



## SUGGESTED GUIDELINES: CREATING A PROJECT DECK

*Project Deck: a written and visual presentation that introduces a project to potential partners by sharing the creative vision, filmmaking team, and risks and rewards of investing in the film.*

These are based on the Sundance 2020 Catalyst suggested guidelines for Project Decks. Please use this outline as a guide only. Every film is different as is every project deck. This is not a legal document, but rather an outline of the elements of your project geared towards potential investors. The order of this information and overall design are up to you.

### **Points to consider as you create your deck:**

- Who is your audience? You may have to create different versions of the deck for different audiences (e.g. an independent financier vs. a studio)
- Make sure that your deck remains consistent with the creative vision for the project. As the project evolves, so must the deck
- There's no such thing as "the right way" to prepare a deck. A Director's lookbook will focus on the story while a "project deck" is more holistic and will be geared towards potential investors/funders/partners.

**As you conceive of your project deck**, remember that narrative is paramount. Not only are you telling the story of your project, but you are telling a story through your pitch deck of how you want that project to be introduced. Your goal is to evoke the feelings and humanity of the characters in your story. Through striking visuals and succinct text, you are guiding your audience. You control the narrative.

Story is of equal importance for documentaries as it is with fiction projects. Whether it is a film about a particular issue or not, the story and the subjects are everything. What will the audience see as the film unfolds? Even if you don't know where the film will ultimately end, you have to give the deck reader an idea of what the story will look and feel like on screen.

Whether you're working on docs or fictional films, use your deck as an opportunity to communicate your vision, be it through the fonts you select, the images and layout; everything stylistically in the deck helps give the viewer a sense of the tone, approach, and creativity of the filmmaker's vision and intent. Often the team behind the film, the filmmaker vision, and the access to the story are equally important elements. Don't be afraid to think outside the box for how to present your story. Decks can come in all shapes, sizes, styles, and containers.

**Design:** Consider a consistent look across your materials. Overall, we recommend simplicity and concision where possible. Keeping your written text brief, and emphasizing legibility in your design (read: font size!) will be crucial in holding reader attention. That's not to say that you shouldn't get creative or in-depth here—but make your most essential details pop and stand out.

**Tools/Software:** Consider using Keynote, PowerPoint, Google Slides, or Canva to create your deck along with professional design software like Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, Sketch or InDesign—or hiring a graphic designer—to elevate your materials.



**Below are the key pieces we recommend including in your project deck:**

**Cover page:** Title of project, Project title and director/producer names (+ company name and classification (LLC, S Corp, C Corp, etc), if relevant). Consider using a single image to sell your film idea and ground the reader.

**Logline:** One or two sentence summary of your film.

**Synopsis:** A brief summary of the film's story. You don't have to include the entire story, from beginning to middle to end. Be selective. Make it compelling.

**Artist/Director Statement:** The director's vision. Why you want to make this film, what inspires you, what it means to you, what it looks like. Connect your message to the medium.

**Artistic Approach/Overview:** This is your pitch. Express your passion for the project and why it is important. Make it personal. Tell the investors why you love your film and why you believe it will be successful. Include any special elements that add value to the project such as cast secured, whether the project is based on a book or article, or other details you want to highlight.

**Timeline:** Recognizing that this may not be within your control, it is also important for the project to feel urgent and that there is a plan to move it forward. Outline when production starts/ends, post production starts/ends, estimated film completion date, and festival/distribution submission date goal.

**Casting:** Include headshots and credits for cast attached to your project with brief character descriptions for the primary roles. If you have not yet attached cast, include your casting "wish list"—just be mindful that your appetite is appropriate for the budget and marketplace value for your project. If you include an actor that takes a \$10M fee per film and your budget is \$2M, you must be prepared to defend that choice otherwise it undermines your project as a realistic proposition.

**Locations:** Consider including images that convey the story landscape. If you know where the project will shoot, you can include photos of the actual environment: exteriors, interiors, etc. Otherwise, you can utilize images from elsewhere (eg. other films, google) that demonstrate the look and feel of the storyworld.

**Budget Summary:** Identify the total gross budget. Include the top page of your budget listing major budget categories (Development, Production, Administration, Post Production, Distribution, etc.). State total funds needed to produce the film and how they will be allocated. You may not always include this in the initial deck; sometimes, you'll keep it as a supplemental insert that once you have gained enthusiasm for the film, you can send follow up details including financials.

**Financing Plan:** List the amount raised to date (if any), the source of all funds raised to date, and the amount needed to complete the film. In your fundraising plan, include committed and pending grants, donations, investment financing, pre-sales and tax incentives. Please also include your classification (LLC, S Corp, C Corp, etc.).

Be realistic and make sure you state there is no guarantee of seeing a profit, but emphasize the investment opportunity, not the risk. Feel free to include other incentives as well, e.g. "second bottom line" and "impact" considerations (see "Impact Plan" below).

**Marketing & Distribution Approach:** Who is the audience for this film, and how will you get to them? Address distribution goals, all potential revenue streams and audience engagement. These strategies



form the foundation for how you will be able to return investor capital and align goals in audience reach and future decisions tied to sales options. If you have a sales agent attached, include their company or credits

**Comparable Films (“Comps”):** Offer comparable films in theme, tone, aesthetic, storytelling, subject or scope to give the funders an idea of the finished film and a sense of where it may land in the marketplace. Unlike a financial comp which suggests the financial goals for your film, a creative comp shows audience interest for your film (no figures). Keep references to the last 2-5 years and be ready to answer additional questions from funders.

Separately, financial comps can be tricky. Given the volatile marketplace and increasing number of streamer acquisitions, it can be difficult to project your film’s performance in the marketplace or get accurate numbers on potential comps. Be aware of how films like yours have fared (with theatrical, VOD or Streamer releases) but note that financial comps will most likely be anecdotal rather than a part of your deck.

**Impact Plan:** If applicable, list your outreach partners (committed and potential), such as NGOs, foundations, tastemakers, community partners, and other stakeholders that will help you build an audience and get the word out. If there is a social justice impact strategy, include that as well. Be reasonable with your goals and what you seek to achieve. Also, be ready to follow up with a separate budget for this or make sure it is notated if your plans are included in your overall film budget.

**Creative Team Bios:** Include your professional bio and describe your past success stories. Option to include photo or headshot. Call out other key crew like Executive Producer, DP, Editor, Casting Director—especially any notable person/credits. You may also consider linking out to your earlier work.

**Past Work:** Include project posters and accolades, notable casting, critical or financial success, especially if investors were made whole.

**Grants and Support:** Also consider including a list of any grants, sponsorships, partnerships, or fellowships that are currently supporting the project.

**End Page:** We recommend listing director/producer names here again, along with your emails and phone numbers and LLC or fiscal sponsorship info.

### **Addendum Insert to consider once you begin soliciting financing:**

#### **Credit Offerings:**

*Include your tiering of credits tied to levels of both investments and non-recoupable grants. If you have a fiscal sponsor, important to note that here as this will enable you to accept non-recoupable grant money. You can refer to the [PGA](#) and [DPA](#) crediting guidelines to help make decisions about crediting (and more).*

#### **Additional Optional Elements:**

- Letters of interest
- Press coverage
- Feature stories on lead actors, director or subjects
- Background articles on the topic, story or issue
- Option agreements (if applicable)
- Distribution agreements (if applicable)
- Agreements relating to the film’s music (if applicable)