

Germany

Keeping up with Les Joneses

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One year ago, in the interest of keeping up with the growing French film industry, the German government and the German Federal Film Board (FFA) announced a change to the German Federal Film Fund (DFFF). Under the new program the federal government provides annual grants to the tune of €60 million (US\$88.7 million) to German producers.

Applications for funds do not have to be submitted at a certain time of year, as there is no jury that meets to distribute funding. Rather, cash distribution is decided upon by the FFA. For an official coproduction to apply for funding, the German producer is only required to have produced at least one full-length film in Germany (or another member state of the European Union) within five years of the application. For documentaries, said film must have had commercial release in German cinemas with distribution of at least four copies in order to meet the requirements.

First films are also eligible for funding through the DFFF as long as the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media (BKM), the FFA or one of the regional film boards gives approval. Qualifying documentary films must have a running time of at least 79 minutes, production costs of at least €200,000 (\$295,000), with at least 25% of production costs spent in Germany. The grant can cover up to 20% of the approved German production costs. A cultural eligibility test must be filled out in order to test qualifying films and will be graded on a point system.

Based in Berlin, the FFA began in 1968 as the result of a law passed in the interest of the promotion of German cinema. It is partially funded by a film levy of 1.8% to 3% of annual gross turnover from German exhibitors and video distributors, as well as public and private television.

While the DFFF is clearly targeted at higher-budgeted, theatrical releases, regional funding is also available through seven different areas of Germany. Each region (or *lander*) has its own policies for dealing with cultural funding. Berlin-Brandenburg and North Rhine-Westfalen are notoriously the bigger regions for funding and are the most typical areas for coproducing. The Berlin-Brandenburg Medienboard was founded in January 2004, and supplies funding to major films and TV productions. Funding given by the Medienboard is only meant to be paid back by 'successful' films.

North Rhine-Westphalia partnered with broadcaster WDR in 1991 to create the Filmstiftung Nordrhein-Westfalen, a project intended to promote local films and create jobs in the film production industry. Since adding the cooperation of broadcasters ZDF and RTL, with an annual budget of €33 million (\$48.7 million), the Filmstiftung makes funding available to producers who spend at least 150% of the money they receive in the region. The Baden-Württemberg region, while smaller on funding than the previous two, is supportive of larger docs through its media program (mfg) with an annual budget of €10 million (\$14.8 million), and the Baden-Württemberg Award for Best Documentary that is awarded biannually and comes with a prize of €20,000 (\$29,500).

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Though there are regional funds available, many German documentary and factual producers get the majority of their funding from pre-sales and licensing fees from both national and international broadcasters. Germany has two different public broadcasting systems that share the largest percentage of audience. One is ARD, which started in 1950 and functions much like America's PBS. Each state in Germany has its own station, and they sometimes do productions (and coproductions) on their own, or other times pool their resources and create programs together that they broadcast throughout the entire ARD system across all of Germany. ZDF is the second public broadcaster and appeared on the scene in 1963. There are production and coproduction opportunities available with strands that feature programs on archeology, nature, science and history.

Till Hoffmann, managing director of Mainz-based medical and science producer Medi Cine Medienproduktions says these public German broadcasters are used to buying all the rights to the programs they acquire. Therefore, getting government assistance isn't always an option, unless you can keep the rights and sell to international markets instead. "This kind of makes it difficult if you do not have a strong international market interest in your product," says Hoffmann.

Private channels entered the German television landscape around 20 years ago, and currently, according to Uwe Kersken, managing director of Cologne-based Gruppe 5 Filmproduktion, the most important private channel in Germany for documentaries is ProSieben (or Pro 7). It has done some coproductions with the BBC, such as the wildlife program *Pride - The Law of the Savannah* and the science series *The Truth About Food*, and it runs many science-focused strands on an almost nightly basis.

RTL, one of the biggest private broadcasters in Germany, is a more commercial station and only runs documentaries from time to time. According to Kersken, "It depends on how important or how big a program can be. If you found a family of speaking polar bears, then they would broadcast it. Though they don't have regular slots, you can do movies or docudramas from time to time with them."

Another channel to keep in mind is the German/French invention ARTE, which focuses heavily on art-based documentary, is partially owned by both ARD and ZDF and has much experience with coproductions.

The functioning of the broadcasters may not have changed much over the past few years, but, according to Friederike Freier, a producer at Leipzig's Le Vision, the landscape is getting more competitive. "Where in the past we spent maybe five to 15 months securing a commission, depending on the size of the budget and the project, sometimes it feels like it takes twice as long now," she says.

German links

German Federal Film Board

The role of the FFA is to promote and improve the structure of the German film industry. It is also responsible for the German Federal Film Fund.

ffa.de

German Film Service + Marketing GmbH

The national information and advisory center for the promotion of German films worldwide.

german-films.de/en

FOCUS Germany

Companies looking to partner with a German production company can seek the help of FOCUS Germany, an organization created in 1990 to aid filmmakers looking for info on funding and production

opportunities.

focusgermany.de

Regional (lander) funds

Each region in Germany has its own fund to encourage filming in different areas of the country.

Here is a sample:

Berlin-Brandenburg Film Commission:

bbfc.de

Bayern Film Commission:

film-commission-bayern.de

Baden-Württemberg:

mfg.de/film/

Hamburg Film Fund:

ffhh.de

Nordrhein-Westfalen Film Fund:

filmstiftung.de

Mitteldeutsche Medienförderung:

Mdm-online.de

Lower Saxony and Bremen's nordmedia:

nordmedia.de