



THE 6-MONTH FILMMAKER'S ROADMAP

A COMPLETE MONTH-BY-MONTH PRODUCTION PLAN

START ANYTIME. FINISH STRONG.

This roadmap is designed for the independent filmmaker who is serious about moving their project from concept to completion. It doesn't matter when you start — Month One begins on the day you commit. Work each phase in sequence, complete each month's deliverables before moving forward, and you will have a finished film in six months. Not someday. In six months.



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HOW TO USE THIS ROADMAP

Each month builds on the last. Do not skip ahead. Complete the deliverables for each month before moving to the next — they are prerequisites, not suggestions. The weekly breakdowns are a guide; your real schedule depends on your resources, your team, and your project's complexity. Adapt the timeline — but don't skip the work.

This roadmap works for narrative shorts, documentaries, web series pilots, and low-budget features. It is designed to be used alongside ShowRunHer's Grant Starter Checklist — funding runs parallel to production, not separate from it. Start your grant research in Month Two and keep applying throughout.

FOUNDATION & DEVELOPMENT

Start here. Every great film begins with clarity.

Month One is about getting your foundation locked. You cannot build a production on a shaky idea. This month, you're not trying to do everything — you're trying to get brutally clear about what your project is, why it matters, and whether you are the right person to make it. Do this work now, and every month that follows gets easier. Skip it, and you'll pay the price in pre-production.

KEY FOCUS AREAS

Project Clarity

Lock your logline, synopsis, and central theme. If you can't describe your film in one sentence, you're not ready to make it yet. Spend real time here — it's the foundation everything else is built on.

Research & Reference

Gather reference films, visual inspiration, tone documents, and any research needed for the story. Build a mood board. Watch 3–5 films that live in the same tonal universe as yours. Study them, don't copy them.

Story Development

Write or refine your treatment. This is your roadmap for the script. A treatment should describe every major scene, the emotional arc, and the world of the story. It doesn't have to be perfect — it has to be complete.

Know Your 'Why'

Write your director's statement now — before the pressure of deadlines hits. Your WHY is your compass for every creative decision you'll make over the next five months. Return to it whenever you feel lost.

WEEK-BY-WEEK BREAKDOWN

Week 1	Write or refine your logline. Write a 1-page synopsis. Identify your genre and tone.
Week 2	Write a full treatment (5–10 pages). Identify comparable films and study their structure.
Week 3	Build your visual/tonal reference folder. Write your director's statement first draft.
Week 4	Get feedback on your treatment from a trusted collaborator. Revise. Lock your concept.

MONTH DELIVERABLES

- Locked logline (1 sentence)
- Polished synopsis (250–500 words)
- Complete treatment (5–10 pages)
- Director's statement (first draft)
- Visual reference / mood board
- List of 5 comparable films studied

MICHELLE'S NOTE

Resist the urge to rush into production. The filmmakers who struggle most are the ones who skipped development. Your script will be better, your pitch will be stronger, and your team will trust you more if you do this month's work with full commitment.

SCRIPT, TEAM & FUNDING STRATEGY

Build the blueprint. Assemble your people. Find the money.

Month Two is where your project starts to become real. You're writing or finalizing your script, identifying key collaborators, and building your funding strategy in parallel. These three tracks run simultaneously — and that's intentional. The sooner you understand what your film costs and who will help you make it, the better positioned you are to pursue the right opportunities.

KEY FOCUS AREAS

Script Development

Write your first full draft if you don't have one. If you have a draft, this month is about focused revision based on structural feedback. Your script is your primary fundraising tool — it has to be strong.

Funding Research

Begin your grant research in earnest. Use your Grant Starter Checklist. Build your tracker. Identify 10–15 grants, fellowships, and labs that match your project's profile, stage, and your identity as a filmmaker.

Team Building

Identify your core team: producer, director of photography, and at least one key department head. Even informal conversations and soft commitments matter. Who believes in this project enough to put their name on it?

Fiscal Sponsorship

If you don't have a fiscal sponsor or your own LLC, get one now. You'll need it for grants, crowdfunding, and tax-deductible donations. Organizations like Fractured Atlas, Film Independent, and IFP offer fiscal sponsorship.

WEEK-BY-WEEK BREAKDOWN

Week 1	Write script pages daily (goal: complete draft by end of month). Begin team outreach.
Week 2	Continue writing. Research 15 potential grants. Start building your funding tracker.
Week 3	Script draft complete. Begin revision pass. Confirm at least 2 team attachments.
Week 4	Apply for fiscal sponsorship. Lock your top 5 grant targets. Prepare eligibility checklist.

MONTH DELIVERABLES

- Complete script first draft
- Producer attached (even informally)
- DP or key HoD in conversation
- Fiscal sponsorship applied for
- Grant research tracker (10–15 opportunities)
- Top 5 grant targets identified with deadlines

MICHELLE'S NOTE

You don't need a perfect script or a full crew to start funding conversations. You need a compelling vision and enough structure to show that you know what you're doing. Confidence in development attracts collaborators.

PRE-PRODUCTION BEGINS

Lock the details before you step on set.

Month Three is pre-production — the most underestimated phase in independent filmmaking. Everything that goes wrong on a shoot can usually be traced back to something that wasn't locked in pre-production. This month, you're scheduling, budgeting, casting, scouting, and applying for your first grants. It's the busiest month of the six — and the most important for protecting your shoot.

KEY FOCUS AREAS

Scheduling & Breakdown

Break your script down scene by scene. Identify every location, character, prop, costume, and special requirement. Build your shooting schedule. Know exactly how many shoot days you need and what each day looks like.

Casting

Cast your principal roles. If you're doing open auditions, post breakdowns now on Actors Access, Backstage, or Casting Networks. If you're offering roles directly, make those calls. Confirmed cast elevates your funding conversations.

Budget Lockdown

Finalize your production budget with real numbers — not estimates. Research costs in your region. Get quotes from rental houses. Know your below-the-line and above-the-line totals. Know what's funded and what still needs to be raised.

Location Scouting

Scout and secure your key locations. Get location agreements in writing — even for free locations. Location problems are the #1 cause of schedule collapses on indie sets. Lock them early.

WEEK-BY-WEEK BREAKDOWN

Week 1	Complete script breakdown. Build shooting schedule. Identify all locations needed.
Week 2	Finalize budget. Begin location scouting. Post casting breakdowns.
Week 3	Auditions / callbacks. Scout and photograph all key locations. Submit first grant application.
Week 4	Lock cast. Confirm locations with signed agreements. Submit second grant application.

MONTH DELIVERABLES

- Complete script breakdown
- Final locked shooting schedule
- Finalized line-item budget
- Principal cast confirmed
- Key locations secured (signed agreements)
- At least 1–2 grant applications submitted
- Department heads locked (DP, AD, Sound, Art)

MICHELLE'S NOTE

Pre-production is not glamorous. It's spreadsheets, phone calls, scouts, and negotiations. But every hour you spend in pre-production saves three hours on set. The directors who look calm on shoot days did the hard work now.

PRODUCTION

Execute. Protect your vision. Lead your set.

This is the month you've been building toward. Month Four is production — you're on set, you're making your film. The goal now is not perfection, it's execution. Protect your schedule, lead your team with clarity and respect, and get what you need in the camera. Great directors know that a good decision made quickly beats a perfect decision made too late.

KEY FOCUS AREAS

Pre-Shoot Final Prep

The week before you roll camera is critical. Tech scouts, equipment checks, production meetings, table reads, blocking rehearsals — do all of it. The more you solve before Day 1, the smoother every day runs.

Daily Wrap Reports

End every shoot day with a wrap report: scenes covered, pages shot, what you got, what you missed, what needs to be picked up. Keep your producer and AD aligned daily. Surprises kill indie productions.

On-Set Leadership

You set the culture on your set. Be prepared, be decisive, and be kind. Know your shot list cold. Know your coverage priorities. When you're behind schedule, know which shots you can afford to simplify. Always protect your master.

Contingency Management

Something will not go as planned. A location falls through, an actor gets sick, it rains on your exterior day. Your contingency planning from Month 3 is your safety net. Use it without panic. Adapt, don't collapse.

WEEK-BY-WEEK BREAKDOWN

- Week 1** Final tech scout. Production meeting with all HoDs. Equipment pickup. Day 1 on set.
- Week 2** Continue principal photography. Daily wrap reports. Mid-shoot check-in with producer.
- Week 3** Continue photography. Address any coverage gaps. Pickup days if needed.
- Week 4** Final shoot days. Company wrap. Equipment return. Celebrate your team.

MONTH DELIVERABLES

- All principal photography completed
- Daily wrap reports filed
- Script supervisor notes organized
- All footage backed up (2 copies minimum)
- Release forms signed by all cast & crew
- Location clearances signed
- Behind-the-scenes content captured for marketing

MICHELLE'S NOTE

The film you make on set will be different from the film in your head. That's okay. Stay present. The magic of filmmaking lives in the unexpected moments — the look an actor gives, the light that hits just right. You have to be present enough to see it and brave enough to use it.

POST-PRODUCTION

The real storytelling begins in the edit.

Month Five is post-production — and this is where your film is truly made. Many filmmakers underestimate post. They budget too little for it, rush through it, and release a film that doesn't fully realize what they shot. Give this phase the time and resources it deserves. The edit, the sound design, the score, and the color grade are not finishing touches — they are storytelling tools.

KEY FOCUS AREAS

Editing

Begin with an assembly cut — everything in order, no cuts yet. Then build your rough cut. Then your fine cut. Get feedback at the rough cut stage from 2–3 trusted viewers who will tell you the truth. Your editor is a co-storyteller. Trust them.

Score & Music

If you're using an original score, your composer should be working while you edit — scoring to your rough cut. If you're licensing music, begin that process early. Music licensing takes longer than most filmmakers expect.

Sound Design & Mix

Poor sound will kill an otherwise beautiful film. Budget for a sound designer and mixer. ADR any lines that are unusable. Build your sound design layer by layer: dialogue, ambience, effects, music. A great mix elevates everything.

Color Grade

Your colorist is your final visual collaborator. Share your reference images and mood board from Month 1. The grade should serve the story's emotional tone — not just make it look 'cinematic.' Budget at least 1–2 days for a feature short.

WEEK-BY-WEEK BREAKDOWN

Week 1	Organize and log all footage. Build assembly cut with editor. Submit any pending grant apps.
Week 2	Rough cut complete. Feedback screenings with trusted viewers. Notes session with editor.
Week 3	Fine cut. Begin sound design. Composer begins score. Apply for post-production grants/labs.
Week 4	Picture lock. Audio mix. Color grade begins. Begin preparing festival strategy.

MONTH DELIVERABLES

- Picture-locked cut
- Completed sound design & mix
- Original score or licensed music cleared
- Color grade complete
- Closed captions / subtitles (for accessibility & festivals)
- DCP or required delivery format prepared
- Festival strategy document begun

MICHELLE'S NOTE

Kill your darlings. The scene you love most might be the one that slows the film down. The best editors — and the best directors — are ruthless about serving the story over protecting their favorite moments. What does the film need? That's the only question that matters in the edit.

FINISHING, FESTIVALS & RELEASE STRATEGY

Your film is done. Now the world needs to see it.

Month Six is about finishing strong and releasing strategically. Too many filmmakers pour everything into making the film and have nothing left for getting it seen. Distribution, festivals, press, and audience building are not afterthoughts — they are the completion of your work. A film that no one sees is an unfinished film. This month, you change that.

KEY FOCUS AREAS

Final Deliverables

Finalize all technical deliverables: DCP, digital screener, press kit, EPK, stills package, trailer, and poster. Every festival and distributor will have specific requirements. Know them before you deliver. Sloppy deliverables signal an unprofessional production.

Press & Marketing

Build your press materials: director's bio, production notes, key stills, and a compelling synopsis for each audience (trade press vs. general audience). Start building buzz on social media. Document your journey — audiences connect with the maker, not just the film.

Festival Strategy

Research your festival targets strategically — not just the big names. Understand each festival's programming sensibility, audience, and what it means for your film's career. Tier your targets: top-tier prestige, mid-tier genre-specific, regional/community festivals.

Distribution Planning

Understand your distribution options: festival circuit to streaming, self-distribution on Vimeo/YouTube, pitching to platforms (Netflix, Amazon, MUBI), or working with an aggregator. Each path has different timelines, costs, and trade-offs. Decide what success looks like for THIS film.

WEEK-BY-WEEK BREAKDOWN

Week 1	Complete all final deliverables. Create EPK and press kit. Write festival submission notes.
Week 2	Submit to top-tier festival targets. Build social media content plan around your film.
Week 3	Submit to second-tier festivals. Pitch to distributors or aggregators if applicable.
Week 4	Plan your premiere screening (private or public). Celebrate. Reflect. Begin your next project.

MONTH DELIVERABLES

- DCP and digital screener (H.264 + ProRes)
- Official trailer (90 seconds – 2 minutes)
- Film poster (print and digital versions)
- Electronic Press Kit (EPK)
- Key stills package (10–15 images)
- Festival submission list (20+ targets)
- Distribution strategy document
- Premiere event planned

MICHELLE'S NOTE

You made a film. From nothing — from an idea — you built something that didn't exist before. That is extraordinary. Don't minimize it. Celebrate the work, share it widely, and let it do what you made it to do: move people. Then start again.

MASTER DELIVERABLES CHECKLIST

YOUR COMPLETE 6-MONTH PRODUCTION CHECKLIST — PRINT THIS. USE IT.

Track your progress across all six months. Check off each item as you complete it. Don't move to the next month until the previous month's deliverables are done.

<p>MONTH ONE FOUNDATION & DEVELOPMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Locked logline (1 sentence) ■ Polished synopsis (250–500 words) ■ Complete treatment (5–10 pages) ■ Director's statement (first draft) ■ Visual reference / mood board ■ List of 5 comparable films studied 	<p>MONTH FOUR PRODUCTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ All principal photography completed ■ Daily wrap reports filed ■ Script supervisor notes organized ■ All footage backed up (2 copies minimum) ■ Release forms signed by all cast & crew ■ Location clearances signed ■ Behind-the-scenes content captured for marketing
<p>MONTH TWO SCRIPT, TEAM & FUNDING STRATEGY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Complete script first draft ■ Producer attached (even informally) ■ DP or key HoD in conversation ■ Fiscal sponsorship applied for ■ Grant research tracker (10–15 opportunities) ■ Top 5 grant targets identified with deadlines 	<p>MONTH FIVE POST-PRODUCTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Picture-locked cut ■ Completed sound design & mix ■ Original score or licensed music cleared ■ Color grade complete ■ Closed captions / subtitles (for accessibility & festivals) ■ DCP or required delivery format prepared ■ Festival strategy document begun
<p>MONTH THREE PRE-PRODUCTION BEGINS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Complete script breakdown ■ Final locked shooting schedule ■ Finalized line-item budget ■ Principal cast confirmed ■ Key locations secured (signed agreements) ■ At least 1–2 grant applications submitted ■ Department heads locked (DP, AD, Sound, Art) 	<p>MONTH SIX FINISHING, FESTIVALS & RELEASE STRATEGY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ DCP and digital screener (H.264 + ProRes) ■ Official trailer (90 seconds – 2 minutes) ■ Film poster (print and digital versions) ■ Electronic Press Kit (EPK) ■ Key stills package (10–15 images) ■ Festival submission list (20+ targets) ■ Distribution strategy document ■ Premiere event planned

You have everything you need to start.

ShowRunHer exists to help filmmakers like you get funded, get organized, and get made.

www.ShowRunHer.com