

INTERNATIONAL CO-PRODUCTION CHECKLIST

A Practical Guide for Filmmakers Working Across Borders

International co-productions expand what's possible in filmmaking — creatively, financially, and culturally. But they also create pressure points you never experience in a purely domestic project: competing copyright systems, unfamiliar hiring laws, multi-currency budgets, foreign tax obligations, and corporate structures that look nothing like the U.S. single-purpose LLC model.

This checklist is designed to help you identify the documents, approvals, and protections you need **before** production starts — so your chain of title stays clean, your incentives stay intact, and your film remains deliverable to distributors worldwide.

Use it as a roadmap, a negotiation guide, and a gut-check as you move through the co-production process.

1. COPYRIGHT & OWNERSHIP BASICS

Why this matters:

Outside the U.S., work-for-hire often doesn't exist, and “authors” may include directors, writers, cinematographers, editors, composers, and lyricists. If rights aren't properly assigned under each jurisdiction's law, your film may not have a clean chain of title.

Checklist:

- ☐ Confirm who legally qualifies as an “author” in each partner's country
- ☐ Obtain written copyright assignments compliant with local law (EU/India/UAE)
- ☐ Address EU moral rights in agreements (non-waivable in several countries)
- ☐ Confirm ownership of underlying works (script, score, lyrics, music publishing)
- ☐ Ensure music rights are fully cleared (India-specific concern)
- ☐ Secure worldwide exploitation rights to the finished film
- ☐ Verify that all contributor agreements meet distributor/E&O delivery standards

2. CORPORATE STRUCTURE & ENTITY CHECK

Why this matters:

U.S. filmmakers rely on single-purpose LLCs. Many foreign producers do not. If your partner uses their main company or a long-standing entity, you must know its liabilities and authorization limits.



Disclaimer: This checklist is provided for educational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice or establish an attorney–client relationship. Every production is unique, and delivery requirements can vary by distributor, territory, or platform. You should consult a qualified entertainment attorney to review your specific distribution agreements and ensure full compliance with applicable laws and contractual obligations.

Checklist:

- ☐ Identify whether the foreign partner uses an existing company or an SPE
- ☐ Confirm entity registration and legal capacity to enter contracts
- ☐ Request certificate of incorporation or good standing (foreign equivalent)
- ☐ Verify the company has authority to assign or license rights to the film
- ☐ Determine who can legally sign on behalf of the company
- ☐ Clarify liability allocation between partners
- ☐ Ensure the company has no liens or encumbrances affecting IP

3. FINANCING, INCENTIVES & CASHFLOW**Why this matters:**

Cross-border cashflow involves exchange rates, soft-money deadlines, VAT/GST, and different banking systems. Missteps here can sink a film halfway through production.

Checklist:

- ☐ Identify each partner's financial contribution
- ☐ Confirm currency for contributions and payments
- ☐ Determine who controls the production bank account(s)
- ☐ Confirm eligibility for government incentives or grants
- ☐ Review cultural/creative requirements tied to those incentives
- ☐ Establish deadlines for fund transfers
- ☐ Determine how overages are handled
- ☐ Address withholding tax/VAT/GST obligations
- ☐ Confirm CAMA requirements for revenue collection

4. CREATIVE CONTROL & DECISION-MAKING**Why this matters:**

Creative expectations vary widely by territory. Final cut, script changes, festival strategy, and casting authority must be defined early to prevent political battles later.

Checklist:

- ☐ Define final cut holder(s)
- ☐ Set parameters for script changes and approvals



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- ☐ Establish decision-making authority for casting
- ☐ Clarify daily communication and reporting expectations
- ☐ Outline editorial workflow and review timelines
- ☐ Confirm festival premiere plan and territory priorities
- ☐ Address government or funder creative input (EU/UAE issue)

5. HIRING, PAYROLL & LOCAL COMPLIANCE

Why this matters:

You are running two hiring systems at once — U.S. and foreign. Their payroll, benefits, contract requirements, and classification laws rarely match.

Checklist:

- ☐ Ensure U.S. cast/crew have valid startwork and union paperwork
- ☐ Verify foreign cast/crew contracts meet E&O and distributor requirements
- ☐ Confirm employment vs. contractor classification under local law
- ☐ For EU hires: confirm social fees, holidays, benefits, and statutory obligations
- ☐ For India: confirm GST, TDS (tax deducted at source), and local compliance
- ☐ For UAE: confirm work permits, visas, and location permissions
- ☐ Ensure dual hiring doesn't trigger unexpected tax residency issues
- ☐ Identify required insurance (workers' comp or foreign equivalent)
- ☐ Review restrictions on minors, stunts, firearms, or sensitive content

6. RIGHTS, CLEARANCES & DELIVERY MATERIALS

Why this matters:

The number one reason international co-productions fail at delivery is incomplete or non-compliant paperwork. Distributors will refuse films that cannot prove clear rights.

Checklist:

- ☐ Obtain all contributor agreements (writers, cast, crew, composers, choreographers)
- ☐ Confirm all underlying rights (books, songs, artwork, archival media)
- ☐ Ensure translation/dubbing/subtitle rights are secured
- ☐ Confirm music publishing and master rights (especially for India/Bollywood)
- ☐ Secure location permits and government approvals



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- ☐ Collect all releases (appearance, location, minor releases, trademark approvals)
- ☐ Prepare legal delivery schedule required by sales agent/distributor
- ☐ Complete E&O application and verify all documents meet insurer requirements

7. GOVERNING LAW, DISPUTES & CONTRACTUAL PROTECTIONS

Why this matters:

When multiple legal systems govern the same film, you need a clear default. Without it, disputes can drag on in courts that shouldn't have jurisdiction.

Checklist:

- ☐ Choose a governing law acceptable to both parties (or neutral jurisdiction)
- ☐ Specify arbitration venue and process for cross-border disputes
- ☐ Include conflict-of-laws override language
- ☐ Define breach consequences and rights reversion
- ☐ Ensure assignments comply with both jurisdictions' statutes
- ☐ Include insurance-backed indemnity provisions

8. FINAL PRE-PRODUCTION SIGN-OFF

Before cameras roll, both partners should confirm:

- ☐ All legal documents have been executed
- ☐ All rights assignments are correct in each jurisdiction
- ☐ All contributor paperwork meets distribution/E&O requirements
- ☐ All incentives or public funds are approved in writing
- ☐ The budget reflects actual exchange rates and tax obligations
- ☐ A clear decision-making tree exists for creative calls
- ☐ Delivery requirements are understood by both sides

A co-production only works when the paperwork works.