

Answering the Call

Indigenous
Action Plan
2026—2029

Le grand solstice



CANADA
MEDIA FUND

FONDS DES MÉDIAS
DU CANADA

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Stories of the North



About the CMF

Canada's stories are a force worldwide

Supported by the Government of Canada and Canada's cable, satellite, and IPTV distributors, the Canada Media Fund (CMF) is a not-for-profit organization that invests in Canadian creators and companies to tell stories that reflect and connect us all. We fund audiovisual and interactive digital media content—across all platforms—that builds a stronger cultural identity at home and on the world stage. The CMF puts stories front and centre, opening pathways to domestic and global markets and promoting a screen-based sector that is more resilient, more inclusive, and fuelled for growth.



North of North



Context

“ This is reconciliation in action. ”

Industry engagement phase participant

Since our inception, the CMF has contributed significant resources to fostering Indigenous narratives and self-determination in the screen-based media industry. The CMF supports Indigenous companies, as well as linear and IDM content creation, via several programs and measures. The Indigenous Program specifically funds linear predevelopment, development, and production for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis creators representing Nations, communities, provinces, and territories. Through our Indigenous Program, the CMF has supported 189 Indigenous companies between 2010-2011 and 2024-2025, allocating \$125.8M. This includes funding for:

- ➔ **Predevelopment:** 64 Indigenous companies received \$2.7M.
- ➔ **Development:** 115 Indigenous companies received \$13.8M.
- ➔ **Production:** 92 Indigenous companies received \$109.2M.

Notably, funding for the [Indigenous Production Program](#) has increased annually, growing from just under \$7.7M to \$8.5M in 2024-2025. Since 2010, 37 Indigenous titles have moved from development / predevelopment funding to production funding. These investments underscore the CMF's commitment to empowering Indigenous creators and companies, reinforcing the importance of Indigenous-led content in Canada's cultural landscape.



Retisser les liens



Purpose and acknowledgements

The purpose of this document is to outline the CMF's continued commitment to advancing Indigenous narrative sovereignty, strengthening Indigenous participation in Canada's screen-based industry, and fostering long-term structural support for Indigenous-led content creation and Indigenous-owned companies.

We acknowledge the contributions and feedback of our partners in developing the CMF's Indigenous Action Plan, including consultant Marcia Nickerson, our industry engagement partners Jennifer Podemski, Jessica Commanda of The Shine Network Institute (TSNI), Kerry Swanson, Melanie Hadley and Jean-François D. O'Bomsawin of the Indigenous Screen Office (ISO), Monika Ille and Adam Garnet Jones of the Aboriginal Peoples' Television Network (APTN), Lucy Tulugarjuk and Jonathan Frantz of the Nunavut Independent Television Network (NITV), Indigenous Focus Group members, Indigenous Industry Participation Survey respondents, and advisor Jason Baerg. Our deepest gratitude for your insights and wisdom.



Uiksaringitara (Wrong Husband)

Our guiding principles

Respect

Transparency

Accountability

Efficiency

Engagement

Courage

Creativity

“ The roots of common stereotypes continue to shape national narratives and perceptions of Indigenous peoples. There is a burden on Indigenous producers to educate funders on Indigenous realities. ”

Industry engagement phase participant

At the Place of Ghosts (Sk+te'kmujue'katik)



Our approach

“ Sometimes Indigenous productions are not going to fit the mold, above the line, below the line, budget, shooting days, timeline, etc. There needs to be more room for other ways of doing things. ”

Industry engagement phase participant



Little Big Community



Our approach

Respect the time and input of Indigenous creators and decision-makers by utilizing existing consultation findings, creating this strategy with input from the ISO, APTN, and NITV to align with their priorities and feedback, and tailoring our industry engagement activities to include a sharing-back process. The CMF will seek additional engagement only when necessary and respectful, while addressing issues raised that have not yet been resolved for Indigenous creators. Our approach considers contributions from wider sector strategies, research, and context such as the [Indigenous Screen Office Report on Consultation 2024](#), [New Futures for Canadian Content: What you Said, September 2022](#), [Indigenous Screen Office Strategic Plan 2022](#), and [2025-2028](#), and [Spark Courage: What We Heard Consultations Summary Report, June 2021](#).

Ensure that CMF programs are aligned with existing Indigenous recommendations and frameworks such as the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, while advancing the policy objectives for Indigenous peoples and languages set out in *Canada's Broadcasting Act*.

Align Indigenous priorities with the CMF's [2026-2029 Strategic Plan](#) and broader [Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility \(EDIA\) Strategy for 2024-2027](#) while maintaining a distinct focus on Indigenous narrative sovereignty. All strategies prioritize expanding access, capacity building, and data-driven accountability, ensuring that historically underrepresented creators receive the resources and opportunities necessary for success. By embedding Indigenous priorities within the CMF's larger inclusion framework, and while simultaneously preserving the distinct needs of Indigenous storytelling, these strategies work in tandem to create a more equitable, representative, and globally competitive screen sector in Canada.

“ Indigenous interactive media creators have different needs than linear media creators. ”

Industry engagement phase participant

“ Communities that have lost their language should not be disadvantaged in accessing CMF funding. ”

Industry engagement phase participant

“ Many of our languages are rapidly disappearing, and media and storytelling can play a critical role not only in preserving them, but in celebrating and sharing them with broader audiences. ”

Industry engagement phase participant

“ We need assistance around navigating application processes, budgeting, and financial management including tools or guidance to help plan, track, and maintain project budgets effectively. ”

Industry engagement phase participant



Our approach (continued)

“It’s a meaningful gesture in advocacy for Indigenous storytellers that our industry partners are showing up.”

Industry engagement phase participant



La Brigade

Our Indigenous Action Plan strategically aligns with the four pillars in our three-year strategic plan:

- ➔ **Modernize:** Embed Indigenous rights, narrative sovereignty, culturally responsive practices, and Indigenous data sovereignty across CMF policies, funding approaches, and decision-making.
- ➔ **Mobilize:** Connect Indigenous creators, companies, partners, and communities to funding, capacity building, collaborative partnerships, and meaningful participation across Canada’s screen sector.
- ➔ **Maximize:** Position Indigenous creators and companies to strengthen their creative, cultural, and economic outcomes by expanding market opportunities and supporting long-term sustainability and leadership.
- ➔ **Monetize:** Support Indigenous creators and companies in monetizing their intellectual property by strengthening Indigenous ownership, improving access to capital and financing, and enabling sustainable business models that generate long-term economic value.

“Financing risk is based on personal and corporate assets, which are challenging to grow and to build that capacity when we have to defer producer fees and corporate overhead to fully finance production.”

Industry engagement phase participant



Our approach (continued)



Kun'tewiktuk: A Mi'kmaw Adventure

Consider the current environment as the Canadian screen sector continues an ongoing period of significant transformation. The industry landscape remains uncertain due to evolving government priorities, shifting market dynamics, and pending developments and consultations around the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC)'s *Broadcasting Act* and the CRTC's *Online Streaming Act*. The federal government will continue the [regulatory plan to modernize Canada's broadcasting framework](#). The updated *Broadcasting Act* formally recognizes Indigenous content as a key pillar in Canada's media landscape and highlights the responsibilities of broadcasters to:

- ➔ Reflect and serve the needs and aspirations of Indigenous communities
- ➔ Support Indigenous programming and language preservation
- ➔ Engage in meaningful consultation with Indigenous communities when creating content that touches on their culture, language, or history

“ We need company-development funding that supports long-term business capacity rather than individual projects. ”

Industry engagement phase participant



Our approach (continued)

Implementation of the *Online Streaming Act* continues to be shaped by litigation from foreign streaming platforms, which has delayed the full coming into force of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC)'s 2024 base contribution decision. In May 2026, the CRTC established a Canadian programming expenditure (CPE) obligation on top of the existing base contribution, bringing the overall streamer contribution to 15 per cent, and in June 2026 the Minister of Canadian Heritage directed the CRTC to reconsider all streamer spending obligations. The federal government paired this with a \$600M annual commitment to backstop streamer contributions to the Canadian and Indigenous content. The CRTC's broader regulatory plan to modernize the broadcasting framework continues to advance, though timelines for finalizing these spending obligations remain to be determined.

We anticipate that the CMF's overall strategic direction from 2026-2029 will be impacted by four major shifts:

- ➔ The Department of Canadian Heritage's ongoing work to modernize the tools and institutions in support of the audiovisual sector.
- ➔ The CRTC's ongoing consultations to implement the new *Broadcasting Act* through the modernization of broadcasting regulations.
- ➔ The referral back to the CRTC of spending obligations for streaming services, and the federal government's implementation of its \$600M annual investment to backstop the sector.
- ➔ Broadcast Distribution Undertakings (BDUs)—a key component of CMF funding—have steadily declined since 2016-2017 (\$216.5M) to 2024-2025 (\$147.7M), and continue to drop, undermining budget predictability.

“ Consistency, transparency, and accountability will go a long way in strengthening relationships between Indigenous creators and funders, and in ensuring that the Indigenous Action Plan has lasting, measurable impact. ”

Industry engagement phase participant

“ Emerging Indigenous game developers often lack the resources or industry relationships to secure marketing partners before a project is underway. ”

Industry engagement phase participant





Our Indigenous Action Plan

Red River Gold



Our Indigenous Action Plan

The successful implementation of this Indigenous Action Plan requires active engagement and collaboration with key partners across the screen sector. The CMF is committed to ongoing collaboration with Indigenous-led organizations, industry partners, and government agencies to ensure the continued growth and sustainability of Indigenous storytelling. The Indigenous Action Plan will be used to create an internal work plan to be delivered over three years. By continuing to align with key partners, the CMF commits to the support of a thriving and evolving Indigenous media landscape.

1 Prioritize Indigenous ownership and narrative sovereignty

► ACTION 1

In collaboration with Indigenous decision makers and policy directives, strengthen mechanisms to ensure ownership, control, and IP remain with Indigenous companies.

► ACTION 2

Invest in companies well-positioned to establish or enhance values-based and culturally responsive production models and content creation.

► ACTION 3

Implement shared definitions of Indigenous content in alignment with other federal audiovisual institutions, the Department of Canadian Heritage, and the CRTC's ongoing co-development of the Indigenous Broadcasting Policy.

► ACTION 4

Explore additional market triggers and inroads toward a more robust linear and digital media IP pathway for Indigenous creators.



Our Indigenous Action Plan (continued)

2 Strengthen Indigenous production and creation capacity

► ACTION 1

Build Indigenous-specific financial tools and supports to help ensure long-term capacity building and sustainability of Indigenous-owned companies.

► ACTION 2

Review outcomes of Indigenous Company Impact Support (ICIS) to assess feasibility of ongoing delivery.

► ACTION 3

Develop a responsive corporate investment program model with purpose and eligibility criteria informed by our Indigenous Focus Group, as well as CMF and industry data.

► ACTION 4

Explore innovative financing mechanisms that improve access to capital for Indigenous producers and company owners to create screen content.



Our Indigenous Action Plan (continued)

3 Enhance CMF responsiveness and Indigenous participation in CMF programs

▶ ACTION 1

Increase knowledge of and access to CMF programs and funding opportunities for Indigenous applicants through tailored supports and development pathways.

▶ ACTION 2

Invest in training for staff, CMF program administrators and analysts, and jurors on topics such as Indigenous history, UNDRIP legislative directives, unconscious bias, and cultural humility.

▶ ACTION 3

Enhance transparency in project assessments and increase Indigenous jury participation across selective programs.

▶ ACTION 4

Identify opportunities for expanded eligibility and added flexibility across CMF programs for Indigenous producers and content creators, in particular for programs with historically low participation and success.

▶ ACTION 5

Address specific barriers experienced by French-speaking Indigenous content creators, regionally based content creators, and IDM content creators.

▶ ACTION 6

In collaboration with the ISO, revisit the CMF's Indigenous Program structure and guidelines to broaden access across Indigenous communities and increase flexibility of funded activities.

Our Indigenous Action Plan (continued)

4 Amplify visibility of Indigenous content in Canada and internationally

▶ ACTION 1

Expand Indigenous content discoverability, access to international markets, and business development and co-production opportunities in collaboration with funders and global screen sector organizations.

▶ ACTION 2

Earmark market access funding for Indigenous creators with focus on established Indigenous territories and Global South communities.

▶ ACTION 3

Invest in robust and reputable career development opportunities for producers, screenwriters, game developers, and digital and immersive media creators.



Our Indigenous Action Plan (continued)

5 Demonstrate institutional allyship across the screen sector

▶ ACTION 1

Catalyze Canada's *Broadcasting Act*, *Online Streaming Act*, and Canadian UNDRIP legislation directives to increase funding and support for Indigenous screen-based content.

▶ ACTION 2

Support the ISO and other Indigenous decision makers in their work to develop the CRTC's *Indigenous Broadcasting Policy*, as well as definitions specific to Indigenous content and Indigenous creators.

▶ ACTION 3

Collaborate with partners on the creation and dissemination of updated best practices for working with Indigenous creators and company owners, as outlined in the *On-Screen Protocols and Pathways* guide and relating to the Indigenous content commitments in Canada's UNDRIP legislation directives.

▶ ACTION 4

Review existing policy directives for non-Indigenous production companies to incentivize the use of *On-Screen Protocols and Pathways*.

▶ ACTION 5

Support discussions between Industry decision makers and Indigenous creatives to enhance Indigenous-led content development, acquisitions, and licensing.

▶ ACTION 6

Ensure Indigenous perspectives and contributions are reflected in CMF and industry advancements, such as sustainability policies, use of artificial intelligence (AI), and genre expansion.

Our Indigenous Action Plan (continued)

6 Advance Indigenous data sovereignty

► ACTION 1

Define clear success metrics and key performance indicators to track progress, impact, and accountability specific to Indigenous participation across CMF programs.

► ACTION 2

Establish ethical and reciprocal data-sharing protocols with partners such as the ISO, Telefilm, and other funders.

► ACTION 3

Enable the CMF to contribute to collective efforts to aggregate data, conduct joint research, and measure the impact of programs and initiatives aligned with Indigenous priorities.

Our Indigenous Action Plan (continued)

7 Increase Indigenous engagement and representation across the organization

▶ ACTION 1

Form an Indigenous Advisory Group to guide implementation of our Indigenous Action Plan, ensure transparent decision-making, and increase organizational accountability.

▶ ACTION 2

Develop an approach to increasing Indigenous representation across career stages and roles within the CMF by strengthening recruitment pathways and professional advancement within the organization.

▶ ACTION 3

Identify additional engagement opportunities for Indigenous professionals, through procurement, consultation, project management, and advisory positions.

▶ ACTION 4

Work with Knowledge Keepers as experts in wise practices, receiving input and feedback that reflects Nations, communities, regions, languages, abilities, generations, sexualities, and genders represented within Indigenous communities.

Appendices



Horse Warriors



Appendix A: Allyship Timeline

The timeline below represents a summary of activities that reflect the CMF’s ongoing commitment to Indigenous narrative sovereignty within the screen sector. This overview provides a record of shared historical context as well as a touchstone for future engagement.

1997-2000 Funding Aboriginal language production

- ➔ The Canadian Television Fund (CTF) begins financing Aboriginal language productions annually for approximately \$1M, as well as supporting additional Indigenous content for broadcasters such as the Aboriginal People’s Television Network (APTN).
- ➔ In 2000, the CTF reports spending \$2.5M in Aboriginal language programming.

2004 Publishing of foundational report

- ➔ Jeff Bear prepares [At the Crossroads](#) for Telefilm Canada, the CTF, the National Film Board (NFB), the Department of Canadian Heritage, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). The report highlights that Canada had begun to create Indigenous screen initiatives, but had not yet built the institutional, financial, industrial, and decision-making infrastructure necessary for a sustainable Indigenous screen sector.

2009 Creation of the Canada Media Fund

- ➔ The CMF is created by merging the Canadian Television Fund and the Canada New Media Fund, officially coming into effect in 2010.

2010-2016 Making a foundational commitment

- ➔ The CMF launches an Aboriginal Program supporting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis content creation, a continuation of support from when we were the Canadian Television Fund.
- ➔ As the CMF, contributions are allocated for production, development, and predevelopment.

	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
TOTAL	\$7M	\$7M	\$6.7M*	\$7M	\$7M	\$8M

*The CMF implemented a four per cent reduction across all funding programs resulting in decreased contributions in 2013-2014.

Appendix A: Allyship Timeline (continued)

2015-2016 Enhancing Indigenous participation in the screen sector

- ➔ The CMF commissions a national, multi-stakeholder engagement process to develop a strategy: [Supporting and Developing the Indigenous Screen-based Sector in Canada](#)
- ➔ Based on the findings, the CMF commissions further work on the development of an Indigenous Screen Office.

2016-2017 Collaborating on the creation of the Indigenous Screen Office (ISO)

- ➔ Responding to Indigenous advocacy and consultation, the CMF facilitates a collaboration between APTN, CBC/SRC, Telefilm Canada, CMPA, and the NFB, and [announces the creation of the Indigenous Screen Office](#) (ISO). The CMF has maintained our commitment to the ISO through significant annual contributions since its inception.
- ➔ With an allocation of \$8M in 2016-2017, the Aboriginal Program budget doubles from the \$4M budget set in 2009-2010.

2017-2018 Building international Indigenous partnerships

- ➔ The Indigenous Screen Office is officially launched. Ojibwe broadcaster, curator, producer, activist, and public speaker Jesse Wenté is appointed as the founding Executive Director. The ISO's mandate is to support the development, production, and marketing of Indigenous content, while creating stronger pathways for Indigenous talent and facilitating relationships with broadcasters, distributors, training institutions, and federal funders.
- ➔ The [Arctic Indigenous Film Fund](#) (AIFF) is launched by the [International Sami Film Institute](#), the CMF, Nunavut Film Development Corporation, Film Greenland, the Sundance Institute, and Sakha Film. The AIFF's mandate is to build a sustainable, interconnected Arctic Indigenous screen industry.

2019-2020 Strengthening support for Indigenous content

- ➔ The CMF has invested over \$100M in Indigenous-led productions since our inception.
- ➔ [On-Screen Protocols + Pathways: A Media Production Guide to Working with First Nations, Métis and Inuit Communities, Cultures, Concepts and Stories](#) is published, commissioned by imagineNATIVE and funded by industry partners, including the CMF.



Appendix A: Allyship Timeline (continued)

2021-2022 Supporting industry advocacy

- ➔ The CMF actively participates in CRTC hearings on Indigenous representation in broadcasting.
- ➔ The second year of the [CMF Slate Development Pilot Program](#) offers additional access point with more flexible eligibility criteria to better support companies owned by Indigenous applicants.
- ➔ The CMF convenes the *Equity and Inclusion in Data Collection Working Group* to develop common standards and a concerted mechanism to track, share, and compare data across the industry; a [Terminology Guide](#) for Data Collection on Indigenous and Racialized Communities is published.
- ➔ The CMF launches [PERSONA-ID](#), a self-identification system to better understand program participation across the industry, including Indigenous-owned companies.

2022-2023 Investing in narrative sovereignty

- ➔ The CMF supports the ISO to enshrine Indigenous peoples and languages as a core pillar of the *Broadcasting Act*, alongside English and French.
- ➔ When it comes into force in April 2023, the *Online Streaming Act* amends the *Broadcasting Act*'s core policy objectives and definitions to prioritize a greater role for Indigenous peoples, ensuring their cultures and languages are reflected in the broadcasting system and establishing Indigenous broadcasting as a distinct, entrenched pillar of the Act.
- ➔ CMF leadership appears before the CRTC during its hearings to implement the *Online Streaming Act*, advancing the position that Indigenous content warrants distinct, dedicated support; the resulting framework establishes dedicated funding for the ISO, alongside new contribution mechanisms for Canadian content more broadly.
- ➔ In November 2023, the federal government [issues a policy direction requiring the CRTC to support the meaningful participation of Indigenous persons in the broadcasting system](#), including through sustainable and predictable funding. These legislative and policy changes are historic opportunities to grow funding for the ISO and the Indigenous screen-based production sector.

Appendix A: Allyship Timeline (continued)

2023-2024 Advancing Indigenous representation

- ➔ The CMF's Indigenous Program supports 17 productions and 33 development and predevelopment projects with \$11.2M in funding. An additional \$4.8M in funding for Indigenous Program productions comes from the Performance Envelopes Program, the English Regional Production Bonus, the Anglophone Minority Incentive, and the Northern Incentive.
- ➔ Indigenous representation in Key Roles (linear content) increases from seven per cent to nine per cent ([CMF Demographic Report 2023-2024](#)).
- ➔ Indigenous-language productions see representation rise from 57 per cent to 68 per cent.
- ➔ Individuals identifying as First Nations, Inuit, and Métis make up a combined seven per cent of all reported Key Roles, and six per cent of Ownership shares in linear programs.
- ➔ Valerie Creighton, CMF President and CEO, and Kerry Swanson, ISO Chief Executive Officer, [announce administration of Indigenous Program will be transferred to Indigenous Screen Office in recognition of narrative sovereignty](#).
- ➔ Canadian Heritage, in collaboration with national audiovisual agency partners (CMF, Telefilm Canada, ISO, and NFB), create the Head of Institutions Table (HIT) and its related working groups to discuss the modernization of the Canadian audiovisual sector. Part of the HIT's work centres on building alignment among partners on the core principles for a standardized definition of Indigenous content that consider cultural contributions, global competitiveness, and flexibility.

2024-2025 Building Indigenous companies and capacity

- ➔ The [CMF-ISO Interactive and Immersive Program](#) partnership launches to boost support for Indigenous creators in developing interactive and immersive projects, including video games, AR/VR/MR works, and apps. The CMF's investment brings the program's total budget to \$900K.
- ➔ In 2024-2025, the Indigenous Program supports [15 productions](#) and 36 development and predevelopment projects with \$10.2M in funding. An additional \$3.2M in funding for Indigenous productions comes from the Performance Envelopes Program, the English Regional Production Bonus, the Anglophone Minority Incentive, Quebec French Regional Production Incentive, and the Northern Incentive. The CMF reports modest increases in representation, which signal the importance of sustained efforts. Notably:
 - Indigenous representation in Key Roles (linear content) increases from nine per cent to 10 per cent.
 - Individuals identifying as First Nations, Inuit, and Métis make up a combined 10 per cent of all reported Key Roles, and 12 per cent of Ownership shares in linear programs.



Appendix A: Allyship Timeline (continued)

2024-2025 Building Indigenous companies and capacity (continued)

- ➔ By 2024-2025, 37 Indigenous development and predevelopment projects transition to production funding.
- ➔ In January 2025, the CMF [announces Indigenous Company Impact Support \(ICIS\) one-time funding of \\$50K for Indigenous-owned companies with CMF-funded projects from 2022-2024](#). Funding activities focus on company stabilization, capacity building, training, community engagement, market access, marketing, language, and accessibility supports.

2025-2026 Expanding national and international impact

- ➔ The Indigenous Screen Office now administers the CMF's Indigenous Program, managing annual funding of approximately \$10M, bringing its total administered funding to around \$37M per year. In addition, the federal government commits [\\$65M over five years](#) and a permanent \$13M per year allocation to the ISO.
- ➔ The CMF partners with imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival, the ISO, The Storyboard Collective, with support from Cherokee Film, to launch the Indigenous Series Lab, selecting four Indigenous screenwriters with projects in development across Canada and the United States for a year-long program with domestic and international market access opportunities.
- ➔ The CMF invests nearly half a million dollars through Strategic Partnerships funding to enhance community capacity building and market access activities for Indigenous-led organizations operating in English, French, and Indigenous languages.

Appendix B

CMF INDIGENOUS ACTION PLAN

Industry Participation Survey General Findings 2026



This report summarizes the general themes gathered from the responses to CMF's Industry Participation Survey, which was conducted to gather input from Indigenous professionals working across the screen sector. Those themes are as follows:

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INTRODUCTION

The survey was designed to identify current opportunities, barriers to access, and priority areas for investment to help inform the CMF's in-development Indigenous Action Plan. The Shine Network Institute assisted in the development and distribution of the survey, helping to engage Indigenous creators, producers, and industry professionals from across Canada and ensure the findings reflect a broad range of lived experiences and perspectives.

FUNDING AVAILABILITY & FINANCIAL BARRIERS

Funding remained the most frequently identified challenge, with 34% of respondents reporting that one of their most critical gaps impacting their ability to succeed was a lack of access to development funding. When asked at what stage respondents encountered the most difficulty accessing funding, with the ability to choose all that applied, the results were as follows: 34% at Idea/Concept Development; 34% at Early Development; 48% at Financing; 65% at Production; 20% at Post-Production; and 17% at Distribution/Marketing. Respondents consistently reported difficulty securing sufficient and reliable financing, particularly for production after successfully obtaining development funding. Many highlighted the need for more production funding, gap financing, interim financing, marketing and audience development funding, and operational support for Indigenous-owned companies. Several noted that continually deferring producer fees and company overhead limits their ability to build sustainable businesses, hire staff, attend markets, and grow beyond project-to-project survival. Respondents also emphasized the need for funding models that recognize longer development timelines, relationship-building with communities, language revitalization work, and Indigenous approaches to storytelling that may not fit conventional production models.

COMPLEX & OPAQUE FUNDING PROCESSES

Over 65% of respondents described funding applications as complex, time-consuming, and difficult to navigate. Respondents cited unclear eligibility requirements, industry jargon, confusing program rules, and limited feedback following unsuccessful applications. Several suggested that greater transparency, including sharing examples of successful applications, providing clearer guidance, and offering mentorship through the application process, would help emerging producers better understand expectations and improve access to funding.

MENTORSHIP, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & CAPACITY BUILDING

A strong theme was the need for greater mentorship and practical support throughout all stages of a producing career. Respondents called for access to experienced Indigenous producers, workshops, business affairs training, and professional development opportunities for producers transitioning into new roles or advancing to larger productions. Many also emphasized investing in Indigenous-owned companies, supporting organizational growth, and creating more opportunities for knowledge-sharing between established and emerging professionals. Over 45% of respondents also identified taxation, business affairs, and other operational support, particularly at a company level, as areas where additional assistance would strengthen long-term sector capacity.

SYSTEMIC & REGIONAL BARRIERS

A recurring theme across open-ended responses was that respondents identified systemic barriers that do not always reflect Indigenous production realities. Funding structures were described as favouring conventional production models over Indigenous approaches that require greater flexibility for community engagement, cultural consultation, and language preservation. Respondents also highlighted regional inequities, including barriers faced by producers working in remote, northern, rural, and non-urban communities, as well as the additional complexities those creating French-language content face. Several respondents noted the importance of Indigenous representation in decision-making while cautioning against gatekeeping, advocating instead for diverse juries with broad industry expertise in linear and experimental mediums and balanced perspectives.

INDUSTRY RELATIONSHIPS, MARKET ACCESS & COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Emerging producers reported difficulty advancing without established producers attached to their projects or prior relationships with funders. Respondents also identified challenges accessing domestic and international markets, particularly for companies outside major production centres, and emphasized the importance of strengthening connections with collaborators, distributors, and industry partners. Beyond professional networking, respondents highlighted the value of creating a more inclusive industry culture through bias awareness and accountability practices, stronger community-building, and increased opportunities for new voices to participate in leadership and decision-making.

CULTURAL WELL-BEING & INDIGENOUS-LED APPROACHES

A distinct theme emerging from these responses was the need for funding and support systems that recognize the emotional and cultural realities of Indigenous storytelling. Several respondents emphasized the importance of incorporating access to Elders, cultural supports, and mental health resources into funding and professional development programs, particularly when creators are engaging with difficult histories or community trauma. Respondents also stressed the importance of supporting Indigenous creators to retain ownership and control of their stories, ensuring that programs are designed in partnership with Indigenous communities and implemented through ongoing consultation, transparency, and trust-building.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Overall, the responses to the Industry Participation Survey reflect a strong desire for a funding ecosystem that is more accessible, transparent, and responsive to the realities of Indigenous creators and production companies. While increased financial investment remains a priority, respondents also emphasized the importance of mentorship, organizational capacity-building, culturally informed funding models, and meaningful relationship-building.

Collectively, these findings suggest that strengthening the Indigenous screen sector will require not only additional funding, but also long-term investments in people, companies, and systems that support sustainable Indigenous-led storytelling.



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