

# UK-CANADA IMMERSIVE EXCHANGE

## Open Call Text

***Call for UK and Canadian creatives and producers to become future leaders in immersive storytelling backed by funding support***

The **UK-Canada Immersive Exchange** is a new talent development and co-production programme for UK and Canadian creatives and producers, who wish to work with immersive technology. The programme is supported by an international partnership between **StoryFutures Academy**, the **National Centre for Immersive Storytelling** (run by the National Film and Television School and Royal Holloway, University of London) and **Arts Council England** in the UK, and the **Canada Media Fund**, **Canadian Film Centre** and the **Canada Council for the Arts** in Canada.

The year-long programme has been developed to support and champion an international cohort of artists, filmmakers and creators from Canada and the UK, aiming to be future leaders of immersive storytelling. Embracing emerging technologies, including virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR) and mixed reality (MR), the accelerator will pioneer new forms of immersive storytelling by bringing together a wealth of backgrounds and experiences from games, TV, film, theatre, performing and visual arts, and other forms of digital and interactive media. As well as an opportunity to develop their creative and technical skills in this area, the programme will equip the cohort of participants with the relevant business and sector specific knowledge, understanding of a new international market, key industry contacts, and an opportunity to apply for a dedicated co-production fund to support collaborative immersive productions.

A total of 24 creatives will be selected to participate, comprising six 'Creative Leads' and six 'Creative Producers' from each country. Creative Leads will be a mixture of artists, filmmakers, theatre directors and visionaries who can drive the creative direction of a project, while Producers, who will be representing creative companies with a track record in immersive production, will bring the business skills and immersive production experience needed to make these projects a reality.

The UK-Canada Immersive Exchange will support an open approach to international networking and project development activities. To respect public health guidelines related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the programme will be delivered remotely, including through the use of immersive technology. However, pending the lifting of travel and working restrictions, opportunities for in-person workshops and exchanges will be explored.

Beginning in November 2020, the exchange programme will comprise a series of workshops and training events that culminate in an opportunity to pitch for co-production financing. Participants will receive a fixed Development Grant of £2,000 (CAN \$3,400) to contribute towards their time spent on the initial 'Talent Development' stage of the programme. In the latter stage, participants can pitch for co-production financing, with a total fund of £300,000

(CAD \$510,000) available between the countries. This will fund approximately six projects between £25,000 (CAD \$ 42,500) and up to a maximum of £100,000 (CAD \$ 170,000).

The co-production stage will begin February 2021 and the programme will conclude with final projects delivered by November 2021.

Applications are now open. The deadline for applications is Thursday 17th September 2020 at 12pm EDT / 5pm BST.

## Programme Outline

This programme will support a cohort of creatives who wish to make new contacts, work collaboratively and create innovative new work with emerging immersive technology. In this context, this refers to creative, audience-facing immersive experiences that are enabled by immersive technologies. This includes:

- Virtual reality (VR)
- Augmented reality (AR)
- Mixed reality (MR)
- Immersive sound technology

This may include Head Mounted Display (HMD) technology, as well as experiences that don't require an HMD (such as mobile AR, or projection displays). Immersive sound technology includes use of spatial sound or other augmented audio techniques.

The programme will consist of two main stages - a talent development stage, and a co-production stage. A total of 24 participants will take part in the Talent Development stage (Stage 1) of the programme, comprising six Creative Leads and six Creative Producers from the UK, and six Creative Leads and six Creative Producers from Canada. Please see the Who Can Apply section below for details on the criteria for applicants.

Following the Talent Development stage, participants will have the opportunity to apply for funding for UK-Canadian co-production projects as part of a collaborative team (Stage 2). The total co-production fund is £300,000 (CAN \$510,000), with up to £150,000 (\$255,000) each to be spent in the UK and Canada.

The main language of the programme is English. As such, participants are expected to have a working knowledge of the English language from the onset of the programme. The open call materials and application form can be made available in French upon request.

## Stage 1: Talent Development (November 2020 - February 2021)

Participants will have access to a set of structured workshops and masterclasses that are delivered remotely, equivalent to approximately 10 days of time in total, spread over 3 months, focussing on:

- exploration of the latest immersive technologies and storytelling techniques;
- in-depth exploration of relevant business and distribution models from across the creative industries, worldwide;
- practical advice and case studies related to international co-productions;
- networking opportunities between creative practitioners within the cohort (nationally and between the two international cohorts);
- market exposure via facilitated introductions to potential partners in each country;
- co-creation sessions to help catalyse creative partnerships and projects between countries;
- for those new to immersive, additional sessions to introduce them to the essentials of immersive content creation and technology.

Some core sessions will be common for all members of the cohort, whilst others may be offered for sub-groups within the cohort, in order to suit different needs and experiences.

Access to technical equipment will be provided wherever possible, and mentors and experts from across the established UK and Canadian arts, culture and entertainment industries, will support the programme.

To respect public health guidelines related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the programme will be delivered remotely, including through the use of immersive technology. However, pending the lifting of travel and working restrictions, opportunities for in-person workshops will be explored. During this time, participants will be supported as they actively develop projects and collaborative relationships ahead of the co-production stage, which includes a fixed Development Grant of £2,000 (CAN \$3,400). Please see the section on Costs and Funding for information on financial support available for participants of the programme.

## Stage 2: Co-production Stage (February 2021 - November 2021)

The objective of this stage is to identify up to two *audience-ready co-productions*, to be funded up to a total value of £100,000 (CAN \$ 170,000) each, that have the potential to be innovative, audience-facing examples of immersive content, as well as being strong examples of well-functioning UK-Canadian partnerships between producers.

In addition, up to four *prototype co-productions* will be awarded a smaller development fund of up to £25,000 (CAN \$ 42,500) each to support early development and prototyping of the work.

The selected projects will be funded for a six-month build period, and must be delivered by 15th November 2021. Please see the section on Criteria for Funded Co-Production Projects for more information.

## Remote Working and Travel Exchanges

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the recent restrictions on travel and ways of working, it has never been more important to find new ways of collaborating both within small project teams, as well as internationally. This programme aims to support the creative sector to continue to find innovative new ways to collaborate remotely and create great content. The programme will be delivered remotely. International collaboration is integral to the programme, and participants must be willing to work remotely with international counterparts throughout. If travel and working restrictions are lifted in 2021, opportunities for in-person workshops, and for one or more in-person exchanges to Canada or the UK will be explored. These exchanges are not guaranteed, however, we ask participants to be flexible and open to the opportunity for international travel if available. A decision about in-person international travel exchange will be taken by the end of 2020.

Dates and times of workshops will be arranged to give as much notice as possible to participants. Due to time-zone differences between the UK and Canada, participants will be expected to attend some joint sessions outside of normal working hours i.e. early morning in Canada, and evening sessions in the UK.

## Who Can Apply?

We are looking for a broad group of creatives who are expected to bring a wealth of experience from one or more related creative industry or artistic practice, such as theatre, performing and visual art, games, TV, film, and other forms of immersive and interactive media. This program welcomes applications from a wide range of diverse backgrounds to work with immersive technology, who are representative of the diversity we aspire to see within the arts sector and creative industries in the UK and Canada. There are 12 places available per country (24 in total) and in particular, we are looking for applicants in one of the two following groups:

### Creative Leads

These are creative practitioners who have the experience of originating and leading the creative vision on a content or artistic project (whether they be creative directors, artists, filmmakers, theatre directors etc). Prior experience of creating immersive media is an advantage, but is not essential, however applicants must have a strong proven track record of delivering work in a related creative or artistic field. Applicants will be assessed according to their demonstrable interest in interactive media forms and their potential for working with immersive environments. We are looking for approximately six Creative Leads in each country.

### Creative Producers

We are looking for creative companies with previous experience of producing immersive media projects to apply. Each company should nominate a named Creative Producer who will represent them and take part in the programme. The nominated producers will be experienced producers of creative work, with a track record of working with creative production companies or artists to develop projects, put together budgets, collaborations and business plans, and

deliver creative work to audiences via different means (such as via an art gallery, a theatre tour, or an online platform). Creative Producers may already have had some experience of putting together co-productions, however this is not a prerequisite. We are looking for approximately six Creative Producers (representing six creative companies) in each country.

The creative company must be registered in the UK/Canada (please see section on Criteria for Creative Companies) with proven experience in immersive content production. The nominated producer can be a permanent employee or on a short-term contract with the company, and we expect they will be acting on behalf of this company during the programme.

In applying for the programme, the company is agreeing to::

- support their nominated producer taking part in the programme with the aim of developing a project to pitch for co-production funding
- be the primary contract holder and manager of production funds (within their country) should their project receive co-production funding
- provide immersive production capabilities at cost, in line with the R&D and training framework of this funding (which does not allow for the budget to include a profit margin or company overheads) should this project receive co-production funding

## Who owns the IP?

We expect IP related to collaborative projects developed during the programme to be shared appropriately among creative leads, creative producers and companies across countries. However, this will be project dependent and is the responsibility of the parties collaborating on a given project to negotiate prior to their pitch for funding.

None of the partners funding the programme (ACE, CCA, CFC, CMF, or SFA) seek to retain any IP of the final projects, however all organisations will require access rights to the final piece for educational, research or marketing purposes. This includes providing access that will allow for any of the partners to do meaningful audience insight research via qualitative or quantitative means and, where agreed between parties, technological methodologies that capture audience data. This insight may be shared or published for academic or training purposes. All funding partners will also require that they are credited for their financial support in all versions of the project.

# Application and Judging Criteria for Applicants

## General Criteria

- Applicants must be 18+.
- In Canada, the applicant must be a Canadian citizen or permanent resident
- In the UK, the applicant must be a permanent UK resident, living and working in the UK.
- The main language of the programme is English. As such, participants are expected to have a working knowledge of the English language from the onset of the programme.
- As this is a talent development programme, all applicants must make clear how being part of this programme will bring a benefit and opportunity to them (and their company or organisation, if relevant) that they would not otherwise have access to
- It is not necessary for applicants to already have international connections or existing projects. However, the programme also welcomes applications from those who may already have a connection with an international counterpart in the UK/Canada and may already be developing a project. However, as the spirit of this programme is to help broker relationships and create opportunities that creators may not otherwise have had, an existing project would not be eligible for co-production funding if it had already secured 50% or more of its total production budget. If you are applying with an existing relationship and project idea, this will not be considered an advantage or disadvantage, however you will be asked to provide details of its current status and the reasons that the partner(s) and the project would benefit from being supported by the programme.
- This programme aims to encourage a broad range of applicants from different related fields, with varying degrees of experience with immersive technology, as we believe this variety offers important opportunities for the cohort to learn from each other's experiences in other fields. We will take a portfolio approach to applications to ensure an appropriate mixture of skills and experience.
- This programme is committed to supporting applicants from a range of diverse backgrounds to work with immersive technology. Please see the Commitment to Diversity section below.
- All applicants are expected to grant the project partners the use of anonymised data related to the project in academic and industry-facing research publications and for reporting to relevant funding bodies.
- Applicants must commit to engaging collaboratively with project activities including workshops and masterclasses.

## Additional Criteria for Creative Leads

- Creative Leads should have a strong proven track record of leading the creative vision of a creative content project, having delivering work in a related creative or artistic field. They must also demonstrate a clear interest in interactive media forms and their potential for working with immersive environments.
- Applicants must apply as a named individual (i.e. rather than applying as a company or collective).

## Additional Criteria for Creative Producers

- The application should be made by a creative company with a track record of producing immersive media projects. Please see section below on Criteria for Creative Companies. The company is asked to nominate a named Creative Producer to represent them and take part in the programme. Both company and producer are expected to explain why taking part would be of benefit to them.
- Nominated Creative Producers should be able to demonstrate their ability to deliver an immersive project to a high standard, within a timescale and budget. They must be able to demonstrate their track record through a body of work and/or credits and/or demonstrable ability to drive a project through production to delivery.

## Criteria for Creative Companies

In Canada, the company criteria is as follows:

- Is a for-profit (i.e. a taxable Canadian corporation, within the meaning of Canada's Income Tax Act) production company.
- Is Canadian-controlled as determined in sections 26 to 28 of the Investment Canada Act.
- Has its head office in Canada.
- Sole proprietorships are not eligible.

In the UK, the company criteria is as follows:

- Is a company or organisation registered and centrally managed in the UK, and is a company between 4-250 employees in size (this includes permanent staff and regular freelancers).
- Sole traders are not eligible.

In the event of receiving co-production funding, payments will only be made to registered companies that have the capacity to receive and manage production funds, and with appropriate production insurance in place if relevant (for example, Public Liability and Employees insurance, Errors and Omissions insurance).

## Application Process and Judging Criteria

Applications must be made online. Once the call has closed, UK applications will be shortlisted by StoryFutures Academy and Arts Council England, and Canadian applications will be shortlisted by the Canada Media Fund, Canadian Film Centre and Canada Council for the Arts. Please note, external specialists and judges may also be consulted at this stage.

Approximately 20 shortlisted applicants in each country will then be invited to a remote, 20 minute lightning pitch, which will take the form of a 5 minute introduction by the applicant followed by a 15 minute Q&A. Following this, a final decision will be made by a panel of representatives from SFA, ACE, CMF, CFC, and CCA.

All applications are treated in confidence.

Eligible applicants will be selected based on the following judging criteria:

- track record of relevant experience as either a Creative Lead or Creative Producer
- demonstrable interest in exploring immersive storytelling
- demonstrable ability to work collaboratively with multiple external partners on a project
- likelihood to benefit from taking part (i.e. a clear explanation as to why this opportunity is important to the applicant, the ways in which they will benefit, and why the programme is providing an opportunity that they may not otherwise have access to)
- for creative companies nominating Creative Producers - ability to set out how the programme fits within the company's portfolio/artistic progression and how it represents an opportunity it may not otherwise have had access to
- for Creative Leads - ability to set out the programme fits within their career/artistic progression

## Commitment to Diversity

This programme is committed to supporting talented creatives from a wide range of diverse backgrounds to work with immersive technology, who are representative of the diversity we aspire to see within the creative industries and arts sector in the UK and Canada.

This includes supporting applicants that work in a broad range of artforms, disciplines and geographical areas, as well as those who identify as a D/deaf or disabled person, have a long-term health condition or are from an under-represented group, including official language minority communities in Canada.

This includes a commitment to reach a minimum of 50% female and 20% BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) / BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) representation amongst participants.

We will take a portfolio approach to applications, ensuring that across the cohort this target is met. Please also see the section below on Costs and Funding for additional support available for those with access requirements.



# Costs and Funding

In order to make this programme as accessible as possible to creatives, all participants will receive a fixed Development Grant of £2,000 (CAN \$3,400) to contribute towards their time spent on the Talent Development stage of the programme. In the case of Creative Producers who are representing creative companies - this Development Grant will be paid to the company to ensure the producer is afforded paid time to participate in this programme.

At co-production stage, the total co-production fund is £300,000 (CAN \$510,000), with up to £150,000 (CAN \$255,000) each to be spent in the UK and Canada. It is expected that the applicant's time is costed into the funding application at this stage at non-commercial rates.

In the event that one or more international travel exchanges in early 2021 are deemed possible, core expenses including food, travel, and accommodation will be covered by the programme. However, these in-person exchanges are not guaranteed.

We are committed to making this initiative as accessible as possible. If you have a disability, or are yourself a carer, you may be entitled to apply for a bursary to cover additional expenses related to these needs that you may incur as a direct result of applying for, or taking part in the programme (such as special assistance arrangements). If you think this may apply to you, this can be indicated on the application form, and a representative from the country in which you are applying will get in touch to discuss requirements if your application is successful. For any enquiries relating to this, please contact [info@immersive-exchange.com](mailto:info@immersive-exchange.com) and clearly state in which country you are applying.

For UK participants, please note all funding awards are treated as project grants, which are outside the scope of VAT (and as such no additional VAT is paid on top of the grant).

## Key Dates

**Applications Open:** Wednesday, August 5th

**Application Deadline:** Thursday 17th September 2020, 12pm EDT / 5pm BST

**Shortlisted applicants notified of invitation to interview:** by Thursday 8th October 2020

**Interviews held:** Tuesday 13th to Thursday 15th October 2020

**Final decision announced:** by Friday 30th October 2020

**Programme kickoff call:** Monday 9th November 2020, 12pm EDT / 5pm BST

**Talent Development Period:** 9th November 2020 – 5th February 2021

**Exchanges (TBC):** Spring 2021 (TBC)

**Pitching and selection for co-production funding:** March 2021

**Co-production build period:** April 2020 - November 2021

**Final delivery:** 1st November 2021

Please note that dates beyond the Application Deadline are indicative, and may be subject to change at the discretion of the programme organisers. Fair notice will be given wherever possible to those involved with the programme.

## Criteria for Funded Co-production Projects

- All projects are expected to be innovative examples of immersive, creative content with a clear vision for how it will appeal to, and ultimately reach an audience.
- The project must involve at least one UK creative practitioner/company, and one Canadian creative practitioner/company.
- All projects are expected to be strong examples of well-functioning UK-Canadian partnerships between creative practitioners/producers.
- The project must involve at least one creative practitioner who is a member of the cohort from either the UK or Canada. This means that at least one of the partners must have participated in the Talent Development stage, but the other could be new to the programme.
- All projects applying for funding as *audience-ready co-productions* are expected to be able to deliver their project within an approximately six-month build period, being delivered by 1st November 2021.
- All projects applying for funding as *prototype co-productions* are expected to be able to deliver their prototype within an approximately six-month build period, being delivered by 1st November 2021, however it is not expected that this prototype would necessarily be ready for public release.
- Funding must be paid to registered companies that have the capacity to receive and manage production funds, and with appropriate production insurance in place if relevant (for example, Public Liability and Employees insurance, Errors and Omissions insurance).
- If projects wish to secure additional resources (either in cash or in-kind) they may do so, however this must be secured by the time of application for the co-production fund. A project will not be awarded funds if successful delivery of the project is dependent upon further funding that has not yet been secured.
- As far as possible, projects are encouraged to create a 50% - 50% split in effort (and funding) between the UK and Canadian parties. In any event, the share of the minority co-producer must not be less than 20%.
- The contribution from each country in each project will be determined on a case by case basis. The funding partners (CMF, CCA, CFC, SFA and ACE) will take a reciprocal approach to ensure a fair balance between majority and minority projects from each country.
- The Canadian portion of the project must respect other criteria established by the CMF and CCA and the UK portion of the project must respect other criteria established by SFA and ACE - this detail will be provided to applicants ahead of the application process for the co-production stage.
- The R&D and training framework of this funding does not allow for the budget to include a profit margin or company overheads. Work is therefore expected to be done at cost.
- Please note additional criteria may apply. A full list of criteria will be published to the cohort ahead of the funding application stage.

# FAQs

## **Q: What are the key dates for the programme?**

**Applications Open:** Wednesday, August 5th

**Application Deadline:** Thursday 17th September 2020, 12pm EDT / 5pm BST

**Shortlisted applicants notified of invitation to interview:** by Thursday 8th October 2020

**Interviews held:** Tuesday 13th to Thursday 15th October 2020

**Final decision announced:** by Friday 30th October 2020

**Programme kickoff call:** Tuesday 9th November 2020, 12pm EDT / 5pm BST

**Talent Development Period:** 9th November 2020 – 5th February 2021

**Exchanges (TBC):** Spring 2021 (TBC)

**Pitching and selection for co-production funding:** March 2021

**Co-production build period:** April 2020 - November 2021

**Final delivery:** 1st November 2021

## **Q: What is meant by Immersive?**

A: In this context, we are looking for creative, audience-facing immersive experiences that are enabled by immersive technologies. This includes:

- Virtual reality (VR)
- Augmented reality (AR)
- Mixed reality (MR)
- Immersive sound technology

This may include Head Mounted Display (HMD) technology, as well as experiences that don't require an HMD (such as mobile AR, or projection displays). Immersive sound technology includes use of spatial sound or other augmented audio techniques.

## **Q: Do you take any IP in the final projects?**

A: None of the partners on the programme seek to retain any IP of the final projects, however all organisations will require access rights to the final piece for educational, research or marketing purposes. This includes providing access that will allow for any of the partners to do meaningful audience insight research via qualitative or quantitative means and, where agreed between parties, technological methodologies that capture audience data. This insight may be shared or published for academic or training purposes. All funding partners will also require that they are credited for their financial support in all versions of the project. Please see the section on Who Owns the IP?

**Q: Do I apply as an individual or a company?**

If applying to take part as a Creative Lead, you may apply as an individual. If applying to take part as a Creative Producer, applications should be made by companies who must nominate a named Producer.

**Q: Do I already have to have a project in mind to apply?**

No, you do not need to have a project in mind. If you have an existing project idea in development with a UK/Canadian counterpart that you would like to further develop as part of this programme, this will not be considered an advantage or disadvantage but you will be asked some details about it to ensure it would be eligible for support.

**Q: I already have a project in development with a UK/Canadian partner, can I apply for funding?**

It is not necessary for applicants to already have international connections or existing projects. The programme welcomes applications from those who may already have a connection with an international counterpart in the UK/Canada and may already be developing a project. However, as the spirit of this programme is to help broker relationships and create opportunities that creators may not otherwise have had, an existing project would not be eligible for co-production funding if it had already secured 50% or more of its total production budget. If you are applying with an existing relationship and project idea, this will not be considered an advantage or disadvantage, however you will be asked to provide details of its current status and the reasons that the partner(s) and the project would benefit from being supported by the programme.

**Q: I've never worked with immersive before, can I apply?**

Yes - if you are applying as a Creative Lead. Training opportunities will be offered to those new to this field. However, you must have demonstrable interest in other forms of interactive media and in working with immersive environments. Those applying as Creative Producers must have a track record of working with immersive technology in a creative context.