

Docs by the Sea 2026 Submission Guidelines

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Docs by the Sea is a program dedicated to empowering filmmakers through film labs and pitching forums. Participating filmmakers will work with top mentors and have the opportunity to present their projects to connect with international industry representatives.

FILM LABS

Editing Lab | to sharpen the rough cut of the films into a more impactful final result in depicting the story; eligible for pitching forum and 1:1 meeting.

Storytelling Lab | to hone filmmakers' creative visions to convey important stories; eligible for pitching forum and 1:1 meeting.

Short Storytelling Lab | to hone filmmakers' creative visions to convey important stories; eligible for project showcase and 1:1 meeting.

Producing Lab | to provide insights and experiences regarding funding, distribution, contracts, and other practical skills to explore the market; eligible for project showcase and 1:1 meeting.

THEME

We encourage creative documentary filmmakers to submit projects with various themes, i.e. climate crisis, inclusivity, social justice, gender issues, human rights, etc.

AVAILABILITY & ACCESS

All labs will be conducted in English. In-Docs does not provide an individual translator for non-English speaking participants in any sessions/events.

ELIGIBILITY

Citizenship

The project must be **produced** or **directed** by a national of any of these countries. The applicants may be required to provide proof of their nationality upon confirmation.

Afghanistan	Kazakhstan	North Korea
Bangladesh	Kyrgyzstan	Pakistan
Brunei	Laos	Philippines
Bhutan	Tajikistan	Singapore
Cambodia	Turkmenistan	Sri Lanka
China	Malaysia	South Korea
Hong Kong	Macao	Taiwan
India	Maldives	Thailand
Indonesia	Mongolia	Timor-Leste
Iran	Myanmar	Uzbekistan
Japan	Nepal	Vietnam

Stage of production

The proposed projects can be at various stages of production with the following requirements.

Lab	Stage	Length (mins.)	A/V Materials
Storytelling	Development & production	60 or more	Trailer or excerpts
Short Storytelling	All stages	Less than 60	
Editing	Post-production	60 or more	Trailer and rough cut
Producing	All stages		Trailer or excerpts

Role in project

The lab participants must at least have one of the following project members.

Lab	Role (mandatory)
Editing	Director and editor
Storytelling, Short Storytelling	Director
Producing	Producer

Past Docs by the Sea projects

You can submit projects that were selected in previous editions of Docs by the Sea, subject to the following conditions.

Previous Lab	2026 Lab
Storytelling	Editing, Producer
Editing	Producer
Producing	Editing, Storytelling

Editorial considerations

1. The project is factually accurate and offers an authentic perspective.
2. Filmmakers adhere to best practices in documentary ethics.
3. Access to characters in the project must be secured.
4. The project is designed with a specific audience in mind and has the potential for global distribution.
5. It is feasible to complete the project within a realistic budget for its scale and has the potential to secure sufficient funding.
6. Selected filmmakers are prepared to collaborate internationally but may require further assistance to access the international market.
7. Past Docs by the Sea participants are encouraged to submit new projects or resubmit projects previously included in the past editions, if significant progress has been made.
8. Producers whose films are selected in the editing, storytelling, or short storytelling lab are not prioritised to participate in the Producing Lab.

GENERATIVE AI POLICY

Docs by the Sea champions authentic storytelling and ethical filmmaking practices. This policy outlines our position on generative AI (including images, audio, video, and text) in all submitted materials and proposed documentary projects.

Mandatory Disclosure Requirements

All applicants must explicitly disclose any use of generative AI in their submissions, including:

- **Specific AI elements:** Identify all AI-generated or AI-modified components.
- **Purpose:** Explain the creative rationale (e.g., conceptual visualization, placeholder, stylistic choice).
- **Tools utilized:** Name the specific platforms or technologies employed (e.g., Midjourney, ElevenLabs, Sora).
- **Integration method:** Describe how AI elements integrate with human-created content.

Failure to disclose AI usage will result in immediate disqualification from consideration.

Permitted Applications

Generative AI may be incorporated in submissions only when:

- Serving as **clearly labeled temporary placeholders** for development purposes (e.g., storyboarding, concept visualization, rough audio drafts).
- Integral to projects **explicitly examining AI or technology** as a central theme or subject.
- Used in **designated experimental sections** with clear artistic justification in the accompanying statement.
- Contributing to **research or process work** rather than final deliverables.

Prohibited Applications

The following uses of generative AI are not permitted:

- Presenting AI-generated content as **authentic documentary material** without explicit disclosure.
- Using AI to **fabricate or simulate documentary evidence** (e.g., synthetic "archival" footage, fabricated interviews).
- Employing AI to **recreate or represent real individuals** without their informed consent.
- Relying **predominantly on generative AI** for core creative elements rather than human authorship.
- Using AI to **circumvent ethical documentary practices** or fieldwork.

Evaluation Framework

Projects incorporating generative AI will be assessed according to:

- **Creative necessity:** Does the AI usage serve a meaningful artistic purpose impossible to achieve through traditional means?
- **Ethical consideration:** Does the project maintain transparency with subjects, collaborators, and audiences?
- **Filmmaker agency:** Does the documentary maker retain substantive creative control and authorship?
- **Subject dignity:** Does the AI usage respect the integrity and representation of documentary subjects?
- **Contextual appropriateness:** Is the technology employed in ways that enhance rather than undermine the documentary form?

Implementation and Consequences

- The selection committee reserves the right to request additional information about AI usage.
- Projects found in violation of this policy at any stage may face:
 - Removal from consideration.
 - Revocation of awarded funding or support.
 - Exclusion from future Docs by the Sea opportunities.

Docs by the Sea remains committed to supporting human-centered storytelling while thoughtfully engaging with evolving technologies.

PARTICIPATION

Attendance

1. Filmmakers of selected projects in the Editing, Storytelling, Producing, and Short Storytelling must travel to Indonesia to attend the in person lab, pitch or showcase their project in the forum, and have 1-on-1 meetings with industry guests.
2. All filmmakers of selected projects are responsible for the travel costs to/from Bali, Indonesia.

What Each Project Will Get

1. Mentorship and opportunities to accept awards or any other support from the industry guests.
2. Each selected project will be facilitated with accommodation and airport transfer.
 - a. One room accommodation for each team throughout these dates (**checkout on 10 September*).
 - Editing Lab 1-10 September.*
 - Storytelling Lab 3-10 September.*
 - Short Storytelling Lab 4-10 September.*
 - Producing Lab 4-10 September.*
 - b. Airport transfer to/from Bali airport (1-10 September).

Fee

1. All filmmakers can submit their projects for free.
2. Selected projects in the following labs are required to pay a participation fee of € 150-250

PROJECT SUBMISSION

Please start your application at bit.ly/dbts26apply.

Deadline for submission: **29 March 2026, 23:59 UTC+7.**

Before filling out the form, you may review the form fields in this [link](#).

CONTACT PERSON

docsbythesea@in-docs.org (Yosu)

KEY DATES

Call for submissions	
Project submission	25 February–29 March 2026
Selected projects announcement	19 June 2026

Virtual sessions	
All labs	10–31 July 2026
Pitch Methodology Online Session	14 August 2026
In person sessions & events	
Editing Lab	2–4 September 2026
Storytelling Lab	4 September 2026
Producing lab, Short Storytelling Lab, and Pitch exercise (Editing & Storytelling Lab)	5 September 2026
Pitching forum, industry talks, 1-on-1 meetings, awarding	6–9 September 2026

FAQ

1. Can I apply for more than one project?

You can apply for more than one project, although the chance to have both of them picked in the same lab (or Editing and Storytelling Lab) would be really low due to scheduling conflicts. We might pick both projects if one of them is submitted for the producing Lab.

2. I'm a first-time documentary filmmaker, would that be a disadvantage in submitting my project?

We are open to submissions from first-time documentary filmmakers, provided that their projects align with the editorial considerations detailed in our submission guidelines.

3. I have never attended a film lab before, would that be a disadvantage in submitting my project?

No, filmmakers who haven't attended a film lab are welcome to apply.

4. Can I register as a director and editor for my project?

Yes, you can register as both director and editor in the Editing Lab.

5. Can I submit a hybrid documentary film?

Yes, you can submit a hybrid documentary film. Docs by the Sea welcomes all kinds of documentary projects that align with the editorial considerations outlined in the submission guidelines.

6. My project is still in the research/development stage and we haven't shot any materials. Can I still submit my project?

Submitting audiovisual materials is mandatory to complete application, as they help our selection juries understand your vision and creative direction for the project. However, if you don't have a trailer ready, excerpts will be sufficient for the application.

7. Is there any duration limit for the rough cut when applying for the Editing Lab?

Yes, the submitted rough cut must be within 60–180 minutes duration.

8. I have a rough cut but still plan to continue shooting. Can I still apply for the Editing Lab?

Yes, you can still apply to the Editing Lab even if you're still in the late stages of production.

9. Who and/or what companies are the decision makers that will be coming to the forum event?

We will be inviting global film distributors, film festival representatives, international documentary producers, and television commissioning editors. For the detailed list, please stay tuned to our social media accounts and website.

10. I can't attend the offline forum event, can I do the pitch online?

The participants must be available to attend the offline pitching forum. Please head to our submission guideline for the event schedule so you can plan your travel ahead.

11. As the producer of a project, can I register my team for the Editing Lab?

Yes, you can. For the Editing Lab, it's required that both the director and editor participate. You may fill out the registration form on behalf of your team.

12. Our team is interested in participating in the Editing Lab. I, as the producer of the project, hold citizenship in one of the listed countries. However, my editor and director's citizenships are not listed. Are we still eligible to apply?

Yes, you are still eligible to apply. We require at least one of the team members to hold citizenship in one of the listed countries.

13. My citizenship is not listed as an eligible country to apply for Docs by the Sea. However, my lineage does, and my story revolves around the listed country. Can I still apply?

Each team must have at least one member who holds citizenship in the listed countries. You may apply if you have a director or producer in your team who can prove their citizenship in said country.

14. Why do we pay a participant fee?

Docs by the Sea is committed to delivering a meaningful program for filmmakers and industry representatives. The fees will help cover event costs and support ongoing operations in the coming years.

15. When and how can I pay for the participant fee?

This will be informed upon participant selection confirmation.