



DOC institute ▶

THE CREATIVE PRODUCERS'  
**THINK TANK**

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM EXPERIENCED BIPOC  
PRODUCERS TO REIMAGINE THE DOCUMENTARY  
PRODUCTION LANDSCAPE.

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This report was commissioned by the DOC Institute and written by independent consultant Amar Lohana in collaboration with the filmmakers who took part in the lab.



# INTRODUCTION

BY LALITA KRISHNA

<sup>1</sup> "It is clear that racialized creators and entrepreneurs continue to feel they are on the outside looking in on Canada's broadcast industry".

Funding and financing are key areas of focus for producers, however years of being shut out of mainstream funding programs have compelled producers from Black, Indigenous and racially diverse backgrounds to strategize in unique and innovative ways, and to build collaborative models of working. If you have recently seen a film produced by a BIPOC creator on the big screen, it is a signifier of creators who have leveraged incredible creativity, business savvy, and strength of character despite the odds against them.

I've been making award winning documentaries for over 20 years. All of my documentaries have been broadcast on major networks in Canada and on US and European networks. They've had very successful festival runs, and domestic and international sales. Many of the documentaries have had real impact on the communities whose stories I captured and on the audiences who continue to view them. Few people know that I have cobbled together the funds for the majority of my productions through alternate sources of funding, often not accessing the bulk of public funds available for the production of documentaries in Canada.

The recent report released by the DOC Institute which analyzes<sup>2</sup> *Funding for BIPOC documentaries content in Canada*, shows that I am not alone. The majority of Black, Indigenous and racialized creators do not apply for or qualify for the bulk of mainstream funding programs. This of course also means that our production budgets are lower and enables a system in which independent producers must wear multiple hats and switch roles based on the needs of each project. This model demands a strict fee structure and defines the role of writers, producers and directors as singular and siloed, when in fact, most producers wear many hats, and work within frameworks that are rich in creativity and collaboration. They also defy traditional models of financing, revenue sharing, and hold lesser-known value systems around concepts such as fairness, equity and authentic representation.

<sup>1</sup> Submission to The Heritage Committee re: Bill C-11, Racial Equity Media Collective, 2021, Page 4

<sup>2</sup> *Funding for BIPOC Documentary Content*, Nordicity, DOC Institute 2022

## **Introduction cont'd...**

In a post George Floyd world, everything from who gets funding, whose stories get told, and who tells the stories, is being examined. But the agencies and gatekeepers continue to use traditional evaluation methods, sticking band aids on problematic areas which they acknowledge are broken. As I participate in panels at conferences to discuss deep entrenched systemic issues which perpetuate the system, I realize that the conversation never moves beyond a basic level. The same stories are repeated and endless time is spent explaining how racism works within institutions.

It's time to move the needle. And the best people to do it are the producers themselves. The value of conversations among a group of racialized producers within a safe space cannot be overstated. A conversation among peers to examine and recommend changes to the current production models and funding system in Canada. A Creative Producer's Think Tank.



***In this report, the term BIPOC refers to Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour. We recognize that this term is considered problematic by some and conversations about the term BIPOC are ongoing. How the Black, Indigenous and racially diverse communities refer to themselves may evolve; what is acceptable today may not be in the future. The decision was made to use the term BIPOC in this report after discussions with equity-deserving groups with the understanding that language is fluid and continues to evolve.***

## WHAT IS THE CREATIVE PRODUCERS' THINK TANK?



*The Creative Producers' Think Tank* provided a unique opportunity for a group of mid-career and senior level producers from racially diverse backgrounds to participate in a 4- day intensive gathering. These participants were invited to reimagine a documentary ecosystem that recognizes the distinct needs of producers who have created critically acclaimed projects despite systemic barriers in traditional models of production and financing in Canada. The closed door sessions allowed participants to share professional experience, do deep dives into policies and protocols, and collaboratively reflect on a re-imagined landscape.

Giving these producers who have succeeded against systemic barriers the space to collaborate and imagine a system that supports and celebrates diverse storytellers is at the core of what the Creative Producers' Think Tank seeks to accomplish.

The content of this report is derived from participant driven presentations, brainstorming, and peer-sharing that took place during the Think Tank. Each day was divided into sessions exploring a different specific aspect of the industry. Think Tank participants and invited speakers gave short talks in their individually defined areas of expertise, followed by brainstorming, and peer-sharing sessions.

The topics for discussion were largely determined through the preliminary research and conversations with a number of experienced producers and with the active collaboration of the NFB.

## HOW WERE THE PARTICIPANTS SELECTED?

Eight core participants participated in sessions over four days, with seven guest speakers who came to address specific topics. The conversations took place with the help of a facilitator.

All of the participants are actively working documentary filmmakers. They bring with them a diversity of professional experiences including award winning theatrical features, working inside and outside the Canadian broadcast funding model, working on productions for streamers and leading production companies, and building their own production companies. Altogether, the producers have over 150 producing credits and over a hundred directing and writing credits

While these filmmakers bring decades of experience and deep roots in their communities, it is important to note that no one person speaks for an entire community, let alone the multitude of communities making up BIPOC people in Canada.

The collaborative approach of this Think Tank looks to leverage the combined experiences of these filmmakers into actionable feedback for policy makers, industry stakeholders including: producers, production companies, agencies, broadcasters, distributors, funders, advocacy groups, and financial institutions. This document incorporates the participants, sharing of their own experiences followed by recommendations agreed upon by the group.

***While the Creative Producers' Think Tank was tasked with addressing issues around BIPOC, we stand in solidarity with other equity seeking groups impacted by disparities in media representation including sexual identity, gender, disability, religion, immigration status, socioeconomic status and other historically under-represented groups.***

## WHAT IS A CREATIVE PRODUCER?

For the purpose of this lab, we define a Creative Producer as the head of the production who also plays a key role in the creative aspects of the production. A creative producer makes things happen; they sit between the creative process and the operational process in a project, orchestrating ideas, resources, people and participants to turn the seed of an idea into reality. They realize the vision of a project and make it possible for a creative team to achieve their best.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The participants of the Think Tank collaborated to identify 25 recommendations for a re-imagined documentary production landscape, which are detailed in the below sections of this report. They were then polled on their top recommendations out of those 25. The top recommendations are highlighted here and reflect the most impactful changes needed to address historical barriers to media representation.

- 1** *Canadian Heritage should support independent funds, outside the broadcast model. The projects supported by these funds should be decided by juries of experienced filmmakers. These funds need to be less bureaucratic and more filmmaker friendly. The existing broadcast funding model concentrates power in the hands of a few gatekeepers.*
- 2** *Broadcasters and agencies need explicit and transparent targets for working with BIPOC owned production companies and BIPOC key creatives across their productions.*
- 3** *Production companies should be required to have protocols for anti-discrimination training, dispute resolution systems, and codes of conduct.*
- 4** *Canadian Heritage should establish an industry census to collect accurate, standardized, industry-wide data. The data needs to cover key creatives, production company ownership, and on-screen representation. The data should be available publicly.*
- 5** *CMPA and DOC should advocate for changes to the tax credit system to include equity top ups.*

## PRODUCER/DIRECTOR RELATIONSHIP

The most important relationship in a documentary team is the Creative Producer & the Director. But how do you know this is the right fit? What does each role seek in the other? Where do roles overstep? Where do they collaborate? Participants spoke about their experience working as producers and directors, examining IP/project ownership, and creating safe working environments.

### *John Choi discusses the changes that he has observed in the industry*

The climate has changed rapidly and continues to change. The process of building a team for a film is completely different now than it was 10 years ago. Today we can talk about things that previously were not spoken about. For me personally when building a team, it's important that not just the director be able to tell the story, but can the producer honor the story? How do we center our equity work and build a crew in an authentic way?

The producer/director relationship is not just a business transaction. It's two people having a relationship for potentially many years. For me, it all begins by putting on the table what I represent and what my values are.



I just finished a series dealing with comedy, which is by definition a controversial and irreverent subject matter. I had a male non-racialized showrunner. I was brought on to direct, I did not produce that project. Very early on the showrunner naturally steered the conversation to a discussion about privilege and discrimination as part of our creative and production process. It was the best job I've ever been on for that reason. It was really important to start with that conversation.

I'm also incredibly impressed with the DGC & it's initiative for all new and existing members to participate in training workshops about discrimination and systemic racism.

Not that long ago, we would never talk about systemic racism and discrimination the way we do now, since the murder of George Floyd in 2020. I feel like important steps are being made to normalize these topics for conversation.





### ***Lisa Rideout on building safe spaces***

What I think is important in a good relationship between a director and producer is that values are aligned, boundaries are defined, and the goals for the film are the same.

One of the most seamless experiences I had was working with a production company whose founding values were aligned with my own. Their focus on diversity wasn't superficial or tokenistic, it was a core belief. Production companies can say they value diversity, but is it reflected in their teams and in the other films they have made or are making? Are they doing the work to make their company a safe space for filmmakers from various diverse backgrounds? Production is chaotic, and stopping to ensure they're cultivating a safe space for Black, Indigenous and racialized filmmakers, needs training, intentionality and care.

In my experience, having a values based conversation alongside talking about creative, budget etc. ensured boundaries and expectations were aligned. The onus should be on production companies and producers to make space for these conversations before signing contracts with filmmakers.



### ***Maya Annik Bedward on the power dynamics within productions***

As a producer, I'm always thinking about who holds power in what spaces? How can we acknowledge it, change it, and dismantle it? It's a constant process because it's always there, no matter what the dynamic is. We just have to always think about that so we're making sure that we're creating more equitable spaces.

I do feel strongly that if you're doing a documentary about your own personal family or community, especially filmmakers who are BIPOC, that they have a piece of their IP. That's a value that I have.

I think it comes back to narrative sovereignty as a core principle.



### ***Ngardy Conteh George on creating an equitable work environment and a novel approach to intellectual property ownership when working with emerging filmmakers***

As a producer, I've strived to create an environment where there is open communication, respect, and everyone talks to each other as human beings.

I feel fortunate that at OYA Media, I've been able to create this environment, with my partner Alison Duke, to have leadership that looks like us, to have projects run by people that look like us about people that look like us.

After we started to have some success, we started an Emerging Filmmakers Program and then created a not for profit OYA Black Arts Coalition to try and uplift others who were trying to get a foothold in the industry. One of the things we've done in portfolio project creation with our emerging filmmakers program is that we share copyright with the filmmakers. **For a recent emerging filmmakers documentary project 'Reel Black' we're piloting retaining the copyright while we're in production and while the tax credits and broadcast licenses are outstanding. When all that business is settled we will return the majority of ownership back to the filmmakers.**



### ***Michelle Asgarali on avoiding token representation***

When we're talking about representation within the production, the keyword is "people not one person." Whether it's BIPOC, female, or any other group, one person can't be everybody's voice.



### ***Nadine Valcin's thoughts on IP***

The equation between Intellectual Property (IP) and funding is a very Canadian concept. In France, the director owns the IP. The model where funders ask the producers to own the IP, is just something we've created. It doesn't have to be that way.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**1**

*Producer/Director teams need to communicate roles, values, expectations, and boundaries upfront as an essential part of the project initiation process.*

**2**

*Production companies should be required to have protocols for anti-discrimination training, dispute resolution systems, and codes of conduct.*

**3**

*CMPA & DOC should create anti-discrimination training, dispute resolution systems, and codes of conduct resources which can include workshops and online trainings that can be used by all productions.*

**4**

*DOC to hold discussions and conduct research into new models of non-exploitative IP relationship practices.*

**5**

*Broadcasters/Agencies should include funds to pay BIPOC mentors when programs are created for BIPOC mentorship.*

*DGC Professional Development & Training was cited as a model that has worked well. Topics covered in the DGC training include: Building a Respectful Workplace, Diversity & Inclusion: Beyond the Single Story, Leadership in the Workplace.*

# BIPOC ON SCREEN: THEIR STORIES, OUR RESPONSIBILITY



Some of the most powerful conversations that took place at the Think Tank were around filmmakers & relationships with those who appear on screen. Creative producers who are BIPOC often have deep connections to the community being portrayed. In many cases, they are the ones who spend the most time with the subject matter, from pre-development and still being connected for many years after.

The industry has a duty to care about the well-being of participants and communities that may be impacted by documentary films. This includes not just filmmakers, but broadcasters, distributors, and funders need to be considering these issues.



The following experiences illustrate the feeling that there is an inherent imbalance between the filmmakers and participants in vulnerable communities and how the filmmakers have worked to navigate this dynamic.



### ***Lisa Jackson, on relational ethics in her filmmaking***

On some projects, I spend a lot of time in development without a camera. That looks different for different projects. On HOW A PEOPLE LIVE (2013) the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Nation were interested in having a film made about their history and reached out to me. At the time, I was part of a small team that was doing week-long youth filmmaking workshops on reserves in BC and the Yukon and I suggested we have a workshop there, which was a great way to connect as community members could stop by to meet casually.

We mentored youth to make short films incorporating their language and at the end of the week we screened their completed films for community members and feasted. I also screened a bit of my work, spoke of the proposed documentary, and answered questions. By making myself available, in their community, over time, and sharing some of my process and myself, I worked to balance the power dynamic, to reveal myself not just as a professional, but as a human being.

I'm currently working on a project about Cree Elder Wilfred Buck, who's a star knowledge keeper and ceremonial leader and has written a riveting memoir on his life. I began with offering him tobacco with the request to embark on a development process for a film on his life, and then we spent time over the next year or so getting to know each other, including participating in ceremony. He agreed to the film and we optioned his memoir, and have—throughout the filmmaking process—looked for opportunities for reciprocity. Whether that's hiring community members, looking for on-reserve businesses to support, providing location fees to community events we're filming at, or sharing footage with film participants on request for educational and community purposes.

One of the things I've grown to understand is that there's the movie you pitch and then there's what's delivered. We all know that oftentimes, those are slightly different beasts. There can be pressure to impose a film on people in order to deliver what you pitched. I've had to recognize that this is a process of co-creation and discovery. So yes, we need to paint the picture of what the film will be like before we make it. But I need everyone to know that I don't call all the shots.



***Alexandra Codina shared the following about working with vulnerable communities and trying to figure out how to create films that don't do harm to the people whose stories she is trying to tell.***

I recently made a film, PAPER CHILDREN (2020), about four siblings who fled gang violence in Honduras and were seeking asylum in the US. I met the children through their pro bono lawyer. In the development phase of the film, I had extensive conversations with friends and allies in the immigration and legal space talking through the ethics of that. If I am being introduced through their lawyer, how do we make sure that we initiate the conversation in a way that they don't feel pressured to say yes?

The kids and many of the adults in the film were extremely vulnerable. I was afraid that participation in the film might get them separated from their family or expose them to an anti-immigrant hate crime. I searched for resources in the filmmaking community on how other producers, directors, funders and distributors had worked together to create safeguards for vulnerable people in their films, but didn't find anything.

I was repeatedly told that it was the filmmaker's responsibility, and was shocked at the lack of models and support. It was equally shocking to realize that many filmmakers simply take a reactive approach—only after their films are released and something actually happens to a person they featured, do they mount a campaign and improvise a strategy

While still in production, we set up an advisory board of lawyers. We talked through the theoretical scenarios of what could happen when the film was released. We spoke to many allies throughout the US to discuss other high profile cases, and potential legal avenues that we could pursue were anyone in the film apprehended or detained. We wanted to understand the worst case scenario. Once we had what we felt were some answers, we sat down with the undocumented members of the family, together with our advisory group. It was important that the conversation happened in their native language, Spanish. We explained to them the risks of telling their story in a public way, what we felt were the safeguards in place legally, and our plan in case anything happened.

*Alexandra Codina cont'd...*

While editing the film we scrubbed any identifying details, including street names in the US, and any mentions of the exact village that they were from in Honduras. We also gave the family a pseudonym and have never revealed their last name in any press nor social media. Because they were fleeing gang violence, it wasn't just about the safety of the family in the US, but we tried very carefully to not include anything that could trigger retaliation for any remaining family members back home in Honduras.

It was important for me as a filmmaker to know that we had made every effort to keep them safe, but it was a terrifying responsibility, and there should be more industry resources and support for filmmakers. We shouldn't have to reinvent the wheel every time.

Our industry and audiences want everything to be as graphic, intense, explicit, and bold as possible. How do we tell the most powerful story that we possibly can without giving up our own humanity or creating unnecessary trauma and risk for the people featured in our films?



## **Michelle Asgarali** about her experience as a disabled producer

Visibility is very important right now. But a lot of producers find it hard to get access to disabled communities, especially disabled racialized individuals. They feel like people just don't want to speak to them. I've experienced a physical shift to an environment when disabled participants see myself, a brown woman in a powerchair behind the camera. Sometimes it takes them aback. A switch turns on: "Oh, I don't need to explain my existence," and becomes, "What do I want to say?" Having someone behind the camera who can speak from a place of experience is an important part of creating that safe space.

I was brought on to one project where they had already cast a group of friends with disabilities, most of whom had a spinal cord injury. The typical story within that space is: "What were you before your injury? How did the injury happen? What was that like?" I came into a creative meeting and asked the question, "If we're talking about their lives now, 20 years after their injury, is that really relevant to this story?" And that was my first question to the group. They had never thought of it that way, and in the end the answer was, "I guess not. Maybe not for everyone."



So we reframed the story and were able to connect with the participants on a much more personal level, with respect, and without having to re-traumatize them.

I think we constantly have to keep asking ourselves, where's the line? Even with the intention to protect, especially with disabled adults, we can't mother them. They have autonomy.

It's important when engaging with underrepresented communities to have protocols, it's important to understand your intention toward the community, and it's important to be cognizant of what the visual output of the process says to that community.





***Lalita Krishna shared the following about her relationship to film participants***

I feel a great sense of responsibility and privilege that people in very vulnerable positions trust me with their stories. One of my core values has always been respect for participants and communities and I spend a lot of time building relationships. Most of these endure far beyond the life of the documentary. As filmmakers, we need to make sure that we get the story right and make it authentic, but we must also make sure “how” we get the story is not exploitative in any way.



***Ngardy Conteh George shared how it's important to her to use filmmaking to challenge the narratives that exist about Africans***

Stories from the African diaspora and Black stories of people uplifting themselves have been my focus. Especially coming from Sierra Leone and dealing with stereotypes that people have about Africans. A lot of the stories I'm drawn to tell focus on the people from those communities who are doing the work themselves to make change, because we're capable of that, and we don't need someone to come in, and swoop in and save us.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

1

*Broadcasters, distributors, and funders all need to implement policies around their duty to care about individuals and communities represented in documentaries.*

2

*Funding agencies need to provide financial support for the creation of protocols and code of conduct for dealing with Black and POC,<sup>3</sup> similar to On-Screen Protocols & Pathways.*

3

*Directors and Producers need to have up front discussions with participants on the filmmaker's intention for the film, boundaries, and potential negative impacts to participants.*

4

*DOC to bring together legal, insurance, and broadcaster stakeholders to discuss standard forms (e.g. releases, life rights, option agreements). These documents need to consider the power dynamic between the production and the individual. Suggestions include the use of plain non-legalistic language and limit agreements to specific productions.*

5

*Industry members should discontinue using the term "subject," as it suggests an innate hierarchy. Alternative terms that can be used are "participant," "contributor," "protagonist," "people in our film."*

6

*DOC to host a discussion on rethinking the application of strict journalism standards as they apply to documentary filmmaking.*

*-There is a need for updated industry practices and budget allowances for compensating participants.*

*-There are many cultures where honoraria, ceremonial gifts, or other compensation are expected. Productions should pay industry rates for personal archive material.*

*- Productions should pay for use of personal and community locations.*

*-Any compensation practices should be focused on maintaining fairness, reciprocity, and respecting participant's time and expertise.*

*- Rethink participant involvement in terms of showing rough cuts to participants*

<sup>3</sup> Nickerson, Marcia, *On-Screen Protocols & Pathways - A Media Production Guide to Working with First Nations, Métis and Inuit Communities, Cultures, Concepts and Stories*, imagineNATIVE

## FUNDING MODELS

The participants of the Think Tank discussed the various funding models for Canadian documentaries and examined why and how these models create and continue to uphold barriers.

For context, in 2020 approximately \$20.8M, less than 1% in total financing for Canadian content, was earmarked for BIPOC-led projects according to an analysis published by<sup>4</sup>Racial Equity Media Collective . Of this \$18.3M (88%) went specifically to Indigenous projects, leaving just \$1.7M going to BPOC creators.

<sup>5</sup>Data also shows that many Black and racialized creators are not accessing existing funds such as CMF & Telefilm at the same level as their white counterparts. Most often they don't qualify or meet the eligibility criteria. While the statistics that are available paint a dire picture, all participants of the Think Tank have faced comments from white industry members on how the focus on diversity is making the environment more challenging for white filmmakers.

When funds are targeted towards an underrepresented group, however, we do find a marked increase in representation. The NFB and CBC set gender equity targets in 2016 and exceeded them by 2020.

The participants in the Think Tank weighed options for addressing systemic biases that continue to exclude BIPOC groups from funding.



<sup>4</sup> (Racialized Funding Data In the Canadian Film and Television Industry, Inspirit Foundation/REMC/Nordicity, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> (Funding Analysis for BIPOC Documentary Content, DOC Institute/Nordicity 2022)

## ***Lalita Krishna on the need for more independent funding***

We used to have more independent funds outside of the broadcast model. For example, the Canadian Independent Film and Video Fund operated from 1991 to 2009. It was run by filmmakers, the juries were mostly made up of filmmakers. The programs had low barriers of entry and often were the first money in. The organization also provided production assistance to first-time producers and directors and business skills to producers for the securing of additional financing. This fund, and others like it, lost funding and closed up in 2009.

In 2020, when there was a flurry of advocacy activity after the murder of George Floyd, Board members like myself decided to refocus the fund to support Black and racialized creators. Renamed the Canadian Independent Screen Fund (CISF) for BPOC creators, the fund is pushing Canadian Heritage to dedicate 20 million dollars annually to support Black and racialized creators. The ISO stands in solidarity and supports the principles of this fund. The fund is managed by a board of filmmakers and representatives from equity seeking groups. The guidelines and criteria are developed in consultation with major community groups who are also represented on the board of the CISF.

Filmmakers know when a fund speaks to them, and responds in a language that resonates with them. The Ministry of Heritage has allocated 40 million dollars to the ISO to administer because they recognize after all these years, that Indigenous sovereignty is distinct and the solutions have to come from within the community. Similarly Black and racialized creators have unique needs and hold much diversity within our groups.



## ***Nadine Valcin on cooperative models of filmmaking***

I've worked mostly in projects funded by arts councils and artist residencies. My aspiration is just to have the opportunity to do the meaningful and important projects that interest me. The environment makes that challenging.

One of the challenges is the inconsistencies in the rules. Canada Council won't fund anything that broadcasters have final say on and a large portion of funding goes through the CMF/broadcast model. Arts councils fund directors. Most other funds are for producers. If you live in Toronto and want to make a French language documentary based in Montreal, Radio-Canada won't support that, it's outside of their mandate. There's a lot of arcane rules that make it very hard to navigate. There needs to be work done to harmonize the funding models because it creates a tremendous amount of overhead and takes away from the creative work.

One of the things we can do to help reduce the burden is to look at the collective model. In Quebec there are two major co-ops that bring together filmmakers, Les Films de l'autre and La Coop Vidéo de Montréal. They started out with filmmakers who would just work on each other's films and they've evolved and grown. It's a very artist friendly way of working. You can get the support and infrastructure so that as a filmmaker, you can focus on the actual work.



## **Haydn Wazelle on how interim financing can present a significant barrier to entry**

There are various systemic obstacles to BIPOC producers getting interim financing.

As a producer, once you have a track record of receiving interim financing, there's a sort of snowball effect. You can continue to access more funds from the banks more consistently. But the question is how do you build that track record if you're currently outside the system, looking in? A lot of BIPOC producers do not check all the boxes.

In addition to the producer's track record, the bank also wants the producer to provide personal guarantees or corporate guarantees, using some valuable collateral or security. Very often it's a personal home. So the producer's personal net worth can be a factor.

Also, the bank will sometimes require the producer to hold back their fees, until all of the private promised financing is received and they've recovered their money. That means there's a requirement of the producer to work upwards of two years without being paid. Very few people can afford to do that.

You also cannot get your first drawdown from most funders until you have your interim financing, so the producer has to fund the legal, accounting, and bank fees to get to apply for the interim financing out of pocket.

All of these historical barriers inside of our industry and in our country, create a catch-22 for many emerging producers, but especially BIPOC producers from accessing the necessary resources that they require to cashflow their productions. It leads many to sign over control of their project to an established producer. If we don't deal with the systemic issues at the root of this, we're going to find established producers that have that track record will continue to benefit from that snowball effect and the problem will only get worse.

## **Ngardy Conteh George on the disparities in the international co-production system and new opportunities in the immersive media space**

One of the structural issues we have is that you can only do an international film with Europe. There are places that have the treaty co-production agreements in place. Most brown/Black countries don't have that because of the legacy of colonization that doesn't allow for those kinds of systems to be in place with those governments to allow those governments to contribute.

In general, we've found the interactive digital media space gives much more freedom and support for diverse storytelling. The factors that make that space different from documentary are that CMF funding goes through a jury, co-productions are not bound by treaty, and creators control the release and distribution process. It's also a new field, there is no historical legacy of gatekeeping and more of a spirit of innovation.



### ***Jennifer Holness on telling stories from Black & brown countries in the Canadian funding system***

We want to tell stories from our countries of origin. But the way the system is set up, you can have a Canadian director, writer, producer, editor, DOP, Composer, all the post production in Canada and it still might not be considered a Canadian. Why? Because you have to spend a certain portion of your non-creative key production expenses in Canada, even if in a documentary that might make up a miniscule portion of your overall budget. You're not Canadian because the formula on CRTC Form Appendix 5b says you're not Canadian.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**1**

*Canadian Heritage should support independent funds, outside the broadcast model. The projects supported by these funds should be decided by juries of experienced filmmakers. These need to be less bureaucratic and more filmmaker friendly. The existing broadcast funding model concentrates power in the hands of a few gatekeepers.*

**2**

*Agencies should harmonize application forms and simplify arcane rules. The current system presents massive bureaucratic obstacles and demands significant unpaid work from producers. These factors benefit established players.*

**3**

*Broadcasters and agencies need explicit and transparent targets for working with BIPOC owned production companies and BIPOC key creatives across their productions.*

**5**

*Agencies to earmark slate funding for BIPOC creators to be able to build sustainable companies.*

**4**

*Canadian Heritage should take steps to decolonize the definition of CanCon by removing hurdles to filming outside Canada. We need to reimagine the co-production system.*

**6**

*Banks and Private Financers need to create specific interim financing funding pools to overcome the systemic barriers.*

## POLICY & ADVOCACY

The Canadian Broadcasting policy has been around for 30 years and has language to encourage the inclusion and representation of racialized creators and companies. Despite the combination of policies, good intentions, and pressure from equity-seeking advocacy groups, little has changed for the community of racialized creators who continue to experience systemic bias and feel their work is undermined by mainstream gatekeepers.

### *Jennifer Holness on her experiences advocating for change*

I have been in this industry since about 2000. Back then, it was not a welcoming environment for BIPOC. If we won a grant to make a project, there was a sense that we should be happy that we got the opportunity to do that one project. It was a struggle to scale up. So that meant that we had to work five times as hard sometimes to get the resources to get things done.

Overtime, the gender equity movement grew in importance. When Trudeau came in, that became a priority and the numbers of women directors skyrocketed. It was still a challenge to bring up that there weren't that many Black and brown women moving up.

But it was clear to me that if the political will existed, massive changes could be made.

And then George Floyd was murdered. This was a pivotal moment.

I reached out to other Black leaders in the Canadian screen industry and the first thing we talked about was: we want to create a Black Screen Office. We had seen how successful the Indigenous Screen Office was in terms of presenting the concerns of its community, and we felt very strongly that we had never had a voice advocating for us in this system. The Black Screen Office would, first and foremost, do that. That's how it got started and finally people started listening.

And then when the CMPA (Canadian Media Producers Association) asked me to apply for their board, I said yes but only if they would significantly increase the BIPOC/racialized representation on the Board. They were open to that. They increased it to 25% and then, after I joined, it went up to 35%. Coming together with other groups of racialized people, to amplify each other's voices is very important.

There are no easy answers. We need filmmakers to join advocacy organizations, get on the boards, get on the committees, and get actively engaged in these conversations. We have to be a part of these established organizations, as well as our individual organizations. We have to be in the room where it happens and we have to speak up when we're in the room where it happens.



## ***Lisa Valencia-Svensson on the need for filmmakers to get educated***

As filmmakers, I think it absolutely behooves us if we're trying to push for change to understand the full context within which we are pushing and how the system works. For all our biggest public funded institutions, and also our private broadcasters, ultimately their direction comes from the Department of Heritage and the CRTC. The Department of Heritage in turn gets its instructions from legislation like Bill C-11. We can lobby all we want at the lower levels, but the actual wording that is in the legislation is of utmost importance.

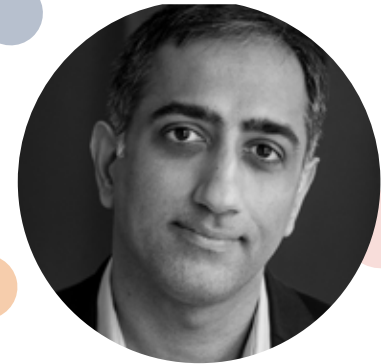
How the legislation flows down to influence our entire ecosystem is not very well understood by most producers.

We need to understand that there's \$3 billion in production financing in Canada every year. Telefilm is seen as a leader and sets a very important precedent for other agencies. But it's important to realize that they are the source for only 2% of that production funding. 28% of that \$3 billion comes from tax credits, and there are no equity components to tax credits. However, changing the tax credit system in order to include equity factors would be an enormous task to undertake.

We as filmmakers need to educate ourselves to be able to advocate effectively.

## ***Ngardy Conteh George on the need for diversifying production company ownership***

What's different for me with George Floyd versus other movements in the past is I think people are awake to understanding the structural barriers that are in place. We don't need Band Aid solutions. I think going towards diversifying who owns the production and how many BIPOC owned production companies are actually making projects. I think this is what's going to lead to sustainable change.



## ***Amar Lohana on the importance of demographic data collection***

In an industry where rejection is a constant, it's impossible for producers to single out any particular programming decision and push back on the grounds of racial equity. You cannot push back without damaging your career. That's why statistics and being transparent is so important.

We've all heard from our white filmmakers on how hard it has become for them to get funding or get hired because of the focus on diversity, when the reality of how little funding and work goes to filmmakers of color is shocking.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**2**

*Advocacy organizations need to collaborate.<sup>6</sup> A recent example of success in that area is when 16 advocacy organizations spoke out regarding the CBC license renewal resulting in the Minister of Heritage rejecting the renewal.*

**1**

*Department of Canadian Heritage to establish an industry census to collect accurate, standardized, industry-wide data. The data needs to cover key creatives, production company ownership, and on-screen representation. The data should be available publicly.*

**3**

*CMPA and DOC to re-establish Terms of Trade agreements in order to establish a fair and equitable negotiation framework between broadcasters and independent producers.*

**4**

*CMPA and DOC should advocate for changes to the tax credit system to include equity bonuses.*

**5**

*Funding agencies need to provide financial support for the creation of protocols and code of conduct for dealing with Black and POC, similar to On-Screen Protocols & Pathways.*

## Reports From Independent Organizations With Data Driven Analysis Of The Sector:

Being Counted, Being Heard, Being Seen- Black Screen Office, IPSOS, Quilin

VAFF Diversity On-Screen Audit Report

The impact of Terms of Trade on the UK's television content production sector, CMPA, Oliver & Ohlbaum.

Changing the Narrative Report, Reelworld Screen Institute, MDR 2020

<sup>6</sup>

CMPA lauds federal government's decision to reject flawed CBC licence renewal decision

# EXPANDING DISTRIBUTION, OUTREACH & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This section explores the ways in which producers have successfully tapped into unexplored audiences through grassroots outreach campaigns, innovative distribution platforms, and the requirement for community engagement through each stage of production.

## *Lalita Krishna with an example of community informed outreach*

Like everyone else, when starting out on my productions, I always create a plan for dissemination and marketing. During the course of research and production which can take several years, I get very close to the communities and organizations connected to the issues. I invest time and energy building these relationships and know the potential and power they have to help me with screenings and distribution of the documentary. But soon after the production is over, I get consumed with the paperwork and/or pressure to move on the next production. The marketing or community engagement for the completed doc is either left to a publicist or when I am able to raise funds, I hire a marketing specialist. In my experience, the majority of publicists and distributors are not connected to our communities. At best they send out a press release to the 'ethnic' publications and to community groups who are inundated with such requests and may include it in their newsletters or print the entire press release.

It's not a targeted outreach plan mostly because they lack the knowledge and connection to the communities.

A few years ago, I produced a documentary about an incredible woman, a Bangladeshi Canadian domestic abuse survivor. Domestic abuse is unfortunately a universal issue so we targeted a number of shelters and women's groups. But the team and I also felt we had to reach out to the large Bangladeshi population in Greater Toronto. Our challenge was to connect with the folks who lived in Scarborough, Mississauga, Brampton, Markham and scattered across the GTA and motivate them to attend the screenings at the Ted Rogers Hot Docs cinema downtown. With this intent, we spread the word among all our contacts, and found a social worker who worked with domestic abuse survivors, who was also closely connected to the Bangladeshi community. She is not a PR person and had never done marketing or publicity. But she was passionate about the subject matter and she was well connected with the community. Through targeted outreach, we not only filled the cinema but we also had the most engaged discussion that continued in small groups outside the cinema after the screening. We had an audience who go to the cinema to see fictional features and may see an occasional doc on TV, but they had just been exposed to the powerful experience of seeing a documentary on the big screen with a bunch of strangers. We had a lot of requests for screenings many in small towns scattered across the province and in smaller towns across Canada.

The three points that I want to make are

- 1) Social issues documentaries, especially those that impact diverse communities have to be marketed by the right people. The producer or filmmaker have to also be involved and therefore paid through a line item in the marketing budget.
- 2) We have to build capacity through training programs for community animators and outreach workers who understand the social issues but are not trained in marketing.
- 3) We have to expose diverse audiences to more content. This would mean creating targeted programs for different communities. Especially for diverse populations in remote areas who are craving new content.



## *Samah Ali on her journey to diversify distribution platforms*

I founded Sisterhood Media in 2016. In the beginning, I recognized that many artists were releasing their work on their respective social media platforms. I envisioned a platform where all of these works can be found in one convenient place for audiences to watch and discuss online. Our mission was to produce, acquire, and screen content on sisterhood Media TV. In addition to host accessible learning opportunities for ethnic, Indigenous and racialized filmmakers, via our accessible educational courses. Our vision was to go to a streaming service, where marginalized filmmakers want their films purchased. Viewers want their content, viewers watch their content, and have online discussion forums for these productions. From the beginning, it was always about the community.

We were focusing on short films, and we were focusing on films that were fresh, mostly from emerging filmmakers. And this pool of talent has never experienced a distribution deal ever. So there was a lot of teaching about how distribution works organically with our own filmmaker.



It was about building a shared community online on a platform that we controlled

When we started, the only major online players in Canada were Netflix and Prime Video. And of course it became a very crowded field over the next few years. But there was a huge shift when GEM came online because a lot of the content that we were looking at ended up on GEM. By the end of 2021, after being declined accreditation from the CRTC as an online service platform, we also had a double hit. We were told that we were not going to get our funding renewed by the Trillium Foundation, which made up the bulk of our operational funds.

In May 2022, we decided to shut down Sisterhood Media. But over the past five years, what I know for sure is filmmakers wanted their projects on a platform like this and viewers valued a catered selection of programming dedicated to them.



## ***Mila Aung-Thwin discusses how he thinks about building an audience***

The challenge of doing one-off feature documentaries is to connect to a new audience for every film. We become experts on a certain subject for two to three years and we use that knowledge to build our audience.

It's helpful to hire a "community manager" early, from development onwards. That's probably a new person for every film. You need a specialist with experience in the community that the film speaks to.

For one project we worked with POV on PBS in the United States. They are a great partner who themselves get very deep into community outreach. They think very hard about the right way to do community outreach and they have an incredible network of contacts that they leverage.

In general, we try to make films with stories that speak to us and bring them to a mainstream audience. There is an under-served audience of people who want to arthouse, sober, international, subtitled films in theaters. Most of those types of films end up on streaming sites. We're finding some success in reaching those audiences that still want that theater experience.



## ***Alexandra Codina on being thoughtful about protecting participants and community after the film is released***

My first film, *MONICA AND DAVID*, is about the marriage of a couple with Down Syndrome. Monica happens to be my cousin, we grew up like sisters. Making that film was such a personal experience and I felt deeply responsible to honor and protect them and their community, not only while making the film, but also throughout the film's distribution. Once we began traveling to festivals and doing press, I created a preferred language guide. Before any press interviews or Q&As, I shared that document with whomever would be speaking with David and Monica. It helped make the conversation more comfortable for everyone because people didn't always know how to frame their questions, nor what language to use.

When the film would play at a festival, I would always reach out to local community organizations and ask them for help finding either a local couple, or other adults with intellectual disabilities who could be part of our Q&A. Whenever possible, Monica and David came, but we always sought local representation so that the events in the film were connected to the local community.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**1**

*Producers doing outreach campaigns should always be looking to hire members of the community represented in the film as outreach coordinators.*

**2**

*Agencies providing funding for community outreach and impact campaigns need to respect the role of the creative producer and pay them to do the work involved.*

**3**

*Broadcasters & Distributors need to look at engaging diverse audiences. These audiences have not typically seen documentaries speaking to their experiences, but creative and community informed outreach can help grow the audience.*

**4**

*Private Investors should invest in community-based distribution platforms. Platforms like APTN lumi and the Sisterhood Media case study presented here, give communities control over how their stories interact with audiences.*





## THE WAY FORWARD

**BY CHANDA CHEVANNES, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER  
ONTARIO STUDIO, NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA (NFB)**

In January 2023, I had the privilege of participating in a panel discussion hosted by TIFF about the work of addressing systemic racism in the Canadian media industry. Sitting on the stage, I was proud to be able to describe our partnership with the DOC Institute in creating the Creative Producers' Think Tank. I was also impressed by the depth and breadth of the work that had been undertaken by institutions like Telefilm Canada and the Canada Media Fund in recent years.

But, when the first panel ended and the second panel began, I moved into the audience and heard from the folks who are at the forefront of the push for change. Listening to the passion and wisdom being expressed on the stage by those who are running advocacy organizations like the Black Screen Office and the Racial Equity Media Collective, I wasn't simply impressed – I was inspired. In particular, the advice offered by Kerry Swanson, CEO of the Indigenous Screen Office, really resonated with me: “feel the urgency” and “trust us.”

What this report does so beautifully is that it communicates the urgency that BIPOC documentary producers feel. And it trusts in their deep knowledge. Ultimately, this report charts the way forward with a series of clear and thoughtful recommendations for our industry.

Of the top five recommendations offered in this report, Recommendation #2, which calls on broadcasters and agencies to set transparent targets, is the most deeply relevant to the NFB. Both because it addresses us directly, as an agency of the Government of Canada, but also because our mandate is to reflect the diversity of Canadian perspectives and experiences in our work.

At the NFB, we understand the importance of targets. Our target for films directed by women is 50%; in 2021-22, 54% of our projects were directed by women. Our target for films directed by Indigenous filmmakers is 15%; in 2021-22, 26% of our projects were directed by Indigenous people. Simply put, targets are important because they work. The NFB will announce targets for BIPOC filmmakers in the fall of 2023.

But what this report makes clear is that it's not just about what we do, it's also about the way we do it. It's not just about working with more BIPOC documentary professionals, it's also about how we work. Are we accessible to filmmakers from marginalized communities? Are we approaching our programming decisions with transparency? Do we have policies that ensure anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices?

These are urgent questions for us to be asking – and answering in collaboration with BIPOC filmmakers. I am grateful to the CPTT participants and the DOC Institute for engaging in this critical conversation, for documenting that conversation in this report, and for charting the way forward for the wider documentary community.

## CPTT PARTICIPANTS & PRESENTERS



**Maya Annik Bedward**

Maya Annik Bedward is a Toronto-based filmmaker. Working primarily in documentary film and television, her productions have screened at Hot Docs, TIFF, Black Star and the New Orleans Film Festival. Maya recently worked as a director on the docuseries *BLK: AN ORIGIN STORY* (History Channel, Global TV) and the comedy variety series, *LIDO TV* (CBC Gem). Dedicated to fostering a more equitable and inclusive industry, Maya is a founding member of the Black Screen Office. She is currently working on her first feature *BLACK ZOMBIE* (documentary Channel).



**Michelle Asgarali**

*Disabled Producer/Writer and Advocate (she/her)*

Michelle Asgarali carved out a career in documentary and TV development, creating entertaining content accessible to all. As a powerchair user, Michelle is no stranger to the challenges of navigating the complex world of inclusive storytelling. Starting as a casting and social media producer of THA Media's award-winning *EMPLOYABLE ME CANADA* (AMI/TVO), she most recently showran her first series *BREAKING CHARACTER* (WINTERHOUSE FILMS/AMI), and joined the creative team of two disability-centered series for CBC and TVOKids.



**John Choi** 최성호 **Seong-ho** (He/Him)

John Choi 최성호 Seong-ho (he/him) is a Canadian Korean filmmaker telling stories for over 25 years. John advocates for equality, diversity and equal representation across the film industry both in front of the lens and behind. He has joined the Hot Docs - Netflix Accelerator Program as a mentor and working with new emerging filmmakers. John Choi has produced and directed projects including *THE ELEVEN* A&E's six-part factual true crime series and CBC Docs *POV SPACEMAN*. His first feature documentary film *LOST & FOUND* was co-produced by NHK Japan, SBS Australia, Shaw Media. The most recent projects completed are YouTube Originals *K-POP EVOLUTION* and Netflix Originals three-part docuseries *THE RAINCOAT KILLER* and the new *VICE* series *DARK SIDE OF COMEDY*.





**Ngardy Conteh George**

Hailing from Sierra Leone, Ngardy Conteh George is an award-winning filmmaker committed to working with systematically excluded communities, especially those that represent the rich cultures and complexities of the African Diaspora. Her films include TV hour MR. JANE AND FINCH (CBC) which won two 2020 Canadian Screen Awards and award-winning Sundance Documentary Film Fund supported feature-length documentary THE FLYING STARS (Best Documentary – BronzeLens Film Festival, 2015).

She was recently a BPM MIT Open Docs Lab visiting artist fellow and is currently producing two feature docs with her company, OYA Media Group, a Black women-led and owned production company in Toronto.



**Lalita Krishna**

Lalita Krishna is an award-winning documentary filmmaker whose films have screened on major Canadian and international networks, and featured at film festivals around the world. Lalita has been a keynote speaker at several conferences and has been invited to present workshops at Co-Pro- Documentary Marketing Foundation, Tel Aviv, Durban International Film Festival, IIFF, Goa, and Silver Docs, Washington, DC.

Lalita is the winner of the 2021 Hot Docs Don Haig award, the 2013 Crystal Award for mentorship given by WIFT Toronto, the Trailblazer (2012) award given by the Reel World Film Festival and the Dreamcatcher award given by the Hopes and Dreams festival for using her craft to better humanity.



**Amar Lohana**

Amar Lohana had a thriving career as a Vice President at financial firms Goldman Sachs and Deutsche Bank. Using his 15 years of experience in finance and technology, Amar launched Akelo Media in 2019 to be able to help tell stories that engage with pressing social issues. He recently produced the feature documentary film THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE (ITVS, CBC, Firelight Media). Amar sits on the board of the Documentary Organization of Canada.



**Lisa Rideout**

Lisa Rideout is an award-winning director who makes character-driven documentaries with a focus on women who have forged their own paths outside of societal norms.

She has directed content for NETFLIX, CRAVE, CBC and VICE. Lisa recently finished an episode for Netflix's series *This is Pop!* and is currently in production with Banger Films, directing and producing the documentary feature *Sex with Sue* about renowned sex expert Sue Johanson.

Her films have garnered multiple Oscar qualifying awards including Best Short Documentary at the LA Film Festival, Best Documentary Short at the Brooklyn Film Festival, the Canadian Screen Award for Best Documentary Short and a Grand Prize at the Rhode Island International Film.

Lisa founded her production company Lifted Eyes Media in 2013.



**Nadine Valcin**

Nadine Valcin is an award-winning bilingual producer, writer and director. Her factual and documentary work has been shown in Canada on CBC, TVO, Artv, Réseau de l'information (RDI), Société Radio-Canada (SRC), TFO, as well as the History Network in the United States. She has directed four documentary projects for the National Film Board of Canada, including *Black, Bold and Beautiful* and *Une école sans frontières* (A School without Borders). Nadine has been awarded numerous grants and prizes including two prestigious Chalmers Arts Fellowships. She holds a professional degree in architecture from McGill University and an MFA in Digital Futures from OCAD University.

## LEAD FACILITATOR



**Karina Rotenstein**

Karina Rotenstein served as the lead facilitator for the Create Producers' Think Tank. Karina is a film, tv and events producer and has served nearly two decades as a film festival programmer.

Her producing credits include: 2018 Academy Award nominee *Edith+Eddie*, *Lucky* and *Screened Out*. She has programmed at many top tier festivals including TIFF, Hot Docs, and Miami International Film Festival.

## CPTT GUEST SPEAKERS



**Samah Ali**

Samah Ali is a VR and film programmer based in Toronto and New York City. A lover of documentaries, she currently programs for Academy Award qualifying festivals Seattle International Film Festival, DOC NYC, and Hot Docs Film Festival. After running her startup Sisterhood Media for five years, she now sits on the Board of Directors at The Black Screen Office and Future of Film Showcase. You can interact with her on Twitter @sistersamah.



**Mila Aung-Thwin**

Mila Aung-Thwin is an award-winning Canadian documentary filmmaker, producer, and activist. As co-founder of EyeSteelFilm, he has produced/exec produced over 50 feature documentaries, notably LAST TRAIN HOME; UP THE YANGTZE; RIP: A REMIX MANIFESTO, FOREST OF THE DANCING SPIRIT and MIDWIVES. He has directed several films including LET THERE BE LIGHT.

In 2020, he won the Special Jury Award for Editing for SOFTIE (dir. Sam Soko). He is the recipient of the 2022 Don Haig Award, has served as President of RIDM for 5 years, and participated on the juries of the Sundance Film Festival, the International Emmys, and the New Zealand National Film Awards. He has taught filmmaking workshops and classes in China, Myanmar, Pakistan, Burkina Faso, and other international festivals.



**Alexandra Codina**

Alexandra Codina is a first generation LatinX documentary filmmaker, based in Miami. Her directorial and producing debut, MONICA & DAVID (the love story of a couple with Down syndrome), won Tribeca's Jury Award, was nominated for a Primetime Emmy and broadcast on HBO. Her latest film, PAPER CHILDREN (about 4 siblings who fled gang violence in Honduras) premiered worldwide with YouTube Originals. She has pitched at Hot Docs:Forum, CPH:Forum, Good Pitch, Tribeca All Access and IDFA. Codina has been featured on NPR's All Things Considered, Newsweek, Univision's Primer Impacto.



### **Jen Holness**

Jen Holness is a happy workaholic. She writes, produces, and directs. She is the first Black woman in Canada to win a CSA (Gemini) for best writing, is the 2021 Indiescreen Producer of the Year and a 2022 WIFT Creative Excellence Award winner.

Her recent feature doc, *SUBJECTS OF DESIRE*, has won numerous festival awards and was a 2021 TIFF top 10 film. She co-created the doc series *BLK: AN ORIGIN STORY* for History and Global that tells epic stories of little known Black Canadian history that premiered in February 2022.

She is an executive member of the Board of the CMPA and is the co chair of the CISF.



### **Lisa Valencia-Svensson**

Lisa is an Emmy award winning producer. She was previously the Acting Industry Programs Director at Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Festival. Before that she was Head of Operations at Multitude Films. Credits include *PRAY AWAY*, *ALWAYS IN SEASON*, *CALL HER GANDA*, *HERMAN'S HOUSE*, *MIGRANT DREAMS* and *THE WORLD BEFORE HER*. Lisa has been a Tribeca All Access and IFP Documentary Lab fellow, a lead mentor for the Hot Docs Diverse Voices mentorship program, and is an AMPAS Documentary Branch member.



### **Haydn Wazelle**

Haydn is a Vancouver-based media & entertainment producer and software developer. He sits on the national boards of the Canadian Media Producers Association (CMPA), the Black Screen Office (BSO), and the Canadian Independent Screen Fund for BPOC creatives (CISF). Along with extensive film & TV producer-side production experience, he has 10+ years in SaaS designing UX for media production workflows, and is CEO and co-founder of ZedDrive. Haydn produced the feature films *ALONE*, *HELLO DESTROYER* (CSA nominated; TIFF Canada's Top Ten) and *VIOLENTIA*, the CBC documentary *DADS*, and the critically acclaimed video game *EON ALTAR* (2016). He regularly represents the CMPA, BSO, and CISF during government relations in actively lobbying for terms of trade, the modernization of the broadcast act (Bill C-11), and with broadcasters regarding equity, diversity, and inclusion for ALL equity-seeking groups.

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