

RTÉ Independent Productions

RTÉ Commissioning Procedures

This document outlines RTÉ's commissioning procedures for independently produced programming, providing detailed guidance across the following areas:

1. Advertising
2. Application Processing
3. Tendering
4. Extension of Commissions
5. Receipt of programme proposals outside of the commissioning cycle

1.1 Commissioning - Advertising Procedure, Purpose and Benefit

RTÉ operates a published commissioning process that includes briefing sessions for the independent production sector, the release of specific programme briefs and call-outs, and the use of an electronic system through which independent producers can submit programme proposals. This system offers three key advantages:

- It ensures that proposals are aligned with RTÉ's specific programming needs.
- It provides all independent producers with an equal opportunity to submit ideas, guaranteeing universal access to RTÉ Television's commissioning process.
- It formalises and structures the proposal-submission process, creating a clear and efficient framework that benefits both RTÉ and the independent production community.

Steps

A detailed business plan is prepared annually which includes a review of programme and schedule performance, the establishment of linear schedule priorities, RTÉ Player requirements and the costing and agreement of the required programming and schedule needs. This results in an agreed transmission schedule and programme delivery along with a detailed list of commissioning programme requirements by genre. Independent productions are commissioned each year to meet these specific programming needs.

Milestone dates are put in place and include the following:

- timeframe within which the receipt of proposals is automatically acknowledged.
- timeframe within which initial eSubmissions are rejected or progressed for further discussion.

Appropriate advertisements or commissioning briefs will be approved in conjunction with Director of Video and/or the Managing Editor Video. These commissioning briefs will be posted online for each genre:

- devised by the relevant Head/Group Head of Genre following schedule and business reviews.
- regularly updated and revised following decisions made by the Director of Video and/or the Managing Editor Video during the year to reflect specific programming needs.

Proposals received as a result of advertisements or commissioning briefs are reviewed and thereafter some are selected for potential further development, for commission/re-commission etc. See Section below for more detailed consideration of this process. In some cases, for time specific reasons, advertisements or

commissioning briefs will have a specific closing date and, in these instances, proposals received after the closing date may/will be held for review for future consideration.

1.2 Commissioning - Application Processing Procedure, Purpose and Benefit

Across the commissioning process, a large volume of applications is typically received by RTÉ. Setting out guidelines for handling these applications ensures that they are dealt with in an orderly and efficient manner. The eSubmission form is a comprehensive form, which will include a programme synopsis, key talent and outline budget. RTÉ Independent Productions has an established online eCommissioning system, which is used to record all relevant details of submitted proposals and of commissioned programmes. It forms an integral part of the procedures in place to demonstrate objective and efficient operation of the commissioning process. The commissioning process will be operated on a rolling basis to facilitate the communication of commissioning priorities (via online commissioning briefs) to the independent sector where discussion, assessment and final decisions on programme submissions can be made all year round.

Operating a rolling commissioning process will result in programme submissions being assessed and processed through the various assessment phases (detailed below) and will/may result in submissions being at different stages in the assessment process at any given time.

Steps

- Each eSubmission form received is automatically allocated a unique reference number and automatically acknowledged to the Independent Producer.
- When proposals are submitted, they are divided under subcategories of each genre where appropriate.
- A universal list of key criteria for the assessment of submissions across genres and categories is agreed and signed off on by the Heads/Group Heads of Genre and the Director of Video and/or the Managing Editor Video prior to commissioning briefs being posted online and submissions being received by RTÉ.

Phase 1

To assess which proposals received are credible as potential programme commissions, each individual proposal is read and assessed against the agreed criteria, by two people including the relevant Head/Group Head of Genre. All proposals are read "blind", i.e. the person reading and assessing does not have access to the assessment of other assessors. The assessments, in this case 'consider further' or 'reject', are uploaded on the online eCommissioning system. Following the first round of reading all proposals receiving two rejects are automatically eliminated. The result of this process is a shortlist of proposals for further consideration. For each genre or genre sub-category, the outcome of Phase 1 is recorded on a two weekly basis on a Phase 1 - Composite Form, which details all the programmes rejected and those for further consideration. The two readers sign this. Given that commissioning will operate on a rolling basis, RTÉ is committed to phase 1 proposals being read and assessed within a **two week timeframe**. This may result in a number of phase 1 composite forms for each programme genre/sub-genre.

All proposals receiving two 'consider further's' are short-listed for Phase 2.

All proposals receiving one 'consider further' and one 'reject' will be discussed by the two assessors at the composite meeting stage and a final decision to consider further or reject such proposals will be reached. Following the composite meeting discussion, the e-commissioning system will be updated to record the final verdicts on these proposals and the composite meeting form will reflect final decisions to either reject or consider further each proposal.

Formal notification of rejections is issued to Independent Producers in respect of all rejected proposals. Given the significant volume of submissions, the issue of a statement to each independent producer outlining the

reason for rejecting the programme proposal is not feasible. This concludes Phase 1 of the Commissioning Process.

Phase 2 (N.B. Phase 2 readers will be the same as in phase 1)

Commissioning teams may/will begin a dialogue with the independent producer on the ideas that are most promising. Following this dialogue the Independent Producer can/may be requested to update the online eSubmission form for Phase 2 of the Commissioning Process.

The shortlisted proposals are re-read by two readers and then discussed with Director of Video and/or the Managing Editor Video with a view to further short-listing and both readers upload assessments for each on the online eCommissioning system.

RTÉ reserve the right at this stage to seek additional information or clarification of the proposals under review. RTÉ also reserve the right to hold pitching sessions at this stage of the process. At the conclusion of Phase 2, each project will fall into one of three categories:

1. RTÉ is interested.
2. RTÉ is interested but the concept needs to be developed further.
3. RTÉ is not interested in the proposal.

To record the outcome of Phase Two, the two readers email the IPU Office to complete the online Phase Two - Composite Form which details the next set of rejected proposals and final shortlist.

When Heads/Group Heads of Genre are nearing decisions on which proposals they wish to proceed with for specific slots, Producers may be notified via the eCommissioning website of this and may be given a further last opportunity to send in proposals. Proposals not proceeded with at this time may be considered for future programme slots.

Notification of rejections is issued to Independent Producers in respect of all rejected proposals. Despite the significant volume of submissions, RTÉ commissioning teams will endeavour to provide specific rationale/feedback to each independent producer outlining the reason for rejecting the programme proposal.

The various decisions and outcomes above, including details of any pitching sessions held with the Independent Producers, are recorded on a timely basis on the online eCommissioning system.

Heads/Group Heads of Genre have discretion to accept a proposal for development or completion outside of the commissioning cycle, where the commitment to spend would not exceed a specified cap without the approval of the Director of Video and/or the Managing Editor Video. All other decisions require formal approval (written sign off) in accordance with agreed specified thresholds.

Phase 3

To conclude the commissioning process a series of routine meetings take place between the Head/Group Heads of Genre and the Director of Video and/or the Managing Editor Video. The Head/Group Heads of Genre brings forward his/her lists of final recommendations for commission to the RTÉ Video Greenlight Group. These lists include all short-listed proposals from Phase 2.

Following the Phase 3 meetings, Director of Video and/or the Managing Editor Video approve final decisions at the RTÉ Video Greenlight Group. All commissioning decisions are approved by RTÉ Video Senior Management and RTÉ's Chief Financial Officer, Director General and the RTÉ Board, where appropriate, within predetermined spend limits.

Upon completion of specific programme category requirements within the schedule, the relevant Head/Group Heads of Genre complete Summary Form(s) as required for each genre subcategory. This form serves as a

means of confirmation that key procedures have been followed during the process. It also provides documentary evidence that the designated RTÉ Independent Productions personnel have conducted all the required discussions and meetings envisaged as part of the decision process with the appropriate level of participation. The relevant Head/Group Head of Genre, Director of Video and/or the Managing Editor Video sign these forms.

1.3 Commissioning - Tendering Procedure, Purpose and Benefit

Certain programmes sought from the independent sector are specified in advance to a high degree of detail and these are effectively commissioned by way of a limited tender. In light of RTÉ's statutory position, it must, of course, exercise great care in ensuring that the tender process is fair and is seen to be fair to all concerned.

Steps

The relevant RTÉ Independent Productions Head/Group Head of Genre and Business and Finance Manager compile a list of prospective production companies to be invited to tender based on agreed pre-determined criteria. Director of Video and/or the Managing Editor Video signs off on both the criteria and list of companies.

A limited number of companies are then invited to tender, in response to detailed specifications for the commission.

In some cases, expressions of interest may be sought from the independent sector and on the basis of agreed criteria companies are then invited to tender.

If requests for further information are received from individual independent producers during the tender period, and such information is given, it is given to all independent producers who have been asked to tender.

Deadlines for receipt of tender submissions are specified and are stringently adhered to.

Designated individuals from Internal Audit, Purchasing and RTÉ Independent Productions attend the opening of tenders and the details are recorded by Internal Audit (separate from RTÉ Independent Productions).

As set out in the RTÉ Independent Productions Commissioning Procedures and Guidelines, Independent Producers list the contents of their submission in a checklist appended to their covering letter and this is verified and signed off when the bid is opened. As each reviewer receives the submission, he/she reviews the checklist and ensures that he/she has received the full contents.

Following the assessment of proposals against agreed criteria, short-listed Independent Producers may be invited to pitch their proposal before a group of people including the specific Head/Group Head of Genre and Business & Finance Manager or their nominees.

A Tender Summary Form is completed to record the tender process and results. This is issued to the Director of Video and/or the Managing Editor Video for sign off. Appropriate Approval Forms or Material Commitment Forms are signed off as appropriate.

1.4 Commissioning - Extension of Commissions (Re-Commissions) Procedure, Purpose and Benefit

Based on an Independent Producer's past performance in producing a particular programme or the success or importance of a particular programme in the schedule, a decision may be taken to re-commission the production rather than putting the programme out to tender or requesting a replacement programme via an appropriate advertisement or commissioning brief.

Steps

The Head/Group Head of Genre formally documents the reasons for a re-commission.

The Director of Video and the Managing Editor Video approve the recommendation indicating specific acceptance of the justification offered. The appropriate Approval Forms or Material Commitment Forms are then signed off by the relevant RTÉ senior management.

After a maximum of four years, every commission is re-advertised unless the Director of Video and/or the Managing Editor Video approve otherwise, in writing.

1.5 Receipt of programme proposals outside of the commissioning cycle

Ideas generated by the independent production sector may, in very exceptional cases, fall outside the normal commissioning process. In addition, RTÉ itself may wish to commission programmes outside the pre-determined cycle. This is likely to be driven by the occurrence of particular events and/or the identification of particular schedule requirements with a short time frame for delivery.

Procedures are in place whereby such ideas, if accepted, are justified. Clearly, it is important that the treatment of these programme ideas is seen to be fair to all producers.

- Independent Producers can contact a Head of Genre or other appropriate person directly.
- As per the terms of RTÉ's Code of Practice with SPI, submissions that are received either orally or via e-mail are not considered formal proposals. Where a Head of Genre receives such a proposal and considers it to have merit, they will revert to the producer and ask that the proposal be submitted through the RTÉ eCommissioning system.

Note: This document is amended from time to time by RTÉ as appropriate