up getting a no for your project and you might in New Zealand because it's tough here. Be gracious and understand just how tough it is to actually get an idea to happen. Here in New Zealand, we have a small population, tight budgets, high demand on funding. So many great ideas never see the light of day. And don't assume your idea is no good just because it didn't get through, or that the broadcasters and funders as crazy and lost their minds. It might just not be your idea's time. Put it away for a while.

See how you feel about it. six months later might be worth trying again. And at this point, I think we should hear from someone who knows all about funding from NZ on air, head of funding at NZOA. Amy Mills, come in Amy.

00:34:33:07 - 00:34:47:12

Amy Mills

Thank you Irene. And thank you to Ness and Irene for organizing this discussion. I think it's brilliant and I'm very grateful that we can be a part, and I love that we're kind of going down right into the heart of the basics because I still furiously take notes when we sit in on stations like this because I feel like I learn as we go. So thank you for that. And I thought actually the

points made by Kay and Tony and Irene, you mentioned this as well, that that piece around research is a really good one. And I feel like if you are interested in trying to access NZOA funding, one of the best places to start if we're really new to you. And actually, even if we're not, is to go to the watch and listen page of our website.

It's updated weekly with all the new releases of the content that gets funded, and it's sort of beautifully organized in terms of genres and sort of belts of content, whether that's drama or current affairs or fresh new content that's come out. And I feel like that is a really, really good shortcut to fast understanding the breadth and the kinds of content that NZOA funds and you kind of understand as well.

And I think to that point you made earlier, I about finding if you are an emerging producer and you want to try and find a production company that you feel an affinity with, finding the content first and then working backwards from me is actually probably a really great. And it's a lovely experience to get to watch all of the amazing local content. So that's a really useful starting point. And then beyond that, the website has an enormous amount of resources on it. It's sometimes a little bit difficult to navigate. We're always at the other end of the phone if people need to sort of have a human talk them through.

But if you do go to pages like you land on it, it's got all the funding dates up top. It's got resources for producers once you've funded. And there's even kind of content that talks you through the funding process, like, have you read the New Zealand Media Fund strategy, which is the kind of underpinning documents for NZOA, there's all that kind of stuff, so I'd really highly recommend everyone if you're not familiar with it, that's a very useful place to start.

And there's five funding rounds a year, we're actually looking to explore whether we might essentially go down to four funding rounds a year and we are just in conversation with the sector around that, but again, to Irene's point, I I do think that's almost one of the very basic tenets, as well as look at the date and then contact the platforms or production companies you're interested in as far as possible, out from that deadline date as you can.

I know some of the networks sometimes work two months that, if not longer, to pull together a slate of what they're going to submit. They're very strategic about how many projects they'll bring to New Zealand on air. So you're really going to be in early while they're making those decisions their side.

I think talking to you about the platforms as well, we try and do a job at NZOA we're in kind of constant conversation with the platforms and the networks to try and talk about the upcoming rounds even before we publish the guidelines. So what types of content we're likely to be looking for that the level of funding we might allocate so that that sort of helps us if we could do that top piece and talk to the platforms and then the platforms themselves and the networks can then talk to the producers. That's quite a helpful kind of waterfall approach. So that's always a good thing as well to touch base with the platforms and ask them what information they have and the latest conversations they've had.

The other thing I would direct people towards just quickly is there's nine investment principles at NZOA that are the kind of foundational criteria that we look at as we're assessing all the applications in the round. I've sent Ness and Irene the link to that to share

on if you're not familiar with those but key ones that you'll see when you have a look at them that we talk about things like value for money. So the note about having a really good production manager on board, helping you with budgets. So that's clear when we're assessing, we're looking at comparable projects, how much should they cost? Why might this one be different? So we do dove into that level of detail the no duplication ones huge, so really do your research to case point - see what else is in the same lane and be clear about why you're different or not. Because when there's so little putea and funding to go around, we're really clear about saying it's so similar to something else is being funded we simply can't prioritize. It might be brilliant, but we just can't. And we do look at capability. So in terms of will this be likely to be delivered? The beauty is often the platforms and the networks have done a lot of the searching for us before it comes to us, but not always. So we are looking. If you're an emerging talent, we're looking at how much money you're trying to access. We're looking at who's around you as a wraparound to ensure that they'd be delivering with it. And then the only other thing I'll add before I head back to you, Irene, would be to say that in terms of what NZOA is looking to achieve, I think it's very helpful to look at pieces of research we do every year, like the diversity report. If you, and that's on our website, being able to see where NZOA has identified gaps for us in terms of audiences, we're both funding, but also we're reflecting on screen.

I think if you can identify those issues and come to us with proposals that address some of the challenges we're trying to face. There's always going to rise to the top as well. So that's probably a good piece of research to look into as well.

00:39:42:07 - 00:39:56:20

Irene Gardiner

Thank you, Amy, that was brilliant. I feel like I'm putting all of my wise guest stars off too soon, but we will be coming to the panel discussion soon. I just have one last piece of text from myself. Obviously, just to recap, we've gone through.

You've got a great idea you found someone to work with and we went through. We've got to find a platform. We went through, got to find a funder. But of course, doesn't stop there. You've got to get through production and post-production. You've got to make the show. So yeah, you've kind of in effect one, the screen industry lottery and you've got a commission and you've got your funding. And so yet now you've to make the production is a big road still ahead and your platform is your client, your platform is still your client and if a builder was building you a house that you were paying for, you'd expect them to build you the house you wanted, and it is no different with this for any production. Your storytelling, strength and creativity can shine through, but you still have to make show the show that your platform and fund that is expecting. So make sure you are really clear at the outset what is expected of you.

You will also have to do legal contracts at the start of the crisis with both your platform and your funder, your production company or EP should be able to guide you through this as the country contracts are reasonably standard.

But you can also enlist the aid of a screen industry lawyer. If you feel the need to and we have a screen and street lawyer on the SPADA board, one of my SPADA Board colleagues

Mick Sinclair clear works in that area. As does Karen Soich, she's a very experienced and others. SPADA can help point you in the right direction.

And as you move past contracting and into production and make sure you keep your platform informed, informed as you progress, there are specific formal producer reports required at certain stages along the way. But keep key people informally abreast of what you're doing as well. Check in now and then at key stages and let people know of any issues and changes again. Clear communication and courtesy will stand you in good stead. If there are differences of opinion, talk them through calmly.

Your commissioner might change their mind. They might not be prepared to compromise. Find a solution that works for both of you. Listen to what your commissioner is saying and what the need is. You might not be able to solve it in the way they're suggesting, but you might be able to solve it in a different way. So just work through things you know, patiently. Compromise. Be pragmatic. Same thing at editing approval time. It can be very frustrating when you are happy with your edit and the network wants changes. But that's their right. Keep a cool head. Getting angry with them won't help you if they're asking for something you don't think will work, explain why. Again, find a middle ground that works for both of you. Let some things go. Diplomacy pragmatism helps you make sure you've left enough editing time and money for network changes. So there are no last minute budget blow outs. Commissioners should know their audience is best. So in most cases when they are assessing your idea or looking at the fine cut in the edit suite, they're asking for changes not just for the sake of it, but to make the idea and the programme best fit the platform and the time slot.

00:43:22:19 - 00:43:37:24

Irene Gardiner

I touched on budget management a moment ago in the context of making sure you have the money for possible network changes. But obviously managing the budget and talking to your platform and funders about any possible issues is essential at all times. As a producer, you likely have a production manager running your budget for you, get someone good who you know you can trust and listen to them at all times. I won't go any further than that at this stage, as we actually could do a whole separate masterclass on budgeting. But ask me at the end if you have any specific questions.

Eventually, you will be finished your show and delivering it to your platform, and if it's been a good process for all concerned and you've made a great production, chances are you'll get to make another one. And that's pretty cool.

And I have talked a lot here about the importance of courtesy in your dealings with networks and funders. But of course, this does go both ways. If you feel you've been badly or unfairly treated but you don't feel like you're in a strong enough position to raise it and you're not working with anyone with the mana to do that for you, then come to us at SPADA. We have a whole board full of experienced producers, myself included, who will happily give you some advice and support.

I have come to the end of the formal part of my talk, but I do want to bring in Julian, who has waited patiently to have a producer perspective. Julian, you want me to throw you a question or do you just want to come in with an observation off the back of everything else?

00:45:04:05 - 00:45:27:08

Julian Arahanga

Kia ora Irene, kia ora koutou. No, I think I could probably just talk to a couple of things off the back of all of the good korero that's gone before me. And yeah, I know that you've touched on it a lot Irene, but you know, this industry, like most of the industries in the world, is all about relationships. And as a producer, you become the relationship with the creator, the storytellers and the broadcasters and the funders. So getting to understand who the different broadcast commissioners are in New Zealand, building relationships with them, building relationships with the funding agencies.

And it doesn't happen overnight, you know, but by attending industry events, introducing yourself, always keeping a professional manner about all of your engagement with everybody, you know, it is really, really key. And although it's been said quite a lot tonight, just keeping up those relationships, even if your stuff gets turned down and you think it's good and you think the person doesn't know what they're talking about, how could they not go with your idea? I actually have got, you know, folders of ideas that might be like 40 or 50 ideas deep that, you know, I can still go back to them at some stage.

And while, yeah, that was a good idea, but those guys had no vision, so um. But then, like sometimes we we will. A funding round will come and we'll put it in like and we'll put a lot of effort into, you know, doing some nice pitch work and then I thought, Oh, well, where's that other thing over here? Or dust that offer throw that in as well and the ones that we spend all the time and energy and that our passion to get the big cross. And then this one that you just kind of through and kind of, you know, had nothing to do on the Friday afternoon gets greenlit and there's no you can never tell in the industry kind of what idea is going to go at any particular time. So, you know, you've just you've got to be really pragmatic about it all. And as passionate as you, you know, you can be about your ideas. It's, you know, it's in some ways it's a bit of a lucky dip.

But going back to relationships, if you are starting to build those relationships with your commissioners and your creative teams, you know, then people can help you develop the idea along the way and, you know, the commissioners and stuff they can have, you know, some good points that you might not have thought, ever thought of. And then you can further develop the idea.

I generally, as a kind of my own thing, I don't know whether it's vanity, but I don't like to scribble ideas on a napkin and say, Hey, do how do you think? How how's that one? Because that's never really worked for me. What what has worked is actually working the ideas up quite a lot before I even share them. Just so that when I'm talking with someone and that they're asking you questions, I need to have thought about a lot of the things that people are going to ask you about or query about. So generally, we will kind of road test ideas quite thoroughly. And then even when we present them, we dress them up a bit because, you know, from the first word to the first image or that that impression that you make, I think for me personally, it is quite important and and can evoke the feeling or the

thought with the reader that lures the men straight away so that this is the personal thing of mine.

I guess, you know, one thing I was thinking about for young producers is like that also have some thought about how big you want to be. This is a tough, tough game and it shouldn't be underestimated, and it takes the skill sets of being a producer. You have to be so many things, from a human counsellor to someone who understands finance, to someone who can break down the boat creative vocabulary to get an idea across in the way that you want to. So it requires a lot of skill set and you develop more and more as you go along. But, you know, understanding, do you want to be a production house that is, you know, doing three, four, 5,6 projects a year?

Or do you want to work from your home and do one project a year and be working with a bigger company and that type of thing? So understanding, you know, having some idea about, you know, where you want to be in your in your future? I think that's quite important. I definitely suggest that for your first one, 2, 3 projects, yes, you are working alongside other people who are who can actually open doors can give you great advice for the myriad of issues that come along.

So, you know, again, building those relationships with people who can help you take your ideas to a place where they can get commissioned and then funded is really sound advice that you've already talked about. I mean, yeah, I've got a whole lot of other notes and stuff that I just wrote here, but one that sort of talks more to what Alice was talking about with writers and staff of working with writers is like, you know, have you actually got something to say, you know, and what is your spin? What is your point of view? Because understanding what your point of view and what it is, you're trying to say what it is you want to say to the world that actually makes a huge difference in how people view you as a person and the materials that you put in front of them.

And and like Tony said, it's a really, really interesting time at the moment because there are all of these different platforms, you know, TVNZ has got is broken down into three or four different places that you can take your material to. Then you've got stuff, RNZ, the Herald spin off like you would say, but then, you know, opportunities are opening up globally. For, you know, essentially what a lot of offshore platforms are calling authentic voices.

And so it is a really exciting time to be a storyteller and to be a producer, to be a writer director because you know the world, you know, because of the platforms that have come along like Netflix, making content that comes from that is told in native languages from around the world. That's opened up a whole new pathway to getting indigenous stories, though to getting Māori stories told.

00:53:21:09 - 00:53:45:08

Irene Gardiner

It's good to hear that it's you know, you say that it's an exciting time because obviously with COVID, there's also that slight depression that comes over us. So it's nice to hear that. And it's it's lovely to have you reinforce the importance of relationships because obviously this has been this was called creativity, clarity and courtesy, and we were joking in the preamble for all. Our lovely audience came in that if you were doing lockdown Zoom webinar bingo tonight and you had put things like polite, courteous, courteous, polite you would be if you

were doing the drinking version, you would be very drunk by now too. Just doing the other vision you'd have won the prize anyway.

We are now sort of coming into the slightly less formal discussion, but we should just go quickly round everyone because people will have probably thought of little extra things off the back of what others have said. And it's a while since we've heard from you, Alice.

00:54:23:09 - 00:54:41:00

Alice Shearman

Oh, thank you. I think everyone has said it now in different ways, but research the sector. I think it's a really, really important thing. If you want to work in the sector, you've got to know the sector and researching who the funders are, what the types of work they're funding, who the funding commissioners are, who the producers are in the sector and who everyone is. I think it's really, really important and you can't do that in a small space. You have to go big, you have to spend weeks researching, you've got to view everything, you've got to watch other people shows. You've got to read books, local books, read local, thank you. Listen to music, you've got to know what's out there in the sphere because I think that actually comes back to that story by osmosis. You talked about it at the very beginning Irene with similar stories coming at the same time, and we're in that at the moment. I'm seeing a lot of similar stories come through, so you have to research what's around you to ensure that you're different from what else is available. Why is someone going to spend their time? Watching your thing, whether they have to pay for it or not, why are they spending their time doing that? That's probably my biggest takeaway, peace research, research and be kind.

00:55:40:12 - 00:55:42:20

Irene Gardiner

Kay what would you say off the back of it?

00:55:43:13 - 00:55:58:09

Kay Ellmers

The same thing. I mean, it's researching from all angles of what's there and how things work because and it is, you know, as you've mentioned, it is busy times for commissioners and you are dealing with a lot of inquiries all the time. And so when it's clear that somebody is coming to you and they just have absolutely no idea and they haven't bothered to find out anything about how anything works, that's going to put you off the idea for a start, because it's sort of showing that you're not, um, just not cognizant of how what's going to be required for this to happen. So, yeah, I keep coming back to that. I really agree with Julian that although you know, the initial pitch might only be the two pager, there is obviously a whole lot more thinking that that's behind that. And so if you do get somebody's attention with that first couple of pages, you need to be prepared to back that up. And if they do come back and they may just come back saying, OK, I would like to see more show us a proposal, or they might come back and say, I want to have a conversation with you about that idea. But if you've got nothing more to add to it, we haven't backed it up. Or when you interrogate an aspect about it, you sort of don't want to be immediately exposed that you actually haven't done the thinking behind the initial idea.

So I think that's cool. And and I would say also, as Irene said, when you are further down the path and particularly into it, it is actually really true that commissioners do want the best for

your project. And I've totally been on the other side most of my career and felt like I know best and the how could anyone else improve on perfection that I have brought them in a cut? And so and it is difficult to take, you know, constructive feedback. And I've totally I've spent more time on that side of the table than this side of the table. But I certainly know that for me and from the way I operate, I have no time nor inclination to be giving feedback just for the sake of it, as if this feedback there it's because I'm genuinely trying to help the project be better, and I'm certainly always open to pushback on that. It's a dialog. It's this might be a suggestion or have you thought about this? The only really sort of dogmatic things would be issues around defamation or, you know, like, absolutely things that can't be budged on. So, yeah, do bear that in mind, and that probably helps you to be a bit kinder if you actually realize that on the other side of the table is normally a nice human being that also wants the best. And we are looking after tax payer money in most cases for commissioners. And so we have a duty of care. So to, you know, look after that. So that would be about it.

00:58:33:18 - 00:58:35:17

Irene Gardiner
Tony, Tony Manson.

00:58:36:02 - 00:58:53:12

Tony Manson
Yeah, I've written down a couple of things, well, we've all been chatting. One is taste tape. We haven't talked about tape, but it's quite easy and quick and cheap these days for you to shoot a little demo or an interview with the key talent or some key locations. And if you can bring that to the pitch or embed that as something in your proposal, then it makes it real for a commissioner and a programmer. And I look at it and I go, Oh great, I get the feel. I get the tone from that, and I know it's just shot on an iPhone or a GoPro or something like that, but it can actually really help you pitch a lot and bring it to life because we're in, we're in that medium. So there's that. And also what not to do if you're wanting to put your ideas is not going to finally get a 15 minute or 20 minute meeting with the commissioner. Don't go with 20 ideas. Julien mentioned 30 or 40 in his drawer because they may have just looked at 100 RFPs that morning. And so just go on with that one idea or two ideas that you've got, well, focused, well-informed and that you're passionate about that. Don't try to pitch too much.

00:59:56:18 - 01:00:10:06

Irene Gardiner
Tony and Kay, while we've been talking to you. And the thing I was talking about about how you don't necessarily pitch exclusively to one platform now, wait for no, go to the next one, which is kind of was the etiquette in the old days of just TV NZ and three. Do you think I'm right on that? Do you think it is accepted now that people will pitch to more than one person at once?

01:00:17:03 - 01:00:30:20

Tony Manson
I think it is, but the mistake he could make is going. I've got this at RNZ, I've got this set of three, so you've got to go with it or I'm out the door and that's my next meeting. Because a network or platform generally don't like to feel they're being manipulated into making a hasty decision or pushing something to the top of the pile because they're in a competition. So I think you've got to be careful how you buy that it could backfire on you.

01:00:49:20 - 01:01:13:21

Kay Ellmers

Yeah, I think it's probably slightly different for us at RNZ because we have this sort of notion of radical sharing. So we're just like, if it's a good fit, it's a good project and it's fulfilling RNZ's stated goals, then you know, whether we're in a primary platform position or secondary platform position isn't such a staunch thing because we don't have a commercial imperative about, you know, selling advertising dollars around it, needing the first play and that type of thing. But yeah, I do. I think it's a really interesting thing that Amy might have some thoughts on too, just the general horse trading that sort of ends up going on towards funding deadlines around, particularly on the smaller platforms. I think like with I'm thinking Māori Television and Re: and and Spin Off on us and the fact that we can support and actually help each other's proposals by having more than one platform. But that's an increasingly difficult thing to manage that end because the timeframes get really tight as well, if you only just found out that you've got a primary platform interested, but then maybe you need to support that with another one, which would help. So they don't. It's all new territory, but Amy might have something to say.

01:02:08:06 - 01:02:20:18

Amy Mills

Yeah, I missed the beginning, sorry because I was live answering a question, which is the first time I've done it, so I but I came in at the end and I think one thing I was going to add to that Kay, which I think from our end we feel really strongly about, is that there is a perception I think, from some of the conversations I've had that the platforms or networks might feel unwilling to commit to being a secondary platform outcome for an application if they feel that they will cannibalize their priorities in the round.

And the thing I would say to that is it's it's a it's a difficult dance because the reality is the proposals and applications that come to us that show multi-platform distribution are incredibly powerful, and that's the world we're operating in now. And anecdotally, we're kind of trying to sort our data to be able to demonstrate this clearly. We believe that often the platforms are speaking to different audiences. So that idea of cannibalizing, I actually don't think is entirely founded on any meaningful data. So I would hope we hope to see more of that happening, and we're always incredibly open with the platforms to be able to have the conversation that says, you're not you're not being negatively disadvantaged in anything. We're looking at it, we're not gathering that as a quantum of the total number that you've got. If we see you attached to secondary platforms, we don't then go, Oh, we don't need to give them these ones as a primary platform that doesn't happen outside.

So I think that's a piece that probably needs a little bit more conversation collectively across the sector.

01:03:34:13 - 01:03:53:10

Irene Gardiner

Questions are starting to come in, and there is one that is kind of for Amy, although I might be able to. It's actually slightly off topic, but it's a good question. And it's any news on how NZ ON Air is planning on increasing the capabilities for Asian creators.

01:03:54:10 - 01:03:55:11

Amy Mills

That was the one I was live answering.

01:03:55:22 - 01:03:56:21

Irene Gardiner

Oh, you were live answering.

01:03:56:21 - 01:04:14:08

Amy Mills

Distracted. Yes, that's from Hweiling. So that was just to say that we're due for an update from the ministry this week, so we've been hounding them. So when I spoke at the lift event in Auckland and Wellington about three weeks ago, we mentioned that there's a really fantastic opportunity of additional COVID recovery or relief funding that we've received, which is \$2 million across this year and next year, so 1 million across each financial year to help with capability funding for the sector. So both boosting technical and business capability for the sector. And we have put a proposal to initiate one pillar of which is saying we need to address the really stark diversity stats that we're seeing around the lack of pathways and ability for Asian New Zealand creatives to come through and create content and develop it. And so one of the initiatives that we've proposed is to address that, which is what Hweiling is mentioning here. But we're still we still haven't heard back. So but we're meant to hear this week. So my note on that answer was just to say we should have some clarity shortly that we can share with the sector.

01:05:00:08 - 01:05:22:06

Irene Gardiner

The question here, which I can probably do, I think which is what advice can you give when it comes to discussing networks and platforms on a pitch document, especially when you haven't secured one yet? So I'm assuming that means your very early pitch document when you're trying to find a production company or EP to work with you because obviously once you're pitching, you do know who your network and platform is. And yeah, there is no reason if you're writing a one page document to say no to page document to see into production, can't we just say, do you have an interest in working with me on this? Do you have an interest in this idea? There is no reason why that document couldn't say, I see this as being for X platform or timeslot or whatever. You know or maybe suggesting two or three. And equally, there would be no issue with saying I'm not quite sure who this would be for, but I would like to talk to you about who that might be, although, you know you probably would have a sense of what. What what sort of network you would you be going for? So, yeah, that's just answering that one, just.

01:06:09:07 - 01:06:31:03

Kay Ellmers

Can I just jump in sort of leveraging off that Irene and leveraging off what Alice was talking about about that sort of first approach thing, too. And this is really speaking with my head on as having been a production company owner is, I think even before you seemed an idea, you should probably ask producers whether they want to receive any ideas, because sometimes that actually exposes producers that don't necessarily want your unsolicited idea because they may well be working on something very similar already. And so if they if you

send them an unsolicited idea. That they are already doing and then opens up a kind of accusation that you've somehow taken that idea point. So I find out. Do they want? Do they want to hear from you with your ideas before it's in them?

01:07:02:16 - 01:07:07:24

Irene Gardiner

And then, yeah, I've got something. Can I talk to you about it? Did you want to comment on that as well Alice?

01:07:08:05 - 01:07:24:04

Alice Shearman

Yeah, I am, absolutely. We've actually one of the PDFs that talks about not sending unsolicited materials to producers and production companies because the risk of a copyright claim is very high in that scenario. Some newer writers don't understand that you just can't send unsolicited because it's actually dangerous for both parties from a copyright point of view. So just backing up what were saying, basically, and it's in the PDF. So if anyone wants one of those PDFs like lollies I'll hand them out.

01:07:38:16 - 01:07:57:02

Tony Manson

If I could add to that list, I mean, we've mentioned big companies like Greenstone and Warner Brothers and screen time. They they all have their own development executives and they all have their own development slate. And some of the bigger international companies like Warners have a catalog of formats. So you've got to jump ahead of them and push your idea to the top of the queue to keep their attention. So that's going to be quite tough for those big companies.

01:08:09:14 - 01:08:25:24

Irene Gardiner

And and that actually brings me to another question, which sort of comes off the back a little bit of what Julian was talking about, how we are now in a global era. And I've been focusing this on really the nuts and bolts of operating here in New Zealand. You know, for newer producers and one of our listeners has just come in saying how realistic in this global era is it of going straight to an overseas platform and bypassing New Zealand? Well, I guess my answer to that would be it probably depends on your level of experience. And you know, plenty of the bigger companies in New Zealand are trying to work globally and doing that quite successfully. And if you've got a great idea, you might have to do that with them. Would someone else perhaps like to talk on that? Julian, maybe.

01:09:03:14 - 01:09:42:11

Julian Arahanga

Yeah, I think it's very real. I suspect that over the next 18 to 24 months that more New Zealand production companies and storytellers will get projects up with those overseas platforms. In the last two weeks, I've met with HBO Max, AMC, Netflix, Amazon, Disney Plus and prior to COVID, those kind of meetings were really hard to get. That was getting on an airplane, going to the United States or going to mipcom and having those and organizing those meetings over there. Now a lot of these places are much more accessible and like I talked about before. Everybody's looking for a story that has got some authenticity to it. And

you know, that could be your story. And so it's very real. Not a lot of it has actually taken off. But I know that there are lots of people in New Zealand who are having those same meetings with those same network network executives that I'm having meetings with. And again, how we've taken time to build relationships in this country. We're in this phase now where we're building relationships globally. And what I'm I'm pretty positive that, you know, there's some of these good ideas that are floating around will take off.

01:10:48:16 - 01:11:10:15

Irene Gardiner

Just slightly changing subject. But keeping you there, Julian. And would you have any advice on what you would call holding on to your own creative vision, but also delivering what is required of you? I talked a bit about really, make sure you know at the outset what you are making for whoever you're making it for. And yet one of our listeners is just asked a question about, Yeah, how do you keep your own vision but also give what you want? Can you think of an example or anything you've gone through that could answer that?

01:11:24:01 - 01:11:46:08

Julian Arahanga

Well, it's a collaborative business and you're one person. Well, you know, speaking about filmmaking as opposed to television, there's a saying that says it's the art of compromise. And right from the very start, you need to start getting used to compromising in various ways your idea. But still, if you can maintain the heart of your idea and keep articulating that to your collaborators, that that is the essence of our idea and we can. That's the thing that we can't stop and then kind of can't look back on. Then, you know, then that that is, you know, the best way that you can go forward, I guess. But you know, there's always going to be compromises. People are pulling the idea this way and some people are pulling it this way. But you know, when you look at it, it's lots of good ideas that have been made. So don't lose hope.

01:12:29:18 - 01:12:49:14

Irene Gardiner

That seems fair enough, as advice, don't lose hope. If we get that vote, should we be talking about it? We have touched on it and it's been a couple of questions. But is the process different when it's an RFP as a formal request for proposals from a network and Kay, would you have anything to add there?

01:12:51:03 - 01:13:04:02

Kay Ellmers

I think I think it's just probably I shouldn't know when I was a producer. I quite like having the dartboard to aim it and knowing that there is a dartboard and and having some vision. So I think it is. I think it is. And we we're doing it at our RNZ largely because we can only do a very small, limited number of projects and there's a very specific mandate around the types of content that we're wanting to do add to commission, which is often, you know, to complement and supplement the type of content that we're already creating internally. So for me, I think, you know, we've tried to be very clear, we've actually just released one that this particular heading towards the NZOA Round. There's really only one sort of genre of content we're looking for in a you if you don't already have it or want to just email commissioning@rnz.co.nz. Maybe Ness, I don't know how to write it, and maybe I didn't.

And when you can get the, you can get the RFP documents. But I think it is different because I'm just immediately going to show me right from the start of your pitch how it is that you're serving. And if I know, if I've see, see and you know, I want a sandwich, don't come and bring me a bowl of pasta, you know, if I've already sort of said what I want. So tell me, tell me straight away if it's better, if it's in response to this and when it's a fairly for in that case, it's a fairly broad brief. But it's like, tell me straight away how your idea fits the brief that you're responding to. So in that respect, I think it is quite different.

01:14:28:10 - 01:14:43:16

Amy Mills

And can I just add quickly, because it probably is actually new news ish to some people on this zoom around RNZ calling for the independent production company to pitch concepts that will come into NZOA funding. It sort of was born out of the Innovation Fund initiative, which was a one off which happened last year. And I know you'll probably be having these conversations with any producers that come to you. But there are kind of quite tight parameters around that because there are challenges. I think around us funding are indeed from an optics point of view and then also funding content on top of that. So to Kay's point, there are very sort of specific public media requirements and audiences that they're trying to reach. And they then also have to kind of made it back into ads. But we're sort of looking at a nominal amount of projects a year. So the demand, I imagine, is much higher than the supply can be. And it's really critical that it's R&D working with the independent production sector because obviously that does create great opportunities with greater platforms and with RNZ having such a strong public media mandate that does create really fantastic ideas that can come through that pathway that we have been saying as much. So you just add a quick note on that for those that this new issue.

01:15:38:24 - 01:15:57:10

Kay Ellmers

And and remembering that even should we choose, just like with any other platform, we're going into a contestable process now. So even if we choose to support something like that's meeting the needs that we want, that doesn't necessarily mean that NZ On Air will be able to fund it because it is going into a contestable round with the rest of everything else, and we appreciate and understand that. And so we always try and be really, really strategic about that. And usually, I've had conversations with NZOA ahead of time with. So those are the types of things we're looking and hoping to wanting to do and balancing that off when I'm being asked to do from my board and senior management. And so, yeah, it's not it's not a given, even that if we've been very clear about something like that we think we want, that doesn't necessarily 100% mean that we'll get it across. But we will work together with chosen price targets to give them the best opportunity. That's what is to what Irene was saying before. We're your partners, we were your client, but also your collaborator, and that we would actually want to work positively.

01:16:42:21 - 01:16:56:15

Amy Mills

And someone's asked a question about advice on structuring multiple platform deals. And I was just going to jump in and say it's it's going to look entirely different depending on who you're talking to. So would probably attest to this are indeed really open, I think, to working with additional platforms. And there's lots of partnerships already happening in the space

with other platforms like the spinoff and in content going out across the platforms. And they're structured slightly differently depending on each project, depending on whether another platform might be contributing a higher license fee or license fee at all.

So I think there isn't an easy answer to that question, and I think if you've got a piece of content that's clearly feels like it's right for one platform, talk to them. And if they're open to TVNZ, there's a lot of partnerships with Māori television as well around your distribution. So I think just having the conversations with the right people. Will lead to the right outcomes in that regard, and it doesn't if you've got secondary platforms, they don't always have to contribute and a license fee, if they make, they're not required to. Having another audience is enough of an additive.

01:17:41:18 - 01:18:00:08

Irene Gardiner

We're getting pretty close to the end of our time as just another listener question here. What infrastructures do you have in place to help support emerging artists? Who do have an idea proposal that you love that you're aware may need additional support. I'm not quite sure what type of artists is meant in that, but obviously that person with that idea is going to need a producer or a production company to help support them get this through the process and if they don't have that. The platform will guide them, which would suggest that they get one, but before they even get to that point, it'd probably be better to ask someone like SPADA, who are some producers that I could talk to rather than going straight to a network because I think it would be just seen them that way anyway.

And that actually brings me to another question, which is perhaps for Tony? You know, I talked that you can go take your idea to a big production company. We could possibly do it yourself with the guidance of a freelance producer. But actually, sometimes the network will guide you to someone that they think would be a good fit for you and that you should. Perhaps with this production company, Tony, you have probably been in that situation where you have done it with a young producer with an idea?

01:19:06:06 - 01:19:32:24

Tony Manson

Yeah, yeah. It happens often that somebody will come up with an idea, but they need to be kind of matched with a production company that's got capability in that genre. So sometimes it's better to go to the network first, so they'll have the kind of preferred suppliers or the people they have confidence in to deliver those kinds of projects. So in a way, you'd better to go kind of unlinked to a production company and have the discussion with the network and now guide this production company, that production company. And I worked on that genre successfully with us in the past. So you then go to them and make up your own mind as a as a writer or director or new producer who you want to work with of those, and develop your own relationship with them.

01:20:05:06 - 01:20:17:20

Irene Gardiner

So that's a sort of a slightly different way around than the way I took that, which was find your producer or EP to guide you first and then go to the network, whereas actually,

sometimes it can work the other way round. If you maybe have a reasonable level of confidence, you could approach the network and they could partner you with someone.

01:20:23:22 - 01:20:42:12

Tony Manson

Yeah, it can work both ways. It's always good to have the discussion within. If you can, they'll have a content strategy. And just in having a 15 or 20 minute discussion about your idea, you'll glean a lot about their content strategy and it might spark something else.

01:20:42:22 - 01:21:03:13

Irene Gardiner

Any advice on how to approach potential talent about becoming involved attached to a project when it's yet to be pitched to become anything concrete? And this is interesting because this relates to what Kay was talking about where if you go to her and you say, I've got Sam Neill to do my project and you haven't got Sam Neill studio project, you're going to get into trouble. So. And yet if something isn't concrete yet, you don't want to waste a whole lot of actors or singers or whatever time getting there. So it is a little bit of a balance.

If it's of some key people who are absolutely key to the thing you're going to make, you do need to take it out. I think if there's sort of some other people who can color out from there, you probably don't need to bother them. Would that be a fair answer, do you think? And Tony?

01:21:31:24 - 01:21:51:19

Kay Ellmers

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I think of it as they're actually core and central to the idea, say Alice Snedden's bad news just to put a plug in and just to put an extra plug in there for that. And then obviously, those core talent need to really be secured in terms of even the initial pitch, because otherwise you're kind of wasting the commissioner's time. But there is a lot of different layers. I agree. And I think as long as you're clear about that, like we're thinking that we will get these types of people for these episodes and those or you might even sometimes have a very early pitch.

I'm thinking more in a sort of documentary type, since they might be quite notional characters or people that don't even exist, but they're the type of people that you will be looking to cast. I think that's fine. And to be clear, and then also, if you are invited in the way that I would work, if you're invited to then submit a full proposal and work further through then would be quite clear about how much access we need pinned down at that stage. Because also sometimes it's, you know, it might be a year out from when you're shooting and the time at which you are, you know, pitching something. So it might be some of the characters are more emotional, so you just end. But the main thing is really don't lie about what access you have.

01:22:55:03 - 01:23:16:22

Irene Gardiner

Lying is never a good idea about any aspect of what we're doing. And I just heard the word from my magic assistant, Ness. Can I please tell people that the PDFs that Alice mentioned, my notes, and the contacts that Kay mentioned, will be on the SPADA website.

We are coming near the end of our time. I hope this has been valuable for the people out there listening. I would just reiterate what I had said have seen all through creativity, clarity, courtesy be a decent human being. I think you'll have seen from this, you know, we've had to commit long time experienced commissioners, producer, Alice and Amy from NZ on Air. These are not awful people. You know, these are people that it's easy to relate to and deal with. So just always be that in mind. As I said, my speech notes will be on line. I should also mention that this is the first in a series of SPADA masterclasses, as I said earlier, because we're not doing the conference this year.

I can't say it, definitely. But when I was talking on my Facebook about that, I was doing this session. A commissioning colleague and friend of mine came to SPADA and said, Oh, we've got a commission, a project that would be a really great case study as a partner for that. And it's not definite yet, but keep an ear out because they might be a sort of a partner discussion. And it would be great. If anything, we've said tonight has inspired you to think of another workshop or press that you need by all means, let's find out and know if you have any questions that we didn't answer that I could answer for you afterwards. You can contact me through SPADA. It's very, very easy to do. I'm sure you can probably track down some of my fabulous panelists as well, and thank you so much panel for being such a great panel. And thank you audience that we can't see for being out there. Have a really great evening, everyone. Mā te wā.

You can find the supporting documents mentioned during this episode at www.spada.co.nz, along with links to more great discussions in the SPADA Masterclass Series. Otherwise, visit Spotify or iTunes for more episodes exploring the producer role and the screen sector in New Zealand.