INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTARY ASSOCIATION
Evaluation Guidelines for Fiscal Sponsorship Applications

Does the project fall within the IDA's mission of supporting documentaries and documentary filmmakers?
IDA defines "documentary" broadly, encompassing science and nature documentaries, public affairs, subjective or first-person documentaries, arts and culture documentaries, ethnographic films, non-fiction essays, and some hybrid forms. Feature films, series and miniseries, and shorts are all acceptable.

IDA does not accept direct advocacy pieces, industrials, public service ads, or projects explicitly designed to publicize or market a specific product or entity – although it is perfectly acceptable for a project to feature a strong independent point of view. Due to IRS regulations, IDA cannot support projects that advocate for a specific candidate to be elected or for any specific legislation.

Is the project ready for fiscal sponsorship?
The project should be at a stage where it is ready for fundraising. This means that the project idea is developed enough that it can be explained in a compelling way to donors and grantmakers. There should also be a dedicated team assembled to focus on fundraising.

Does the project have a compelling and achievable story?
A good documentary is thoughtful, intentional, and focused. It should have a clear understanding of who the characters are, what the arc of the story is, and what the narrative goals are.

IDA will not accept any projects that intend to share hateful, or intentionally false or misleading messages.

Is the filmmaker the right fit for telling this story?
As more funders are critically thinking about authorship and access, IDA also wants filmmakers to approach their subject with intentionality. Some questions to consider are: What is the filmmaker's relationship with the subject(s)? Are they aware of their own biases that they may bring to the story? Are they showing genuine curiosity towards their subject(s) and their struggles, and including their perspectives in the narrative arc?

Does the filmmaker have a robust community care plan?
Care for the documentary subjects/characters/protagonists is paramount for an ethical film production. Special attention should be given to vulnerable communities: children, elders, disabled, d/Deaf, and chronically ill individuals, incarcerated individuals, persecuted and oppressed communities, and others who could be identified as a vulnerable community. Has the filmmaking team considered the individual needs of each subject and crew member? Is there a process for informed consent?

Is the project timeline achievable and reasonable?
Does the filmmaker lay out a reasonable timeline for their project allowing appropriate time for development, production, and post-production? Do they have an understanding of when they will move to the next stage and what they need in order to get there?

Does the project have a target audience and an educational distribution plan?
The project must have a defined audience and a clear educational distribution plan in order to qualify for fiscal sponsorship.

Is the project's accessibility plan adequate?
Does the filmmaker consider both the crew's and the audience's accessibility needs? Are costs associated with accessibility (e.g. captions, audio descriptions, transcripts) reflected in the budget?

Does the production team have the skills to achieve the goals?
The production team must demonstrate adequate experience in documentaries and/or film production, significant knowledge of their chosen subject matter, and the capacity to shape and interpret their material coherently. They must also display an understanding of the project's viability in the media marketplace and its potential for funding.

Is the fundraising plan realistic?
Do the filmmakers have a diversified fundraising strategy? Do they have specific funders and grants listed in the application?

Is the budget realistic?
Applications must include a detailed line item budget for the entire proposed project. A budget summary or one sheet is not acceptable. Projects in any stage of production must submit a budget that includes the outreach and distribution expenses. We also highly encourage filmmakers to include the 7% fiscal sponsorship fee and a 10% contingency in their budget.

A Note on AI:
We understand that Artificial Intelligence has become a popular and useful tool when writing applications; however, we encourage you to use your own words as much as possible. Our review team is adept at identifying the use of AI, and we find that AI-written applications often sound generic and contain incorrect information. Documentaries require original research, attention to detail, and the ability to tell stories. If your submission is written by or heavily uses AI, it becomes difficult for us to evaluate these skills.