

New *Emerging Screenwriters' Incubator* initiative brings industry together to invest in diverse writing talent

SBS, in partnership with Screen Australia, state and territory agencies Film Victoria, Screen Canberra, Screen NSW, Screen Queensland, Screenwest and the South Australian Film Corporation, and with the assistance of the Australian Writers' Guild, are launching the **Emerging Screenwriters' Incubator**: a new, nationwide initiative to support the development of diverse fiction writing talent in the Australian screen sector.

Working with some of Australia's leading production companies, the Emerging Screenwriters' Incubator will bring the industry together to contribute to greater diversity among Australian screenwriting talent, by providing significant work experience in drama production for 18 emerging writers from backgrounds and with lived experiences currently underrepresented in the sector. This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; people who are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; those who are living with a disability; are female or trans/gender diverse; identify as LGBTQIA+; and people located in regional and remote areas.

Each year for the next three years, six successful candidates will be employed for 12 months in production companies around the country acclaimed for their delivery of Australian drama. During their placement, they will develop ideas into treatments, work across a production company's fiction slate of programming, participate in writers' rooms, and work closely with development producers and others to increase their knowledge and further develop their skills.

Co-funded by SBS, Screen Australia with participating state and territory screen agencies, the national initiative will launch with its first round of placements in July this year.

SBS Director of TV and Online Content, Marshall Heald, said: "SBS is proud to be working with our partners across the industry, who share our commitment to diversity, to make an important contribution to the future of Australian storytelling through the Emerging Screenwriters' Incubator. Not only is this initiative an important investment in the next generation of screenwriting talent, it will help to ensure the unique perspectives and experiences of those who reflect contemporary Australia, are explored on our screens.

"I want to acknowledge those in our sector like director, screenwriter and showrunner, Tony Ayres, who have long demonstrated their passion for the benefits a more inclusive industry and have inspired so many. It's through conversations with Tony that this initiative came to be, and it's now incredibly exciting to see the momentum we have across the industry to come together to do more. Our storytelling will be all the better for it."

Tony Ayres added: "Marshall and I have been having a great and ongoing discussion about the



best ways to make long lasting and meaningful change to our industry, and to genuinely shift the needle towards a wider, truer representation of Australia. This initiative is a brilliant start and will broaden the talent pool of writers from underrepresented parts of our society. Writing is where it all starts."

Screen Australia's Head of Content, Sally Caplan, said: "This initiative is testament to our industry's commitment to working together to make the sector more inclusive, and accessible for emerging talent. We are excited to be collaborating with SBS, AWG, and state and territory screen agencies on uncovering and developing the next generation of screenwriting talent through this program."

Susie Hamilton, Professional Development Manager, Australian Writers' Guild, said: "The Australian Writers' Guild is delighted to be part of the Emerging Screenwriters' Incubator, an initiative designed to not only create opportunities but to break down the barriers standing in the way of meaningful representation in the screen industry. It will provide participants with significant opportunities to develop their craft and networks, and will undoubtedly change their career trajectories. We look forward to seeing the talent of the writers and the stories that emerge from this experience."

Film Victoria CEO, Caroline Pitcher, said: "Film Victoria's screen development internship and key talent placement programs have long demonstrated the significant impact these intensive experiences can have on the careers of screen creators. We are proud to support the Emerging Screenwriters' Incubator to elevate new voices and to ensure that we see more diverse stories on screen."

Monica Penders, CEO of Screen Canberra, said: "We are very pleased to be involved in this exciting initiative. For a small jurisdiction like ours it is so vital that we can provide opportunities for our writers to upskill, increase their networks and get those all important credits. And sometimes that means outside of the ACT."

Screen Queensland Chief Creative Officer, Jo Dillon, said, "This new incubator initiative has the potential to dramatically increase the diversity of Australian screen stories being made for national and international audiences, and Screen Queensland is wholly committed to delivering and supporting programs that give voice to underrepresented screenwriters."

Grainne Brunsdon, Head of Screen NSW, said: "The time has come to hear new voices and the Emerging Screenwriters' Incubator and Screen NSW is proud to invest and support diverse writing talents through this program. This initiative will make it possible for a refreshingly new cohort of screenwriters to learn the ropes, tell their stories, and redefine the idea of what makes an Australian story, and I can't wait to hear what they have to say!"

Willie Rowe, CEO of Screenwest, said, "Screenwest is always looking for new ways to enhance the representation of Indigenous and diverse voices and talent within the industry. This is an incredible opportunity for Western Australian screenwriters to improve their craft develop their skills and build their networks."

CEO of the South Australian Film Corporation, Kate Croser, said: "The SAFC is pleased to support this initiative as part of our ongoing commitment to grow and diversify the pool of



credited South Australian key creatives."

Details on applying for the *Emerging Screenwriter's Incubator* will be released in the coming weeks. Each participating state and territory screen agency will reach out to local networks and from June, the selection process will begin, with placements at production companies from July 2021.

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