

EPISODE 5  
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(AL)

GUESTS Amy Parry (AP)

VP – Content Development  
Screen Queensland

#### References

- Loani Arman's [My Body Says](#)
- Screen Queensland [IDEAS program](#)
- [How to apply for the IDEAS program video](#)
- Screen Australia [pitch document resources](#)

#### Blurb

Have a screen story idea that you're looking to develop? In this episode we talk to Screen Queensland's VP of Content Development Amy Parry about the IDEAS program - what to include in your pitch package, when to pitch, and what support Screen Queensland is able to offer to get your idea from the page to the screen.

This episode is for screen practitioners looking to apply for development funding for the first time or those you are interested in the development and pitching process. You can get more information about the specifics of the IDEAS program at the [Screen Queensland Facebook page](#).

AL	Welcome to SQ ON AIR presented by Screen Queensland and exploring the issues and news affecting Queensland screen practitioners. I'm Aimee Lindorff and in this episode I talk to Screen Queensland's VP of Content Development Amy Parry about navigating the development process and what early career practitioners need to know about development and pitching to market and the Screen Queensland IDEAS program.
AL	Thanks for joining us, Amy.
AP	It's great to be speaking with you today and to have the opportunity to speak about development and ideas.
AL	I'm new to the industry. I have an idea - what do I need to start that development process.

	<p>What's the difference between development and pre-production?</p>
<p>AP</p>	<p>Development is anything that goes on before you start pre production. They can kind of bleed into each other a little bit on some series you might have for example a pilot episodes two to four written but it's an eight part series. So as pre production is happening for the beginning episodes of writer's room might still be executing the final episodes in that series. We see that on productions in Australia sometimes that moreover in America where they're in production already but they're still developing the series. so they do bleed into each other a little bit. but we talk about active development which is where you uh nailing down with a market partner how exactly your idea is going to be told. so scripting is doing first second third drafts of scripts working with a team generally of producers, a script editor you might have other writers that you're working with and actively taking that project forward for feedback from the various investors and partners. it if that is how it mostly works in Australia so having a project and having a stage of development where you can kind of deliver materials then for feedback and a partner will then say we want to see more of this project or this isn't for us right now.</p>
<p>AL</p>	<p>What kind of materials are we talking about?</p>
<p>AP</p>	<p>There's a number of different ways to pitch in ideas to partners that you might want to help to develop your idea. you could write a logline which is a sentence that explains your idea succinctly. You could write a synopsis which is a paragraph that goes into a little more detail about your idea and you could write a one pager which again has kind of the general outline of what your idea is as well as it might talk about tone of the project and how you might start to see that on screen and it might touch on audience. So who you hope might watch your idea when it's fully produced. so they're really the bare bones of documents that you want to start with. and and having a slight we talk about which is all of your ideas basically written down with a log line synopsis.</p>
<p>AP</p>	<p>And one page is a really great way to keep track of all of your ideas as well as to have materials there to be able to quickly and easily refer to. if for example you're stuck in an elevator with the head of Netflix and you've got 30 seconds to talk to them you could pitch them your idea and then follow up with your log line synopsis. And one page of very quickly and easily elevator pitch elevator pitch. it happens especially if you're traveling to markets and you're in these environments where there's executives that are buying and looking for ideas. practice pitching those documents. Further to that and and what you would then hope to develop after you had a one pager is to start thinking about a treatment.</p>

AP	<p>That's where you basically write out your idea outline in greater detail. so that can range from anywhere between you know I've seen them as small as five pages before to some writers like to write very detailed treatments up to you know 60-70 pages. So they're doing a lot of planning and script work within that treatment. so that's more for a feature film. For TV series we work with something called a Bible. so that's basically all of the rules and ideas and outlines and characters and tone and world and audience and market and information about the creator. So you and anyone you might be working with and it's meant to really excite anyone that you're giving it to. So again those documents can be anywhere from five pages up to you know endless number of pages but it's meant to not only act as a document for you to refer to and as you bring other people on to your project or you start to talk to people about your idea it's meant to be a document that they can refer to to quickly get them into the world that you're working within.</p>
AL	<p>Should what stage of development should you have those documents ready – do you need them to pitch?</p>
AP	<p>That's a really good question. I think it's great to have several different projects on your slate at different stages of development. you might be focusing and really feeling like now is the time to pitch a particular project out to market because of what is happening in the zeitgeists. and so if if you're concentrating on taking that project forward and taking it into active development with a market partner I would suggest uh kind of what the industry expects and what we expect at screen Queensland to have someone invest in your idea. So have money start to exchange hands is a Bible or a detailed treatment. but that's not to say that you know again at one of these market events where your your sat at a table and pitch meetings are happening that you can't pitch to market with a one page or a logline and synopsis and it becomes a conversation then about if they're interested in the idea</p>
AP	<p>Of course that's a great sign if someone's entering into an idea with you because it means they are interested in you and what you have to say. but but if you're doing say a cold pitch and you're emailing a producer or a broadcaster I think the more that you can paint that picture for them out of your documentation the better chance you're going to have of having them buy into your idea where you can't be there to pitch it in person. It's also great to have that documentation on the standby. So a book, a Bible, a treatment, any visual references that you might have to help get across the tone and how you see your idea after you have a one on one pitch to them. So it's great to get an email and follow up and give them more information than you maybe would have been able to speak with someone about in the short time that you had. So I would say you can have an idea at any stage</p>

	but then when you're starting to pitch to market the more information you can give them the better.
AL	More and more we're seeing beta or variations of an idea - usually in a different medium or shorter format - to cultivate or test interest - do you see it useful in the development phase?
AP	I think there is now more than ever the ability to be really innovative about the medium that you use and to have a really well rounded approach to the medium you're choosing to deliver your idea in there is a huge digital audience at the moment. So it's worthwhile thinking about if you have a more traditional medium in mind for your idea, how can you also tap into that digital audience? companies in Brisbane that you know a real leader in that way of working has been Hoodlum. They developed their whole slate on it in the beginning and have since kind of moved beyond that. but as a way of starting out and delivering something that was really different and unique to the industry it really works for them.
AP	At the end of the day the medium you choose some writers will say it's gotta to be what's best for the idea. but if your idea is never going to get on screen because there's no market interested or marketer interested in different ways of working then that's no good either. So I think it's worthwhile for the individual to not only think about what's best for their idea but also commercially how that idea will fit into the landscape of what people are buying at the moment especially as a again as an emerging practitioner if you've got an amazing idea but it's going to have a \$20 million budget it's going to be really hard for market to take that chance on you. but if if you can perhaps distill that ideal or or find an opportunity to to make that idea something that is within the realms of marketing market taking a chance on you for so bringing down that budget delivering it to a digital audience uh proving that there's audience there as a way of then having the next step of the idea delivered then then that's something that market might be more likely to do.
AP	We just saw a great example of this with Loani Arman's <i>My Body Says</i> which was a digitally released mini series through the ABC for them mental health week at the moment. Now I know that's a much bigger format idea that Loani had for that project. But her being able to get it to audiences with ABC support and for them to see how well received that has been is really a very clever way for them to continue that relationship and develop that idea further.
AL	It's interesting you mention that - talking to Martha Goddard about <i>All Our Eggs</i> and the <i>Beyond Strange Lands</i> teams about developing their projects - it's very much

	<p>leaning into the proof of concept idea or finding funding opportunities where you modify the concept to demonstrate viability.</p>
AP	<p>Yeah definitely. We ran an initiative a year ago called the proof of concept initiative where we offered three teams an amount of money to develop a short form idea that would act as a proof of concept for a bigger idea or a longer form project. one of the teams worked to translate their idea to a podcast for audible. but there's a full series that is being conceived at the same time that is in the same world as the same characters. one of those teams has done a short for what is the feature film script that they're going to release at festivals. And one of those teams is that has this really great stop motion animation technology that they're proving to the market can deliver to a certain standard but at a much lower cost than what would usually be expected in that uh medi . and and they're doing a short in that world as well as a proof of concept of their technology and ideas. So shorts are a really great way not only to prove audience, it's to prove talent, it's to prove technology, it's to prove things that have never been done before.</p>
AL	<p>That's such an interesting point about proving technology. That's how PIXAR started - they released a whole bunch of short films and then they could demonstrate that their technology worked and now got investment for their features.</p>
AP	<p>That's a really great point that you said about PIXAR proving their animation technology and more and more we're seeing this happen within the industry where there's new technology that comes about and what can be made using that technology. We actually have a really exciting initiative coming up where we're actually using some new technology and inviting people to pitch in a creative way to use that for a screen project or short.</p>
AP	<p>one of the things that I would encourage an emerging practitioner to do is not just develop one idea and focus all of their time and energy on that. I would encourage them to develop a slate of ideas. And when I say slate it's just a number of ideas that you could pitch to market. I know when people come in and pitch their ideas to me a question that I ask them when they come in is what else are you working on? and it's always great to have one or two projects in your back pocket that that you can pitch if someone wants to hear more from you because perhaps they don't like the idea that you lead with but they like you and you never know what it is that they are looking for for their company.</p> <p>We hear those stories all the time. and if there's an idea that they're interested in from that meeting then working to develop that idea with them is better than going away from a meeting disappointed that they weren't interested in that lead idea that you pitched them.</p>

AP	<p>Making sure that you have a number of projects that you're developing and you can bring to market at any moment is really I think important and smart. It's a smart way to work because also if you're working on one project for too long and you get stuck on it often putting that project down or you've pitched it out and and you're not getting anywhere with market putting that project down giving it time to breathe giving you a chance to clear your head and think of different approaches to that project and picking up another is is a great practice as well. and being able to jump from one to the other is something that I think a good screenwriter should be able to do</p>
AL	<p>So I've got my great idea and looking to develop it before pitching to market - What can SQ offer in ways of support?</p>
AP	<p>So a couple of programs that we have running at the moment is our creative consultation program which is a screen Queensland subsidized consultation with really leading experts who will consult on scripts or creative materials from early on and help to give feedback to bring it to a place that's stronger and ready to pitch to market.</p>
AP	<p>We have a digital conversions program at the moment which is designed so that people that really needed to prove audience, and that people would be interested in their idea can have the opportunity on a reasonably low budget to actually take their idea to audience in the form of a short form concept. and self distribute that and then attract audience to that idea. So then you can go to market and say look at the interest in my idea. so that's a really exciting new way to start to develop. We have a WATTPAD initiative that has been announced recently which I'm just super excited about. It's where screen Queensland have partnered with an online book platform that mostly appeals to the YA market young adult market that has over 80 million users active users on the platform.</p>
AP	<p>So screen Queensland along with WATTPAD are going to offer some titles to a producer-writer, a showrunner and and they will within that opportunity get to develop an idea on an existing piece of an IP that already has an audience. and they'll get to create a short for that and deliver it to that audience and receive audience feedback which I think is just so great to be able to hear from the horse's mouth what it is they're interested in seeing more or less of as the idea is developed. and then we have our ride initiative which is a partnership with SBS Madmen and media super-which is where you can take an idea which has a diversity focus and develop that within that program with the assistance of those partners and screen Queensland with the outcome being that uh low budget</p>

	feature film will be made from your idea. So that's taking it right from idea through to end product which is a really exciting initiative as well.
AL	How is the IDEAS program different from these initiatives?
AP	So the way that our ideas program is running at the moment is that we have up to \$10 000 available for early ideas or ideas that don't have matched market funding. you can come in as a solitary person, a writer, or you can come in as a part of a team of a writer-producer, a script editor. and you can pitch your idea in not just for us to invest in that idea but for you to actively develop that idea. So along with your idea you need to have a strategy of how you're going to use this \$10 000 develop your idea what you will deliver to screen Queensland for that \$10 000 whether you're taking it from Bible to first draft pilot or whether you're doing a rewrite of a feature film script or you're taking it from treatment to first draft feature; how you're going to do that - So really being honest with yourself about what the work is that needs to be done on that idea. you know if it's a good idea and it has legs it's going we're going to see it as a positive if you can also point out where the weaknesses lie in it at the moment what you want to actually use your time and money to develop within the idea to make it a stronger idea. so often people don't like to do that on applications because it I guess it feels like them showing revealing all of the faults in the idea but we can see the faults in the idea when we assess it anyways. So really if you're aware of the faults that's the first step and if you have a strategy to address how you're going to improve the idea through our funding that is the best place that you can come to and the right people to help you do that.
AP	So as a writer I suggest that you find someone that you would like to work with to enter that process when you come into screen Queensland. So whether that be a creative producer or a script editor that has credits in the area that you're hoping to develop your idea in that's really highly encouraged because the thing that I think also a lot of screenwriters have sometimes trouble doing is sharing their ideas before they're ready. it's terrifying. I completely understand it but at the end of the day that feedback that you get from a third party who isn't a friend or family but actually is coming with industry knowledge and a fresh perspective is only going to make the idea stronger. And if you can pay them some money through funding through an agency to get them to do that with you then all the better.
AP	so that that's the early stage funding and that's really differentiated up to \$10 000 without market attachment. Then we have the latest stage funding and that is where we hope to see an idea with matched or significant contributory funding from a third party that is a good match for your project. generally that's from a market partner. So that's when you've got your idea you've gone and pitched it to

	<p>market. they've said uh yes we're interested as well. And we're going to give you some money to help develop that screen Queensland will then either match or or consider giving you money that you need to develop the project with that market park partner and move it closer towards production. Because at the end of the day that's what we're looking for. Our screen Queensland funding is an investment.</p>
AP	<p>it is 110% repayable on the first day of principal photography. and that is because we hope to recoup funds from successful projects that will bring more money back into our agencies so that we can then support the industry more. It's only repayable if the idea goes into production and you would work that repayment amount into your finance plan for production. so for that late stage funding there's up to \$25 000 available from screen Queensland. if again you have matched or significant funding from market or a third party</p>
AL	<p>So I've got my great idea, what would you recommend as the first step for development?</p>
AP	<p>When you have an idea, what is the best path forward for that? Do you work on it by yourself? Do you go and pitch it out straight away so you can bring other people into your team? do I think those are the real really the two choices early on and I would say each individual pro this is going to be an infuriating answer but each individual project will have a different path forward. and I think one of the best things that a practitioner can do is to be adaptable in that early stage. you might find that working on the idea yourself you don't have the knowledge skills or ability perhaps to take the idea that is really big forward. So you might need to go and find a team to help you execute that idea.</p>
AP	<p>Whereas if it's an idea that you're writing from a really authentic place it's an experience that you've had. and and you feel like it's just flowing out of you and and you can get it to a place that is uh you know has a Bible and maybe you've even done a first draft because this idea can't be contained within you. and you and you want to do that. I dunno sometimes there's ideas that just have a mind of their own and will dictate as to how you develop it. but doing that without talking to anyone can often be useful as well for you to get in your mind. what exactly the idea is. I think each idea has its own path forward. and I will say that I think the sooner that you can talk to people about your idea and collaborate usually that is better because you can get people offering you support and their own ideas.</p>
AP	<p>and you can help to cement how you want to take your idea forward. So maybe people start telling you uh Oh I thought that lead character would make a different</p>

	<p>choice there. And you could consider that and then end up saying actually no I want this character to make this choice because of X Y and Z. So it can either or you could say yes I want this character. I'd never thought about that before. Actually that's a really interesting way to take it. So having other people's perspectives I think is always a good thing because it helps the creative cement what they want to do with the idea.</p>
AL	<p>How do I know an idea has legs for funding?</p>
AP	<p>I think it takes a while for you to develop those real sensitivities that it takes to be honest with yourself about an idea as someone starting out I would say if you talk to three people about your idea and hopefully at least one or two of those people are people that could help you bring your idea to screen then and they're not interested in that idea. You don't have to throw it away but it might just be the good time to put it to the side and pick up something else. It might just not be the right time for that idea. It might be that you need to leave it and think about how you can make it more appealing or maybe you just haven't been able to express it in a way that other people are able to engage with yet.</p>
AL	<p>How do I find the best people to support the project?</p>
AP	<p>you know there's lots of different ways to start finding those people. looking at the community of people around you through screen Queensland events that we hold coming when you can to those events or joining online and screen Queensland has offered a whole soiree full of events over the last four months that have mostly been subsidized which which have participants coming in and talking about their screen projects in various different ways. So reaching out to that community looking for Facebook groups looking for meet ups the universities are not necessarily always the answer but I know keeping those contacts if you have gone through a university and checking in with them finding those people that you connect with on that level is really useful. you can also enter your work you know into competitions with those entries they will offer coverage on your script or your work which is a page or you know a number of pages of notes that someone else working in the industry is able to write for you.</p>
AP	<p>The creative consultations opportunity is a good one to look at in terms of finding someone else who might be able to give you input into your work who has a lot of experience in the genre that you're trying to work in. and then you know also offering your ideas and your points of view to people. So it's not you just always going and asking but you also have something to offer and it becomes more of a conversation in a circular thing rather than one sided. I will say screen Queensland does get a lot of inquiries about whether or not we can read scripts.</p>

	<p>within initiatives or if you have an application in we read all materials within there. if you are going to put something into an initiative or or apply for something and you want to send us a script beforehand that's not something that we generally do.</p>
AP	<p>where we can give feedback if it's asked for, we do, but it's not possible for every single thing that we put out. So it's always worth asking the question or and we'll let you know whether or not there's any available and whether we can give feedback if you've put something in for an application or or an initiative.</p>
AL	<p>Thanks for listening to SQ on Air. You can find out more information about the IDEAS Program, and other Screen Queensland initiatives, on the Screen Queensland's website at <a href="http://screenqueensland.com.au">screenqueensland.com.au</a></p>