



DOC Institute Releases Report on Racial Inequity in Canada's Screen Sector

Report finds a dearth of data in Canadian field



BY PAT MULLEN NOVEMBER 17, 2022 INDUSTRY 8 MINS READ

A report commissioned by the DOC Institute speaks to the dire state of funding for Canadian creators in the documentary sphere who identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Colour. Alternatively, it underscores the dearth of data available about representation in publicly funded projects. The release of the report, which was conducted by Nordicity, was marked by a panel at Reel Asian Film Festival, which included Kadon Douglas of BIPOC TV and Film, Joan Jenkinson of the Black Screen Office (BSO), Sally Lee of the Canadian Independent Screen Fund for BPOC Creators, and Lisa Valencia-Svensson of Racial Equity Media Collective with filmmaker Min Sook Lee moderating.

The consensus of the panel was that the report concluded that “water is wet,” but that it legitimizes concerns that exist anecdotally. “The great thing about the report is that it makes people aware of the

water we're swimming in," observed Lee.

The report mined the numbers to understand which key creatives received funding from Telefilm Canada, the Canada Media Fund (CMF), the National Film Board (NFB), and TV Ontario (TVO). The Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC) was approached but outright declined to participate. The national broadcaster cited insufficient human resources. However, the report found that the public funders simply lacked the information sought by the commission. This report followed findings this spring about [racial inequity at BC's Knowledge Network](#).

Of the funding bodies, only TVO had numbers to reflect Black creators, which is going in a downward trend. Data was available to reflect Indigenous creators (Telefilm Canada has an Indigenous stream, while the NFB has an Indigenous action plan), yet these numbers don't reflect one fifth of the projects. The report indicated that there is no industry mandate to collect data, which means that inequity is lost amid reporting, or remains anecdotal. As the panelists noted, however, Canada's Privacy Act prevents Crown Corporations from collecting said data unless it relates to their programming.

Jenkinson cited reason for optimism, though, by observing efforts at Telefilm Canada and CMF to remedy the absence of data collection. With these numbers, advocacy groups within Canada's screen sector can have evidence-based research to enact change. The findings may be obvious, but they indicate that the industry has been slow to deliver the pledges made amid the racial reckoning of 2020.

Valencia-Svensson echoed the sentiment, noting that a centralized method for collecting data would incentivize reporting and reduce burnout for producers who would otherwise need to submit the same numbers to various funders. She added that leaders of organizations in the screen sector, however, are finally having the conversations for which groups like REMC have advocated.

Douglas, meanwhile, noted that the absence of data said enough itself. "It reflects who is asked to legitimize their struggle and who is not," she told the room. The report reflected this sentiment by finding a disparity between who is even applying for funding. A survey commissioned as part of the report found that 88% of respondents who identified as white/Caucasian applied for funding between 2017-2020. That number dropped to 67% for Black respondents, 47% for respondents who identify as People of Colour, and 20% for Indigenous respondents. While white respondents overwhelmingly noted that they didn't feel they had barriers in terms of applying to funding, 100% of Indigenous respondents said they lacked the time or resources to apply, as did respondents who were Black or People of Colour. Other barriers to access indicated access to operating funding as a barrier, as well as a lack of awareness, and a lack of culture reflected in the funding model.

The report also broke down the levels of funding to reflect further the disparity in the ecosystem. Public funding remained the highest source of income, with the CMF representing 33% of funding for docs, followed by tax credits, which are not subject to equity reporting, at 17%. Funds created specifically to boost diverse creatives, such as Hot Docs' CrossCurrents Doc Funds and Blue Ice Docs Fund, provided some relief to equity-seeking groups, but the report observed that these funds accounted for only 0.71% of financing. The panelists noted that such gaps compound the disparity by providing a sense of relief that is relatively minor in the documentary ecosystem.

"We stand to lose another generation of BIPOC creators falling by the wayside unless we have a fund that is governed by the communities they support," said Lee. She pointed to stopgap measures that saw the

federal government give more money to funders, who, ironically, perpetuated inequity in the first place. Lee also pointed to the qualitative barriers like access to broadcast licenses, which trigger funding, or simply a lack of business savvy among BIPOC creators learning how to advance in the pipeline.

The report also noted long-term challenges related to ownership of intellectual property (IP). It found that white/Caucasian filmmakers were far more successful in retaining the IP rights to their work. 80% of white/Caucasian respondents said they typically get to hold the IP rights to their work, compared to 60% People of Colour and 54% Black creators.

The panelists added that top-level change in organizations was needed to inspire revolution across the industry. Jenkinson cited the success of Telefilm's commitment to gender parity, launched when Carolle Brabant was executive director, as a model for setting targets on which to report. "If we can recreate the reporting they had for gender equity, we can use that for inequity among diverse creators," she noted, stressing that the industry had to pivot from colonial methodologies and stop using white audiences as a reference point for racialized audiences and creators.

Another reason why the industry needs to be accountable with numbers, Douglas stressed in closing out the panel, is the power that documentaries hold. "Documentaries are seen as fact, so that is a higher responsibility to ensure ethical practices," said Douglas.

Read the report [here](#).