



Grant Application Introductory Workshop Series

Workshop 6: Applying to CODE

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Content to Cover

- ▶ CODE's goals and focuses
- ▶ CODE's 3 Main Grants
- ▶ Application process - how it works from beginning to end
- ▶ Overview: Parts of the Application
- ▶ Breakdown of the Main Application Document Writing Guide
- ▶ Realities and best practices
- ▶ Getting in contact and final notes
- ▶ Q&A

This is a lot of info...



..and it might jump around a bit

Hold on as you can, you have these docs to refer to



...if you have any burning questions, contact your RCM

CODE's Goals & Focuses

- ▶ CODE is an Economic Development Agency
- ▶ Our goal is to help games studios in Aotearoa build sustainable businesses on behalf of MBIE and New Zealand tax payers
- ▶ One way we do this is through grants
- ▶ 3rd party assessors review CODE's grant applications and select studios that show deep understanding of the games industry, of which the studio's game is a part
- ▶ We understand that making games is risky, however we are a risk averse organisation - it's about mitigation

CODE Grants

Travel Grant

- A grant to travel to one or more events for business outcomes
 - Meeting with Publishers
 - Meeting with potential clients for Work for Hire
 - Marketing for an upcoming release
- Can only receive grant funding for an event every 365 days
- Up to \$8,000 NZD (w/ 20% co-pay)

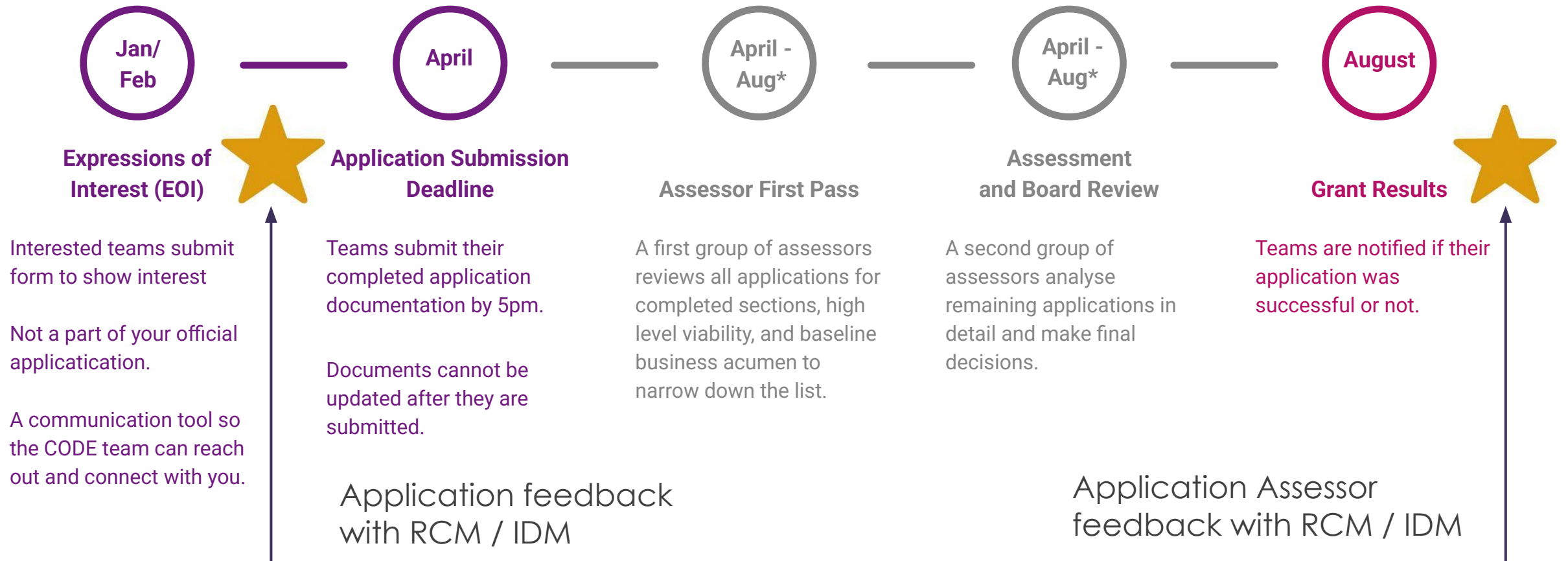
Kickstart Grant

- A grant to fund teams/studios who are
 - In the earlier stages of development
 - Want to grow a sustainable studio
 - Have identified a USP
 - Have researched the viability of their game
 - Have identified their audiences and have plans on how to connect with them
- Up to \$40,000 NZD

Start Up Grant

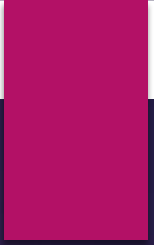
- A grant to fund studios who
 - Have created a playable prototype for their game
 - Are in the midst of marketing their game
 - and/or connecting with publishers or other ways to fund the remainder of their game
 - Have a clear path in development, production, and marketing to shipping (releasing) their game
- Up to \$150,000

Application Process



Parts of the Application

- ▶ Main Application Document
- ▶ Application Form
- ▶ Core team CVs
- ▶ Build of the game (if applicable)
- ▶ Your Production spreadsheet
 - ▶ please use our provided spreadsheet
- ▶ Any supplemental documentation supporting your application



Application Sections

Writing Guide Breakdown

Forward

This guide has been created to help teams and/or studios interested in applying for a Kickstart or Start Up Grant from the New Zealand Centre of Digital Excellence (aka CODE).

The objective of the grant funding from CODE is to support teams in their early stages of their journey towards becoming a sustainable studio able to support itself through the sale of their games.

While we acknowledge and respect the creative work that goes into making games, this application must additionally demonstrate the business development work that has been done (and will be done) to decrease risk and increase the chances of the studio being able to sustainably support New Zealand game developers.

Please note:

- The document will contain a combination of information that would be found in a typical Game Design Document and/or Pitch Deck as well as information that would be found in a cohesive Business Plan.
- The intention of asking our applicants to complete this process is twofold; it helps our assessors check off the requirements needed to see that your project is viable for the level of funding you are applying for, and it provides a standard format to frame your planning.
- It is also beneficial for you as an applicant because it will equip you with a “toolbox” from which to draw material when you go to pitch to publishers, platform holders such as Xbox, PlayStation etc. and other financial partners, as well as helping you to think about potential plans and paths for your game's release and beyond.
- While we do **not** require exhaustive detail (i.e. your full Game Design Document, or all of the data gathered for your market research), we **do** require the key points that validate your project and demonstrates that the project is viable and stands out in its genre - both in terms of game design and market analysis.
- To be clear, you will not submit your whole Game Design Document nor your entire business plan but you will need to submit a document that conveys;
 - The fun and distinct aspects of your title; tone, mechanics or otherwise, and the relevant research-based evidence that proves that your game is worth supporting
 - The high level production and financial plans that are reasonable and achievable
 - The summary of your market research, the breakdown of your audiences, and the marketing plan to how you'll be connecting with your players
 - The evidence that you / your team has the experience needed to produce the product

Writing Guide - Introduction

- ▶ Give the assessors a very high overview of your game to get them ready to dive into the specifics of your game. This should include:
 - ▶ Your one-line elevator pitch.
 - ▶ A brief paragraph summarising your game.
 - ▶ A sentence or two identifying your main target audiences.

This is a taster to give the assessors context and get them interested.

What is one thing that should definitely be introduced here? USPs!

Writing Guide - Game Play p.1

- Give an overview of your game that explains the exceptional systems, features, and experiences of your current understanding of your full game
- Include things like:
 - Main gameplay style, genre, and theming
 - Core gameplay loop(s) with descriptions of the main phases/features in these loops
 - Hint: include diagrams
 - How these systems/loops combine to make engaging gameplay
 - A couple of examples of things like items, power ups, gear, or other features
- Highlight what mechanics and features will make your game stand out as your USPs (Unique Selling Points) and key differentiators.

After reading this, the reader should have a clear idea of what they'll be doing if they were to sit down to play your demo.

If your genre has other games as touchstones, you can use and reference these, but point out differences.

The Assessors want to know about the full game, not just the demo you'd be working on as part of the grant - we need to see your full vision.

The things that your audience will enjoy (including USPs) should shine and later relate back to your Go to Market section.

Writing Guide - Game Play p.2

- If appropriate, provide a Narrative design section to explain the extent of your narrative
 - Describe your theming and how will present throughout your game
 - Breakdown any applicable main plot points, how they are intertwined with gameplay, and what the ending to the narrative will be
 - Include an excerpt of a script or dialogue as a supplementary document for narrative-heavy games

Spoil the ending!

Not all narrative design is story or dialogue. Talk about how you're showcasing theme and how it's reflected in gameplay.

If you're narrative heavy, your writing should shine through, especially throughout the Game Play section. Descriptive language is welcome (yay adjectives!)

Writing Guide - Game Play p.3

- For serious games, provide research and evidence for the educational or informative value of your game, or how you intend on measuring outcomes if you have not commenced evidence-gathering yet.
- Describe the accessibility features and accommodations you will be including in your game.

Note: The point here is to show how your game will work as a whole and excite players within the genre without getting too far into the detail of describing every single mechanic, item, option, etc.

Serious games have to go the extra mile here to show how your game is fit for purpose. Including expert opinions on your game's potential impact can also be very helpful.

Including accessibility features opens up to a big audience. Publishers are starting to look at this. Do some good research.

Note for return applicants: we're taking out the accessibility section in the form and moving it to the doc so you're not doubling up. This section should have its own subheading in the Main Application Doc.

Find the right layer of description. Utilise your game loops (they come with subheadings installed!)

Writing Guide - Art & Animation p.1

- Describe your intended art style for your game and include examples of concept art, key art, environment art, screenshots, gifs of animations, or assets of characters, items, etc, that you've made for your game if you have them
 - It is more important for you to show the vision of what the final product will look like rather than current screenshots with lots of placeholder artwork
- Mention and include any influences you are drawing from, and explain what parts of these inspirations you are tying into your style
- Include the different feelings you are trying to evoke in your players

Games are art! You can let this shine here.

Be selective of which images you use. They don't all need to be screenshots.

Don't forget about things like animations, particle effects, juice, etc.

Caption the images to help explain what you are showing off with it.

Writing Guide - Art & Animation p.2

- UI or UI-mockups should also be included in this section
- If you are in the early stages of development, images of other games or other types of inspiration can be helpful in describing your intended style, but keep in mind...
 - This should serve as a demonstration in conjunction with some concept or character art.
 - Explain what part of these inspirational examples you plan to draw on.
 - Any art/screenshots that are from outside of your game must be labelled and credited.
 - Aim to have at least one or more parts of key art and/or examples of a game screen to show what the game will eventually look like to show what your vision is..

Again, UI can be placeholder but give the idea about what the finished product will look like (especially in UI heavy games).

Early concept, or sketches, are fine to include, just label them as such, and try to have at least a couple that are more polished. Yes this means potentially needing to pay someone.

If there will be technical challenges for implementing the art, this is also a good place to include that info.

If Art is low priority for your audience, speak to that and what your business decisions are around it.

Writing Guide - Art & Animation p.3

- A note on AI-art
 - We appreciate that for many developers, providing professional-level concept art at an early design stage may not be feasible so many will resort to AI art generators.
 - Please label these “concept art only” in your application and know that Generated AI content can not be included in the final game as per our Terms and Conditions.
 - Be mindful that CODE is currently working on the premise that if there is a risk of infringement of intellectual property with the use of AI art in a game, we reserve the right to refuse funding.
 - Be mindful of use of AI art around Māori or Indigenous subject matter where it may not be appropriate.
 - If in doubt, talk to your Regional Content Manager or the Industry Development Manager before submitting.

If using AI art, know that the Assessors tend to look extra hard at the rest of the art section to understand what the vision is for art. Make it crystal clear and fit for purpose.

Aagin, it really helps to have at least a couple of human made images to help show where you're headed. Yes that means you might need to pay someone - plan for it, it's an investment in your game.

Writing Guide - Sound Design

- Sound design is an integral part of your game and needs to be considered even at early stages
- Describe the choices you're making around
 - Music
 - Sound Effects (SFX)
 - Voice Acting (if applicable)
- Include a playlist of original music or SFX (if you have any) and/or inspirational tracks and what specifically about these examples you want to highlight or apply to your game
- Describe the styles of music, if/how it will change throughout gameplay, the emotions you're trying to evoke in your players, and any special systems or technology plan to use (if any)
- It is fine to include links or samples in your supplementary material.

Again, if there's anything technically challenging here, include the details.

Writing Guide - Production p.1

- Provide a few sentences describing what the grant will allow you do to develop your game
- Create a high level schedule for the development of your game including major features and milestones.
- Discuss major production milestones and any challenges you may face. It is important that we see the full scope of production, not just the timeline that will be covered by the grant.
- Consider including visual diagrams of the schedule.

Thinking in features as opposed to individual tasks (too small) or milestones (too big) especially for the grant period. This may mean making a detailed plan for your team and then a condensed one for the application.

Remember that marketing beats will impact development time and milestones. Make time for social media prep or trailer work (especially if you don't have a person dedicated to it).

This helps the assessors understand how grounded you are about how long things will take.

I highly recommend the high level visual diagram.

Writing Guide - Production p.2

- Include all of your plans if you have more than one pathway to release (eg. with and without receiving a code grant, etc).
- Feel free to include a section on risk management. I.E. Identifying potential risks and what your team is going to do to actively mitigate them.
- Please note that all production schedules should align with the hours within the Production Spreadsheet.

Start with (best) plan A and then work your way down through the worst case - show you've thought about it.

For risks, look up a risk register, and think about your production's biggest threats.

Double check your sheets just before you submit your application. This is a common mistake and someone always does the maths.

Writing Guide - Finances p.1

- At a KickStart level, we are not expecting definitive answers on where you expect to get additional funding from but we would like to see potentially realistic plans that you plan to pursue. Be mindful of actual sources and your strategy, rather than “we’re going to talk to publishers.”
- At a StartUp level, we need to see the plans to fund the game through to launch in addition to any monies you may receive from CODE. These can include publisher advances (or intention to receive them), platform funding, venture capital funding, personal funds, or other methods.
- For serious games, be sure to mention any staged funding plans as your path may not be a single round of funding.

Show us the how when it comes to funding via publisher. What are you going to do to connect and pitch to publishers? Give the steps so the assessor knows what you'd actually do.

Give us your spreadsheet of publishers or potential financial partners that includes any important details. Make it something you'll actually use. Show us you've researched this.

Writing Guide - Finances p.2

- Mention the current funding and/or time that has been put towards the project so far.
- Include any relevant publishing deals, market attachments, commercial opportunities, completed crowdfunding efforts and raising attempts as a supplemental document and include a description of where you are within this process in the main document.
- Note that this financial information will be paired with the Production Spreadsheet.

Be clear about which are actual dollars or “in kind” time.

Note that if you are in talks with a publisher and terms or contracts are in play, you can update your RCM/IDM and they can pass the info and potentially the document on mid-assessment. Other than team personnel changes, this is the only info we can update on once the assessments are in flight.

If you don't include evidence, the assessors will have to conclude the conversations aren't legit / can't be counted.

Writing Guide - Go to Market p.1

- Describe the audiences for your game, what is important to them (including demographics / psychographics, playstyles, etc) and how you will reach and connect with these audiences.
- Include your understanding about the genre(s) that you're game is a part of.
- Support your understanding of audience and genre with competitive analysis.
- Describe your game's marketing plan including:
 - Major marketing beats and schedule
 - Where you'll be connecting with your audiences
 - How you'll connect with your audiences in each of these places

Note that it says "Audiences". Different groups will like your game for difference reasons. Understand what they like and where to find them.

A reminder that your Competitive Analysis should not just be stats. What are you learning from their game's experience?

Hint to relate the different parts of your marketing plan back to your specific audiences. Think about why this is.

Writing Guide - Go to Market p.2

- Kickstart applications are expected to have a strong understanding of their audiences, how to connect with them, and have an understanding of the many ways to connect with them as part of their marketing plan and some exploration into the longer term marketing and Public Relations (PR) strategy.
- StartUp applications are expected to include a solid marketing strategy - this could be a combination of; your social media presence(s), website, paid User Acquisition, PR-planning, advertising, platform and publisher planned-engagement or direct marketing activities - and likely have started executing this strategy or have made significant preparations to do so.
- Consider including a high-level visual diagram of the Marketing Plan.

Kickstart will have some leeway compared to StartUp, but there is an expectation that you can show what your plans as that also impacts other areas! Remember the 4 main marketing beats.

StartUp, we're looking for the path to launch here. Your plan should be quite detailed.

A visual schedule of the big marketing milestones can be helpful. There will be overlap with the production plan (and that's a good thing).

Writing Guide - Go to Market p.3

- If you're making a serious game, specify who your paying customers will be, include your customer payment structure, and your release plan. Be mindful that the people who make most use of the game or the players may not be the actual paying customer. E.G. Teachers and school students rarely make any actual buying decisions of educational games used in the classroom. That's a management-level decision.

Note here that your approaches to each different group might be vastly different and require completely different approaches to connect with each of those audiences.

Writing Guide - Teams p.1

- A brief introduction of your team members should be included in the Main Application Document. It is important to demonstrate that not only is the project viable but the team behind it also has the capability to see the project to launch.
- Include both Core members and the expanded team including contractors, consultants, mentors, etc.
- CVs must be included as supplemental documents for all core team members. Apart from serious games where academic credibility may be relevant, keep them to the relevant highlights and one page only for the assessors.

Your team should include people capable of completing all of the work that is set out in the Production section.

Core team members are ones that will be staying around and would be full time if you had the funding. They also may be helping with creative/technical decisions. These are also the ones who need CVs.

You may want to include CVs for Expanded team who are helping to cover gaps in key skill sets. Just make a note that they aren't Core team.

Writing Guide - Teams p.2

- While CODE appreciates you may not be able to contract team members unless you receive the grant, you should know who they will be, especially in key roles or if you are a tiny team. For larger teams, it is fine to indicate funding may go to, say, a junior designer who is not yet recruited - but not an Art Director. Please note, email addresses must be supplied for named team members and they will be emailed to ensure they are not misrepresented as being attached to the project.
- Feel free to include any additional info about your studio's goals and values.

Having empty spots can often be a red flag. You don't need to have signed contracts, but having verbal agreements that they are keen and able to do the work shows you'll be ready to go if your application is successful.

This is your chance to show who your studio is and how you plan to be part of the NZ game community.

Writing Guide - Builds

- When applying specifically for StartUp funding a prototype will be necessary for your application. This does not have to be a polished, investment-ready demo that you would show a publisher or financial partner but it should be at a stage where the assessor can understand the feel of the game. Include install and playing instructions if necessary.
- For KickStart funding, submitting a build is **not** necessary as this level is designed for earlier stage projects, however if you are applying for funds to help you get to the Vertical Slice stage of development, and your build can be played by the assessors without significant instruction, it may be relevant.
- All builds will be downloaded at time of submission and will not be able to be updated during the assessment process.
- Feel free to include build notes to describe any notable information.

Consider if it's worth including a build. Is the assessor able to play it without instruction and find the fun? If not, it might be better to do a video or not include the build at all. Consider "What does this prove about my game?". If it's only technical ability and not game play, it's likely not worth it (check with your RCM/IDM).

Writing Guide - Final Note

Information regarding the above points will give your application the best chance possible. It is your responsibility to sell the concept of your game and business strategy to the assessor panel, convince them that you understand the business of games, and to identify and mitigate risks, well enough in order for your studio to be sustainable. Remember that the assessors will **not** assume any knowledge or understandings are held by default, and will only be able to assess what you include in your application.

Show the assessors why/how you're making good business decisions and how you're reducing risk enough that you'll be able to fund your game and you'll have an audience keen to buy your game.

Always do a last double check if your documentation to make sure everything is in there.

Writing Guide - Handy Tips

- Use the sections below as headings and subheadings for each section of your document, and keep them generally in this order so it's easy and clear for the assessors to navigate your document.
- Keep your writing clear and concise.
- Write in a third-person business style.
- Use diagrams where appropriate or useful.
- Include any other information or learning that can help to provide additional context on your business skills and decisions.
- Art assets are welcome within the document to help showcase the game's style, but they should not impede the written information.
- Please make sure the assessment panel can see your reasoning if you are making any assertions. E.G. "It is believed that that Developer can get 10,000 users on our Discord server by January 202X"- describe how, including the strategy and methodology. Don't leave the assessors guessing.
- Be specific about your target markets/audiences/players. E.G. "we're targeting mid-core gamers interested in fantasy rogue-likes who will likely have played..." rather than "Male and female gamers, age 18-50".

Writing Guide - Handy Tips

- Avoid the word “unique” or other stock words/phrases - specificity with language will communicate your proposal more effectively than using similarly common expressions - “Unique Selling Points/Proposition” (USP) is the exception to this rule.
- This document should focus on the big picture of what your game has to offer and how the business will become sustainable. The assessment panel does not need to see long asset lists you have yet to complete, but grouping things as features can be helpful to show scope.
- If something is unknown about your game, state this and discuss briefly how you are going to tackle this problem.
- If you are including supplemental documentation, make sure it's organised and readable. Consider including summaries to explain findings.
- Use non-discriminatory language.
- If your game includes content outside of your personal experience, follow guidelines for First Nations content or utilise other appropriate resources. Cultural consultation is not an afterthought.

Writing Guide - Handy Tips

- The applications cut off will be at 5:00pm sharp on the closing date - plan to have your application submitted well before hand in case of technical difficulties.
- Remember that you are not just showing why your game is good, but showing your understanding of business development in the games industry and how you're making good business decisions to lower your risk and give your studio its best chance for sustainability.

Realities

- This application will take at least 40 hours to prepare
- The bar is high
- These grants aren't for everyone
- The Go to Market section, especially Audience and Market Plan are key
- Post grant production plans and financing must make sense
- You might not understand why others were selected - focus on your risks, plans, feedback, etc.
- An unsuccessful application isn't the end
- There is a two attempt limit per game (but there can be exceptions in some cases)
- RCMs / IDMs are here to point you in the right direction, not do the work for you
- All of this process is learning - be keen for it!

Best Practices

- Start Early (you can start now!)
- Book your feedback session early
 - Wait to long, you might not get one
- Be ready for your feedback session
 - You only get one
- Consider if your demo/prototype is ready - maybe a video instead?
- Think from the assessor's point of view
 - What are they looking for?
 - How does the document read?
 - Why is X a benefit / good thing?
- Have someone else read your application
- Submit at least the day before the deadline.

Who to contact?

Antony Maday (he/him)

- Regional Content Manager (RCM)
- antony@nz-code.nz
- _antony.m
- Auckland

Navi Brouwer (she/they)

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Vee Pendergrast (she/her)

- Industry Development Manager (IDM)
- vee@nz-code.nz
- Vvvee
- Dunedin

Not sure?

- funding@nz-code.nz



What's Next?

- We'll send you a resource pack, the video playlist, and edited slide decks
- The new writing guide will be up soon (we'll mention on Discord)
- Speaking of Discord, keep an eye on there (or LinkedIn) for round announcements
- Keep an eye on Discord (once a week) for new insights, info, and links
- Start working on your business plans and application
- Reach out to your RCMs with questions and/or drafts
- Go forth!

If you can get the right balance with everything working in concert, you can achieve great things!



Any Questions?

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Regional Content Manager

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Thank you!

