

Acknowledgements

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Any opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funders of this study. The funders are in no way bound by the recommendations contained in this document.

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

This study fills an important gap in the available information on the Aboriginal screen-based production sector in Canada. The goal of this study is to present a profile of the sector with a view to describing the milestones that have marked its evolution, documenting its unique characteristics, and identifying priorities for its future growth.¹

This study is financially supported by the Aboriginal People's Television Network (APTN), the Canada Media Fund (CMF), the National Film Board (NFB), the Bell Broadcast and New Media Fund (Bell Fund), Telefilm Canada (Telefilm), the Canada Council for the Arts (Canada Council), and the National Screen Institute (NSI).

This study used multiple lines of inquiry including a literature review of secondary sources and primary research conducted using two online questionnaires and informant interviews. The consultants also analysed trends using data on the public funding of Aboriginal screen-based production.

2. A Dynamic and Vibrant Industry Sector

There is a network of training institutions, funding agencies and Aboriginal community media organizations that have contributed to making Aboriginal screen-based content a distinctive success.

There are economic, social and cultural benefits being generated by the sector: jobs are being created, mentoring is taking place where highly valued skills are being transferred, and content is being made in Aboriginal languages.

The last decade has seen the astonishing rise of a sector responsible for award-winning television programs, films and digital media. These successes include many trailblazers that have experimented with film, video, and multimedia within the networks of film and video cooperatives, distribution centres, and artist-run centres. These works found audiences via independent film festivals and other distribution networks.

This report discusses a few noteworthy examples of award-winning films, television programs, and digital media content made over the last decade for the purpose of illustrating the vibrancy, diversity, and breadth of Aboriginal expression in the sector. Many other successes, while not profiled in this study, have nevertheless helped nurture the rich screen Aboriginal culture that exists today.

2.1 Unique Characteristics Distinguish The Aboriginal Screen-based Sector

The sector generally shares many characteristics with the independent production sector overall, such as the large number of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), who face challenges in achieving long-term sustainability. Aboriginal production companies employ on average fewer than five people on a permanent basis.

¹ Here, screen-based production means the production of television programs, digital media and feature films.

At the same time, unique characteristics define the sector: production companies typically employ Aboriginal people, assume the roles of writer/and or director in addition to producer, and produce programming in Aboriginal languages. Aboriginal producers are also primarily located in Western Canada, where the Aboriginal population is largest.

2.2 \$173 million in Production and 3000 Direct and Indirect Jobs

Television is the primary market with documentary production being the most prevalent, though the sector also produces drama, including series, one-offs, and movies of the week, children and youth programming, animation, variety, and short films.

\$173 million in production activity was supported by the CMF Convergent Stream over the five-year period from 2007-2008 to 2011-2012, contributing to the creation of an estimated 3,333 direct and indirect jobs.

The slate of productions being produced is increasingly diverse, though still dominated by documentary production.

2.3 Over \$15 million in Innovative Digital Media Production

Our analysis shows that digital production is being undertaken, with much activity taking place in web-based content, including games, though few, if any, webisodes. A small number of innovative companies are pioneering in Aboriginal game development and online platforms.

Of the total volume of production supported by the CMF Convergent Stream, interactive digital media components accounted for \$8.6 million of production. In addition, the CMF Experimental Stream and the Bell Fund supported \$5.9 million of interactive digital media production, for a total contribution of \$14.5 million. The Canada Council contributed a further \$670,000 to media arts infrastructure and project grants for new media artists.

The data available do not provide a precise portrait of interactive digital media production activity being funded through the Experimental Stream and the Bell Fund, as Aboriginal production companies funded through these programs are not required to self-identify as Aboriginal.

However, it is reasonable to assume that the CMF's Convergent Stream, which requires that content be distributed on at least two platforms, is stimulating production.

Interviews with stakeholders suggest that a greater amount of interactive digital media production is taking place than can be measured based on available data. APTN also recognizes that interactive digital production and distribution is a priority and has made its DigitalDrum.ca platform a centrepiece of its future strategy. This may also have an effect on stimulating new production.

2.4 A Small Number of Feature Films Produced

In terms of feature film production, very few films were produced between 2007-2008 and 2011-2012, with the majority of funding supporting the development of projects. In all, Aboriginal filmmakers accessed \$4.8 million, the majority provided by the Canada Council (\$2.3 million), followed by Telefilm Canada (\$1.5 million) and the NFB (\$1 million).

2.5 Support for Emerging Producers: The Canada Council and the NFB

While there is currently no way to track the career trajectory of successful producers, it is reasonable to assume that some would have received funding from the Canada Council or the NFB at some point in their careers, as these agencies play an important role in developing the skills of emerging filmmakers. The NSI has also helped propel the careers of a number of award-winning writers and directors.

3. Challenges and Priorities

The most important challenges discussed in this report are greater access by producers to broadcasters and production financing, distribution channels, career development opportunities and market intelligence.

3.1 Lack of Access to Broadcasters and Production Financing

Many of the established producers interviewed for this report are concerned about the long-term sustainability of their businesses since their lack of access to broadcasters other than APTN represents a key barrier in their growth. Other challenges cited by television producers include lack of sufficient financing to produce higher-budget productions.

An analysis of the financial structures of projects funded through the CMF reveals that Aboriginal-language productions have less access to financing beyond the CMF than other Canadian productions.

Few feature films are being produced and little financing is being allocated to Aboriginal feature film production. Producers of feature films point to the unique challenges facing their sector including lack of access to the Canada Feature Film Fund, and lack of access to distributors to attach to potential projects. Film production is a high-risk undertaking involving a long development cycle, accounting at least in part for the higher proportion of feature films financed in development.

Digital media production is a particular challenge as, for the most part, producers lack in-house expertise and hiring third party contractors is costly. Finding Aboriginal digital media developers can be a challenge in the absence of a directory of producers.

Digital media production budgets are low on average and producers are expressing the need for the CMF to make more funding available for Aboriginal-language interactive digital media productions and generally for the government to take a lead in helping to build the digital media production capacity of the sector.

Writers and directors interviewed for this study are interested in greater access to experienced producers so that they can pitch their ideas and expand their professional work experiences domestically and internationally. Work experience is considered the most valuable in terms of developing and advancing one's career. They would also like to be able to transition to digital storytelling.

3.2 Need for Greater Access to Distribution Channels

Access to distribution channels for the works created is a key challenge, as are achieving sales of significant value. Alternative distribution networks are important, particularly for the educational market, where there is a need for works in Aboriginal languages.

3.3 Lack of Market Intelligence on Interactive Digital Media

Having a more complete view of funding would provide valuable intelligence with which to consider capacity-building and skills development issues. One example would be to better understand the trend in convergent digital media seen over two years, in which production volumes and average budgets of Aboriginal projects declined significantly, in contrast to convergent production overall.² Having greater information on Aboriginal-owned companies working primarily in digital media would allow a more complete picture to emerge.

4. Proposed Future Directions

The Aboriginal production sector requires a supportive framework to drive sustainability and within this context, we propose the following directions for consideration by governments, funders, training institutions, and broadcasters.

4.1 Develop an Audiovisual Policy for Aboriginal Screen-Based Production

A number of studies in the last decade identified a need for the federal government to develop an audiovisual policy aimed at supporting the capacity of the Aboriginal screen-based production sector.³ Such a policy would identify priorities for Aboriginal screen-based production in Canada.

We propose that a national summit be held in 2014 with the goal of developing a policy framework for independent Aboriginal screen-based production. Participants would be called on to identify a blueprint for building capacity in film and television production over the coming years. The summit would include the participation of the federal and provincial governments, funders, producers, training institutions, writers, director, broadcasters, and the CRTC.

4.2 Increase Funding to APTN

The coming decade is expected to be transformative and APTN has adopted an Aboriginal-language and multi-platform strategy to make content more readily accessible on multiple platforms.

As APTN stated in its license renewal application to the CRTC, “APTN [has] triggered the development of a much more substantial Aboriginal independent production industry than had

² An increase in convergent production volume and in average budgets from 2010-2011 to 2011-2012 is noted in *Profile 2012: An Economic Report on the Screen-based Production Industry in Canada*, Op. Cit., page 13.

³ See, for example, the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, Canada, 1996; and Jeff Bear, *At the Crossroads*, report prepared for Telefilm Canada, the Canadian Television Fund, the National Film Board, the Department of Canadian Heritage and the CBC, September 20, 2004.

previously been considered possible leading to the emergence of distinctive, professional content reflecting a wide range of Aboriginal perspectives.”⁴

To the extent that APTN could be provided with additional resources to address the challenges that have been identified in this report by producers, this sector would have tools to grow. These include higher license fees for television productions, taking on more higher budget production including drama series and feature films, and digital media production.

4.3 Create Incentives to Increase Access to Canadian Broadcasters by Aboriginal Producers

To promote and encourage the distribution of Aboriginal programming to a wider range of broadcasting services in Canada, the CMF could consider the introduction of incentives to encourage broadcasters other than APTN to trigger projects by Aboriginal producers. In this regard, CBC/Radio-Canada has a special responsibility as a public broadcaster to reflect Aboriginal peoples on television and to provide employment opportunities for Aboriginal producers, writers, and directors.

There is a need to consult with Canadian broadcasters on incentives that would create favourable conditions for their financial participation in Aboriginal productions.

The CRTC, for its part, could play an important role in ensuring that Canadian broadcasters meet the requirements of the *Broadcasting Act*.

4.4 Introduce Capacity-Building Initiatives for the Digital Media Sector

There is a need to gather intelligence on the number of Aboriginal people working in the digital media sector, their locations and their skillsets. In this regard, there is a lesson to be learned from Screen Australia, which has developed a portal called The Black Book, a comprehensive directory of Aboriginal organisations and individuals working across 95 professions in the arts, media, and cultural industries. A similar tool could be developed for use in the digital media sector.

In order to improve the competitiveness of applications by Aboriginal producers to access the Bell Fund and the CMF’s Experimental Stream, the CMF, the Bell Fund and APTN could consider organizing funding “clinics” for Aboriginal producers interested in applying to their support programs for digital media. Consideration should be given to applicants based in remote communities.

The CMF, the Bell Fund, APTN and the NFB could consider collaborating on a pilot project aimed at the development, production and distribution of digital media content by Aboriginal production companies. One example could be to host a national game competition similar in format to the Great Canadian Game Competition led by Telefilm a number of years ago, with the purpose of stimulating the development of new interactive game content and building expertise in young interactive digital media companies.

⁴ “Appendix 4,” *Supplementary Brief to the CRTC Licence Application for Renewal*, APTN, 2013. The APTN’s licence renewal was heard by the CRTC at a public hearing beginning on April 23, 2013.

The Canada Council could consider developing initiatives to stimulate engagement by Aboriginal youth. For example, the Canada Council's "Artists and Community Collaboration" program could be leveraged to support initiatives that engage Aboriginal youth in new media projects and provide them with opportunities to develop interactive digital media skills. One recent initiative is the Doig River Nation's Indigital Warriors digital media program for Aboriginal youth.⁵

The NFB could similarly consider projects specifically tailored to Aboriginal youth, for example, modeled on some of their former youth-centred initiatives, such as in animation.

There is an opportunity for the industry to create a specialized accelerator for Aboriginal interactive digital media companies. Digital media funders and government-funded venture capital funds for digital media could be approached as potential partners. The Driven accelerator program in Toronto provides an interesting model of a specialized not-for profit accelerator targeted at minority- and women-led technology startups, with the aim of creating social impact.

4.5 Increase Support for Production of Feature Films

It is proposed that several agencies including Telefilm, the Canada Council, the CMF, APTN and CBC/Radio-Canada pool resources to launch a pilot initiative to support the production of a slate of feature films by Aboriginal producers. These funders could consider the possibility of partnering with existing initiatives in the Aboriginal feature film sector, as a means of further consolidating the industry. We understand there is an initiative underway by the Adam Beach Film Institute to create a feature film fund in Canada to support Aboriginal filmmaking. Also, APTN would like to support a greater array of feature-length fiction films but this requires new resources.

Funders could also consider sponsoring competitive pitch sessions for dramatic television and feature fiction films, bringing producers together with commissioning editors of broadcasters or film distributors, in conjunction with major industry events such as the Banff Television Festival, the Toronto International Film Festival and ImagineNative Film + Media Arts Festival. Prizes could be sponsored to support the production of winning pitches.

4.6 Address Gaps in Professional Development Opportunities

There are gaps in the professional development opportunities of producers, writers and directors. Three areas were identified as meriting attention: scriptwriting, digital storytelling, and development of business and marketing skills.

This study points to existing solutions popular with those interviewed for this report, such as the NSI, the TIFF STUDIO and the Native Lab of the Sundance Film Institute.

Professionals point to the NSI as a successful model and would like to see more opportunities being offered.

The NSI could consider offering digital media programs tailored for Aboriginal producers.

⁵ Interview with Gary Oker for this study. See also <http://www.changemakers.com/fnmi-learning/nominations/digital-literacy-and-media-production-making-indigital>.

There is a need to develop training opportunities for producers, writers and directors working in remote communities.

The Canada Council could consider prioritizing the provision of travel grants to writers, directors and producers to attend industry events in the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal screen-based sectors. A particular focus could be on professionals working in remote communities with fewer opportunities to attend key festivals, markets or professional development programs.

4.7 Conduct a Study on the Distribution and Sales of Aboriginal Screen-Based Content

More information is needed to better understand the distribution networks being used by Aboriginal producers in the sale of their works. Informant interviews reveal that access to distribution is a challenge and that alternative distribution networks are important, particularly for the educational market, where there is demand for works in Aboriginal languages.

The NFB could be playing a larger role in this regard, for example through its educational distribution program. Similarly, through its support for artist-run distribution centres, the Canada Council could consider providing targeted support to enhance distribution of Canadian Aboriginal screen-based productions.

With the potential disappearance of Isuma.TV, it is not clear what distribution platform would take its place. The Canada Council could consider ways to ensure that the opportunity for online distribution created through Isuma.TV is not lost, within the scope of its current interest in supporting online distribution of Canadian independent media arts.

While APTN serves a critical function as a national distributor of Aboriginal screen-based content, local initiatives are also needed to continue to engage communities and Aboriginal youth and to ensure the continued development of a rich pipeline of content for a wide range of Canadian broadcasters and distributors.

In the feature film sector, the lack of distributors is an impediment to the financing, distribution, and marketing of feature films by Aboriginal producers.

An in-depth study that could explore the issues outlined above and examine the current distribution networks available to Aboriginal screen-based content should be undertaken, with a view to identifying possible options to expand the reach of Aboriginal content.

In the meantime, funders could consider working together within existing initiatives to ensure the distribution and accessibility of films and videos produced by Aboriginal producers to local, national, and international audiences. An initiative that could serve as an inspiration is Screen Australia's The Black Screen program, which makes Aboriginal Australian films available to individuals and organizations for use at screening events, festivals and community celebrations.

The CMF could consider increasing its support to the imagiNATIVE Film + Media Arts to develop events relating to financing, interactive digital media production and greater access to Canadian broadcasters. The festival could also consider approaching other funders, such as the Bell Fund, for additional support.

4.8 Expand Opportunities Internationally

Producers would benefit from market preparedness boot camps.

A boot camp should be organized for producers interested in pursuing co-productions. Such an initiative could be organized with the support of Telefilm Canada, the CMF (which also has an interest in assuring that financing and sales opportunities are maximized for Canadian content), the ImagineNative Film + Media Arts Festival, and other agencies.

As part of the boot camp experience, organizers could also consider coordinating a special delegation of Aboriginal producers to countries where there are concrete opportunities to access financing.

The NSI launched the Aboriginal Cultural Trade Initiative (ACTI) in 2003-04. It was a program designed to help Canadian Aboriginal film and television producers advance their projects as international co-productions through guidance and access to new markets. The first year culminated with a trade mission to Australia and New Zealand. In 2005, Aborigine and Maori producers travelled to Winnipeg to meet the Canadian producers at NSI's former film festival. Finally in late 2005, now named NSI Storytellers, participants went to New Zealand for a 10-day intensive trade mission.

Participants could include the Norwegian International Sami Film Centre, the Berlin Film Festival and Market, and APTN, in conjunction with World Indigenous Television Broadcasters Network.

To the extent that these efforts can be leveraged for the benefit of the Aboriginal screen-based production sector, then Canadian-made Aboriginal content can expand its reach internationally.

Summary of Proposed Future Directions

Proposed Measures

- ✓ Development of an Audiovisual Policy for Aboriginal Screen-Based Production.
- ✓ Increased Funding to the APTN.
- ✓ Incentives to Increase Access to Canadian Broadcasters by Aboriginal Producers.
- ✓ Capacity-Building Initiatives for the Digital Media Sector.
- ✓ Increased Support for the Production of Feature Films.
- ✓ Professional Development Initiatives.
- ✓ A Study on the Distribution and Sales of Aboriginal Screen-Based Content.
- ✓ Expanded Opportunities Internationally.

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“Our stories have always been recognized as a window on who we are, what we experience, and how we understand each other, how we express ourselves to others and to one another... Language remains a fundamental character of our distinctiveness as Aboriginal cultures.”

- At the Crossroads⁶

Introduction

1. The Context

As far back as 10 years ago, reference was being made to a renaissance taking place in the Aboriginal film and television community – one that was characterized by “stories being told by Aboriginal peoples ... in their own voices.”⁷ By many accounts, the factors often cited as having helped to contribute to this renaissance include the creation of the Aboriginal Filmmaking Program at the National Film Board (NFB) in 1996, the establishment of the Aboriginal Production Fund in 1997 (now called the Aboriginal Program) by the Canada Media Fund (CMF), and the licensing of the Aboriginal People’s Television Network (APTN) in 1999.

Thanks to decades of groundwork by countless individuals, organizations and trailblazers, today’s independent Aboriginal screen-based production sector is said to be vibrant and dynamic – responsible for award-winning feature films, television drama series, shorts, animation, documentaries and interactive games and websites.

The goal of this study is to present a profile of independent Aboriginal screen-based production in Canada with a view to describing the milestones that have marked its evolution, documenting its unique characteristics, and identifying priorities for its future growth.⁸

This study fills an important gap in the available information on the sector in Canada and is financially supported by APTN, the CMF, the NFB, the Bell Broadcast and New Media Fund (Bell Fund), Telefilm Canada (Telefilm), the Canada Council for the Arts (Canada Council), and the National Screen Institute (NSI).

2. Approach and Methodology

This study used multiple lines of inquiry including a literature review of secondary sources and primary research conducted using two online questionnaires and informant interviews. The consultants also analysed trends based using data on the public funding of Aboriginal screen-based production.

⁶ Jeff Bear, *At the Crossroads*, report prepared for Telefilm Canada, the Canadian Television Fund, the National Film Board, the Department of Canadian Heritage and the CBC, September 20, 2004.

⁷ François Macerola, *Canadian Content in the 21st Century in Film and Televisions: A Matter of Cultural Identity*, for the Department of Canadian Heritage, June 2003, p. 102.

⁸ Here, screen-based production means the production of television programs, digital media and feature films.

2.1 Literature Review

The consultants reviewed documents, reports and other studies to provide background and context for understanding the emergence of an independent Aboriginal screen-based production sector in Canada. The consultants were also interested in capacity-building initiatives targeted at the Aboriginal screen-based sector in Australia and New Zealand, which both have large indigenous populations and industry characteristics similar to Canada's. To the extent that they provide lessons learned for the Canadian context, they have been incorporated as part of proposed future directions in Section V of this report. Annex 1 includes a selected bibliography of sources consulted.

2.2 Online Questionnaires

The consultants surveyed independent Aboriginal producers, writers and directors across the country who are active in the film, television and digital media sectors. Two separate online questionnaires were developed and launched. The first questionnaire achieved a 62% response rate from amongst 85 emerging and established Aboriginal producers across Canada. The second questionnaire, sent to 41 writers and directors, achieved a 50% response rate.

The goal of these questionnaires was to gain an understanding of the size and unique characteristics of the independent production sector, an appreciation for the challenges facing the community, and perspectives on future priorities for growth.

2.3 Informant Interviews

The consultants conducted a total of 34 interviews with a range of stakeholders, including Aboriginal producers, writers, directors, media artists, who also received the online survey, and organizations that support the development and growth of Aboriginal screen-based production: the National Indigenous Media Arts Coalition, the Alliance of Aboriginal Media Producers, and ImagineNative Film + Media Arts Festival, funding agencies, training institutions and APTN. Annex 2 includes a list of stakeholders interviewed for this study.

2.4 Trend Analysis in Public Funding Support to Aboriginal Screen-Based Production

The CMF represents the most significant funding source for Aboriginal television and digital media production in Canada. The consultants analyzed data provided by the Fund in order to paint a five-year portrait of Aboriginal production, including the volume and characteristics of production represented by this activity.

To the extent that an analysis of funding support provided by Telefilm, the NFB, the Bell Fund and the Canada Council was possible and complemented this portrait, we have included it in this report. However, one of the challenges was that Telefilm, the NFB and the Bell Fund do not have separate, ear-marked programs for Aboriginal producers and thus, it was difficult to paint a complete picture of the full extent of their support. Any analysis conducted of funding trends in this report has been done within available data, and with consideration that individual projects cannot be identified.

3. Structure of this Report

This report is divided into the following five sections:

- Section I provides a brief description of key milestones that have helped shape the independent production sector;
- Section II profiles the size and characteristics of the independent production sector, trends in production, distribution and sales, and provides examples of the sector's success stories;
- Section III presents an analysis of trends in public funding to the production sector;
- Section IV identifies the challenges facing the sector and priorities for the future;
- Section V concludes with proposed future directions for consideration by the federal government and the funders of this study.

“APTN opened the door to Aboriginal talent across the country. Producers and directors suddenly had a network where they could pitch their ideas; actors and writers had a market for their material. And the result has been the explosive expansion and success of the Aboriginal production sector.”

- Jennifer David⁹

I. Key Milestones in the Growth of an Independent Production Sector

1. Preamble

This section provides a brief history in the development of an independent production sector with reference to key milestones that have contributed to its emergence. These milestones are not meant to be exhaustive in nature.

2. The Emergence of an Independent Production Sector

2.1 Key Milestones: The Licensing of APTN and the Establishment of the CMF’s Aboriginal Program

The 1991 *Broadcasting Act* reserves “a special place” for Aboriginal peoples within the Canadian broadcasting system requiring that through its programming and employment opportunities, the needs, interests, circumstances, and aspirations of Aboriginal peoples be reflected.

By many accounts, the licensing of APTN in 1999 is seen to have advanced the goals of the *Act* to preserve and foster the cultural identity of Aboriginal peoples, and promote their special place within Canadian society.¹⁰

Informant interviews conducted for this study reference the licensing of APTN as one of the two most important events that have helped spur the creation of an independent production sector and created a place for Aboriginal peoples on Canadian television.

“I think we have opportunities in Canada that don’t exist anywhere else. Imagine we have our own Aboriginal television station... it’s incredible... other countries don’t have that.”

Alanis Obomsawin, Filmmaker, National Film Board, Interview, CBC – *8th Fire, Aboriginal Peoples and the Way Forward*

Previous to these events, “only about two dozen active Aboriginal producers were working at all...many of these were independents and some were attached to such organizations as Northern

⁹ Jennifer David, *Original People Original Television: The Launching of the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network*, Debwe Communications, 2012, p. 197.

¹⁰ Rita Cugini, Regional Commissioner for Ontario, Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, Speech to the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network 10th Anniversary Gala, September 12, 2009.

Native Broadcasting companies.”¹¹ Also, it has been noted that before the licensing of APTN, the “likelihood of seeing an Aboriginal face when you turned on the television was slim to none.”¹²

It is important to point out that prior to the licensing of APTN, there was no system of support for Aboriginal creators and writers in communities in the south comparable to Television Northern Canada (TVNC), which served communities in the North.

In the 1990s, the Aboriginal Film and Video Art Alliance was created in partnership with the Banff Centre for the Arts to promote and preserve First Nation culture through the production and distribution of film and video. Some Aboriginal producers established artist-run film and video centres that provided training and professional development opportunities for Aboriginal artists. These efforts have contributed to the development of Aboriginal expression. Filmmakers such as Loretta Todd, Marjorie Beaucage, Catherine Martin, Bernard Assiniwi, Denis Lacroix, Richard Agecutay, Cleo Reece, Maria Campbell, Bernelda Wheeler, and Wil Campbell have helped shape Aboriginal filmmaking.

Funding institutions such as the NFB, the Canada Council and Telefilm have played a role in the creation of programs and initiatives over the years that have supported an important body of work, including films and digital media made by Aboriginal peoples.

The NFB provides infrastructure support within the context of its mandate to produce and distribute films. The Aboriginal Filmmaking Program was said to have made a significant contribution not just because of the professional development of individual filmmakers but also because the films made communicated the “Aboriginal experience in all its diversity.”¹³

One study notes that the creation of the Aboriginal Filmmaking Program was the catalyst for the establishment of the CMF’s Aboriginal Program with the NFB having helped sensitize other federal agencies on the importance of dedicating resources specifically for film and television production.¹⁴

“The Aboriginal Filmmaking Program (AFP) was a well-funded program intent on expanding filmmaking opportunities for Aboriginal peoples. The success of the Program can be seen in the prevalence of AFP films in the CVs and resumés of most of the Aboriginal filmmakers working today.”

- Gil Cardinal, *The Aboriginal Voice: The National Film Board and Aboriginal Filmmaking Through the Years*, nfb.ca

“Drama is what people notice the most in the evolution of the sector. Drama was a turning point for the APTN and the production sector.”

- Jean LaRose, Chief Executive Officer, APTN (Interview for this study)

¹¹ *Canadian Content in the 21st Century in Film and Television: A Matter of Cultural Identity*, Op. Cit., page 102.

¹² Jean LaRose, Presentation to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, April 20, 2007.

¹³ Maria De Rosa, Studio One: Of Storytellers and Stories, in *North of Everything: English Canadian Cinema Since 1980*, William Beard and Jerry White, eds., University of Alberta, 2002, p. 338.

¹⁴ Maria De Rosa, Op. Cit., p. 339

The CMF's Aboriginal Program is described by stakeholders interviewed for this study as pivotal in the emergence of an independent production sector in Canada helping to create an infrastructure that supports Aboriginal peoples in front and behind the camera. Stakeholders also emphasize that the Program plays an important role in helping to sustain Aboriginal languages.

In 2005, in its licence renewal decision regarding APTN, the CRTC recognized that, "as Canada's only Aboriginal television broadcaster...[APTN had] become a magnet for Aboriginal talent from all regions of the country and [had] served as a key vehicle for the production and broadcast of programming reflecting the Aboriginal community." The CRTC went on to note that APTN had nurtured the emergence of a new independent production sector in this country, and that many of the small, independent Aboriginal production companies would probably not exist were it not for APTN's support.¹⁵

2.2 Key Reports

In 1996, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) noted the importance of Aboriginal media. It called for higher visibility for Aboriginal productions and performers on Canadian television networks and recommended that the government commit ongoing funding support for Aboriginal media and production.¹⁶

In 2002, a report conducted for the federal government, *Canadian Content in the 21st Century in Film and Television Productions: A Matter of Cultural Identity* recommended that in light of the special place of Aboriginal expression in Canada, it was timely and necessary that the federal government develop an audiovisual policy for Aboriginal-made films and television programs.¹⁷

In 2004, a ground-breaking report, *At the Crossroads*, authored by independent Aboriginal producer Jeff Bear was published.¹⁸ It identified a number of challenges facing Aboriginal screen-based production in Canada and recommended that a policy framework be developed to support the following: the establishment of a permanent Aboriginal Production Endowment Fund, the creation of a national organization to represent Aboriginal media producers, a strategy to accelerate training to create an Aboriginal workforce to support production, and greater sensitization of mainstream broadcasters and commissioning editors so they would finance production by Aboriginal producers. The report noted that "there is no national strategy, blueprint or map of how to build capacity for Aboriginal film and television."¹⁹

2.3 The Establishment of an Independent Association Representing the Production Sector

The commissioning of the *At the Crossroads* report by Telefilm, the Canadian Television Fund (today the CMF), the NFB, the Department of Canadian Heritage and the CBC in 2004 acted as a catalyst for the creation of the first-ever national Independent Aboriginal Screen Producers Association (IASPA) in 2005. The mandate of IASPA was to: represent the interests and concerns of Aboriginal

¹⁵ CRTC, *Broadcasting Decision CRTC 2005-445*, August 31, 2005.

¹⁶ Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Canada, 1996.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Jeff Bear, *At the Crossroads*, Op.Cit.

¹⁹ Ibid.

film and television producers in Canada in order to enhance and further the diverse cultural voices and visions of Aboriginal producers, directors, and writers; and to build an Aboriginal media industry that promoted economic and professional development as well as the growth of a skilled Aboriginal media workforce.

Due to a lack of resources, the IASPA disbanded in 2008. In 2011, the Alliance of Aboriginal Media Producers (AAMP) was established to represent Aboriginal producers in Canada from the film, television, and digital media sectors.

AAMP has a mandate to help the growth and sustainability of the production community. It has most recently been involved in the negotiation of a terms of trade agreement with APTN on behalf of the production community, aimed at establishing standard terms for independently commissioned programs.

“The re-emergence of the Indigenous voice has been a long time coming.”

- Storytellers in Motion²⁰

II. A Profile of the Independent Aboriginal Screen-Based Production Sector

1. Preamble

This section profiles the Aboriginal independent screen-based production sector, drawing from the results of primary research conducted in the form of two on-line questionnaires and informant interviews. We also include in this section examples of success stories – award-winning feature films, television productions, and digital media that are indicative of the breadth of work being done and representative of its vibrancy.

2. Size and Characteristics of the Sector

2.1 Production Companies are Primarily SMEs

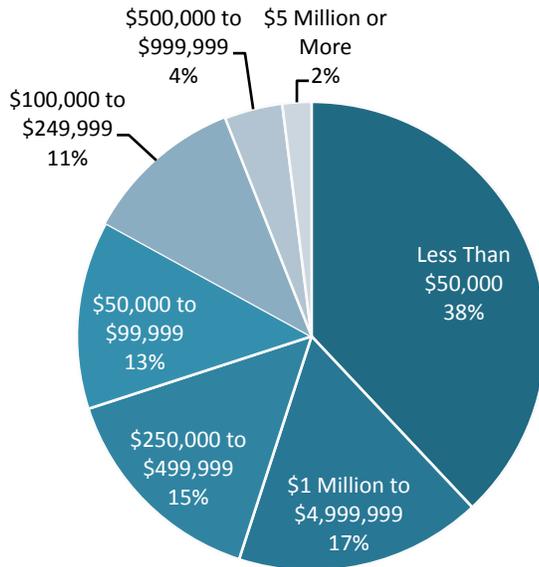
Based on data available through APTN, the CMF and the Alliance of Aboriginal Media Producers, we estimate that there are approximately 70 to 80 production companies operating on an ongoing basis in the Aboriginal screen-based production sector.

The majority of companies are small, with low levels of gross revenues and small staff sizes. Half of all companies (51%) had gross revenues of less than \$100,000 in their last fiscal year. 81% had gross revenues of less than \$1 million, as shown in Figure 1.

Survey results indicate that, for the most part, these companies have been in business for many years. 50% of the companies surveyed for this report have been in operation for nine years or more, and two companies have been in business for 30 years. Only 21% of companies said they had been in operation less than five years.

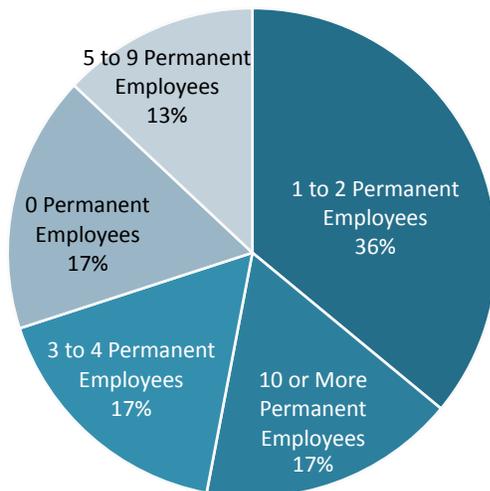
²⁰ <http://urbanrez.ca/sim/storytellers-in-motion-index.html>

Figure 1: Gross Revenues of Production Companies in their Last Fiscal Year



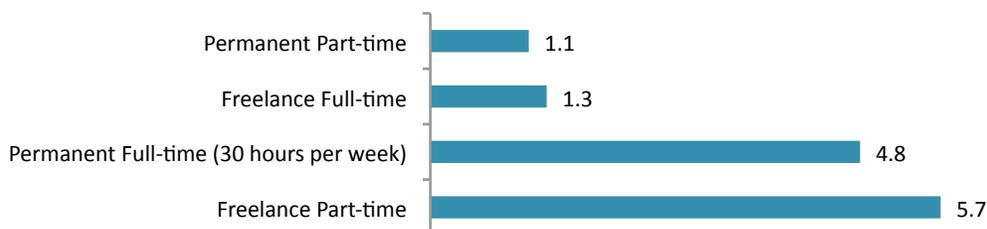
The majority of companies (70%) are micro companies employing fewer than five people on a permanent basis, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: View of the Sector by Permanent Employment



Companies overall employ on average approximately five people on a permanent full-time basis (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Average Number of Employees by Type of Employment



2.2 A High Level of Employment of Aboriginal People

Overall, Aboriginal companies employ a high proportion of Aboriginal people. On average 75% of permanent employees are Aboriginal. 36% of companies indicated that 100% of their permanent employees are Aboriginal. These companies are small, employing five or fewer people. Amongst companies with 10 or more permanent employees, 70% on average are Aboriginal. On average, 50% of freelance employees are Aboriginal.

2.3 The Majority of Companies are Located in the West

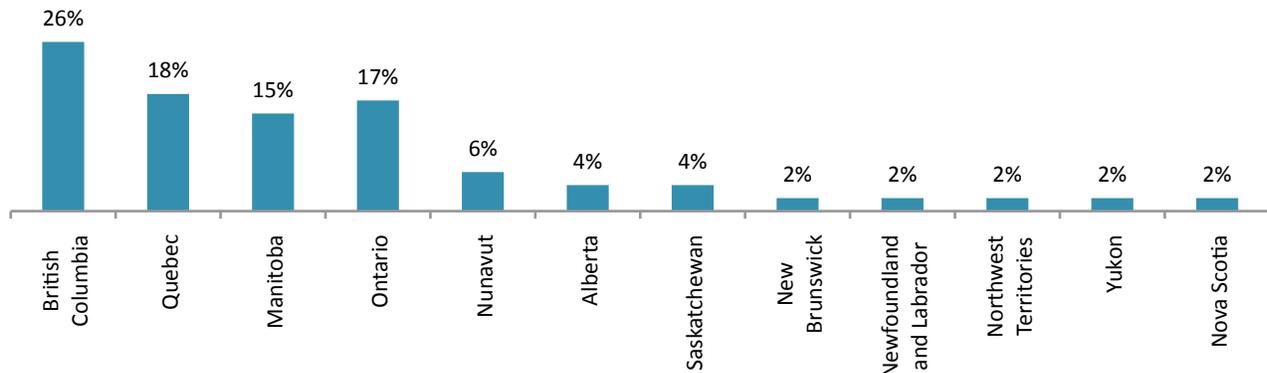
The majority of companies (55%) are located in the Western Provinces and Territories, from Manitoba to British Columbia, and north to the Northwest Territories. The highest proportion of Aboriginal companies is located in British Columbia. (See Figure 4.)

Growth is also occurring more rapidly in the West, with three-quarters of all companies less than five years old located west of Ontario and Nunavut.

Quebec and Ontario account for 34% of all companies.

70% of companies are located in the major metropolitan areas of Vancouver, Toronto, Winnipeg, Montreal, Ottawa-Gatineau, Quebec City, and Edmonton. 30% are located in smaller municipalities. Three companies are situated on reserves.

Figure 4: Distribution of Survey Respondents by Province and Territory



3. Trends in Production Activity

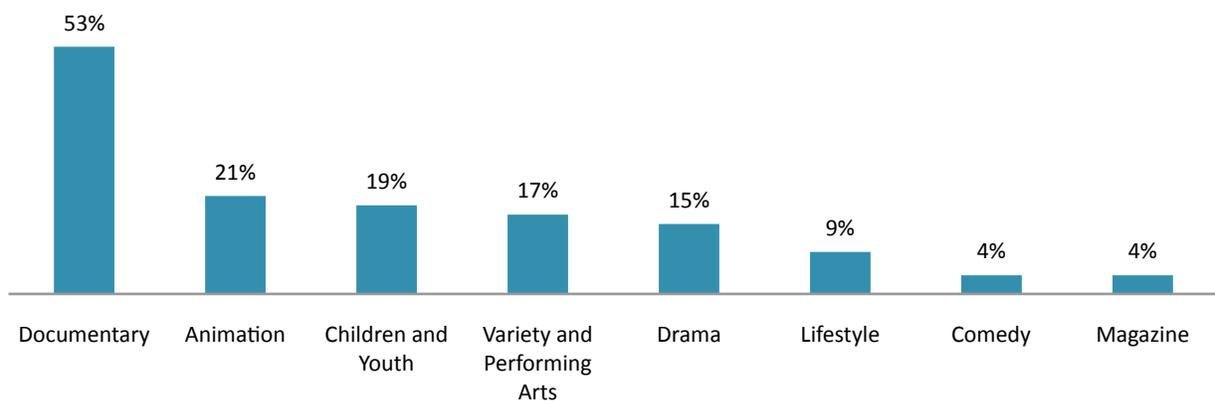
3.1 Television is the Primary Market

The majority of companies (87%) derived at least 50% of their revenues from television in their last fiscal year. 43% of these also had revenues from interactive digital media productions. Overall, only 6% of companies had revenues primarily from feature film, and only 4% reported interactive digital media as their primary source of revenue.

3.2 Producers Are Most Active in Documentary Production

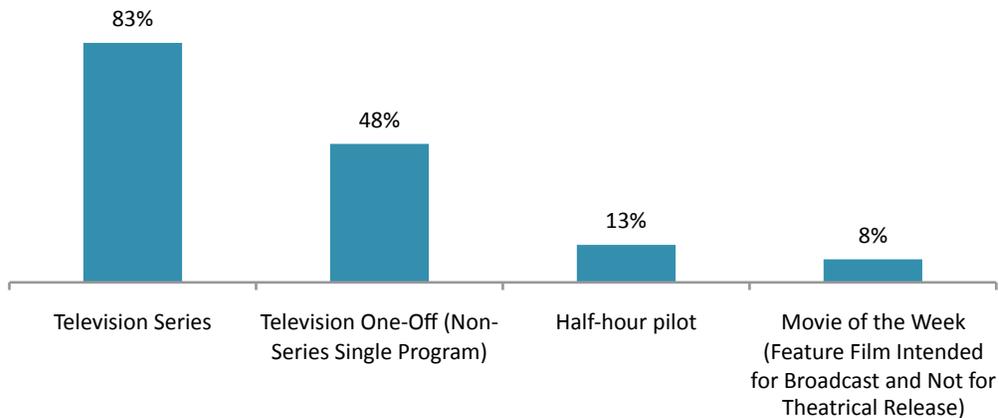
91% of producers indicated that they produce for television. Figure 5 shows that the majority of television production companies produce documentaries. Approximately 20% of companies produce animation and children's and youth programming, respectively, followed by variety and performing arts and drama. (See Figure 5.)

Figure 5: Genres Produced by Television Companies²¹



A majority of producers said they had produced series television, followed by one-off programs. Figure 6 provides a snapshot of the types of television productions undertaken.

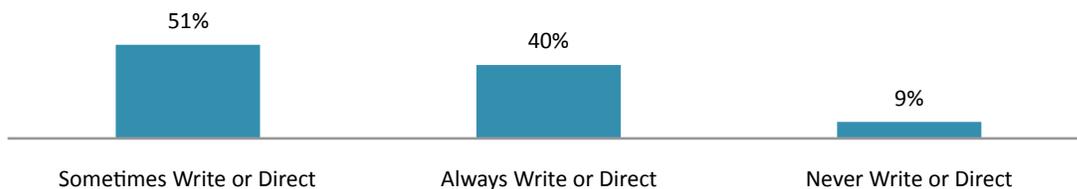
Figure 6: Types of Television Production²²



3.3 Most Producers Also Write and Direct

One of the unique characteristics of the Aboriginal screen-based production sector is the prevalence of producers who also write and/or direct their own projects. As can be seen in Figure 7 below, the overwhelming majority of producers (91%) also write or direct their own projects at least some of the time, while 40% said they did so all of the time. Interviews indicate that writers and directors often take on the role of creative producer.

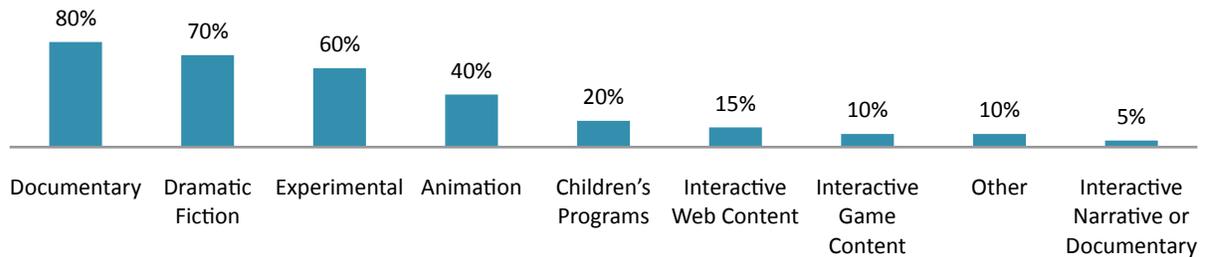
Figure 7: Percentage of Producers Who Write or Direct Their Own Projects



For producers who are writing and/or directing, the most popular genre they work in is documentary, followed by dramatic fiction. Figure 8 shows the genres that producers who write and direct their own projects are working in. Other genres include variety specials and music video.

²² Ibid.

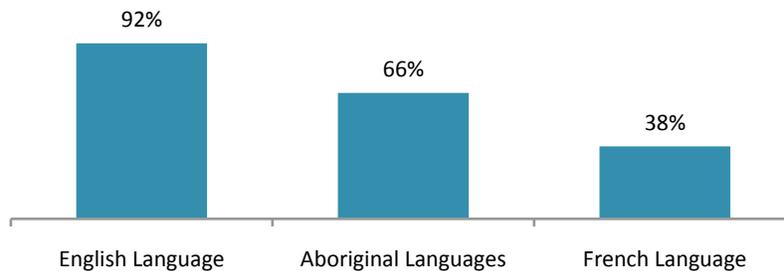
Figure 8: Most Popular Genres of Producer Writer-Directors²³



3.4 Production in Aboriginal Languages is Very High

Just over two thirds (69%) of producers said they produce in more than one language. As can be seen in Figure 9, 92% of companies said they produced work in the English language, followed by 66% who said they produced in Aboriginal languages, and 38% who said they produced in French.

Figure 9: Languages of Production in the Past Five Years²⁴



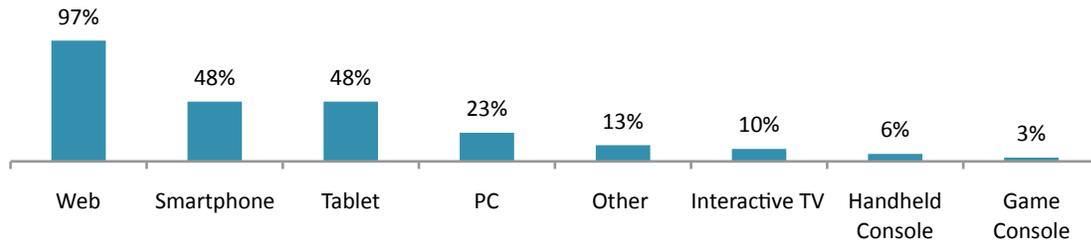
3.5 The Primary Form of Interactive Digital Content Being Produced is for the Web

63% of companies are producing interactive digital media content. Almost all of these (97%) produce content for the Web, while half (48%) said they produce content for smartphones and tablet computers. (See Figure 10.)

²³ Percentages exceed 100 as a number of companies produce in more than one genre.

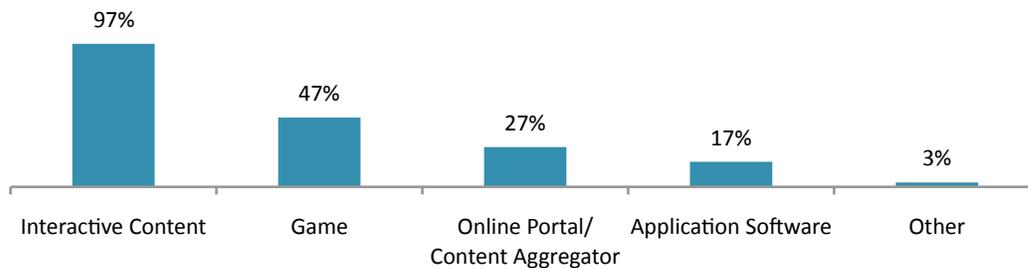
²⁴ Ibid.

Figure 10: Digital Media Platforms²⁵



As can be seen in Figure 11, almost half of interactive digital media producers (47%) are producing games content. 27% of companies are aggregating their content online. 17% companies are producing applications, while one company indicated that it has produced webisodes.

Figure 11: Type of Digital Media Production²⁶



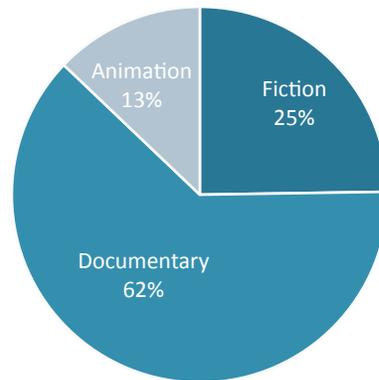
3.6 Films Being Produced are Primarily Documentaries

15% of producers said they produced films. Of these, half indicated that they had produced a feature film in the past five years. As shown in Figure 12, most companies produced a documentary film. One producer produced a cross-platform film.

²⁵ Percentages exceed 100 as a number of companies produce in more than one genre.

²⁶ Ibid.

Figure 12: Analysis of Film Genres Produced

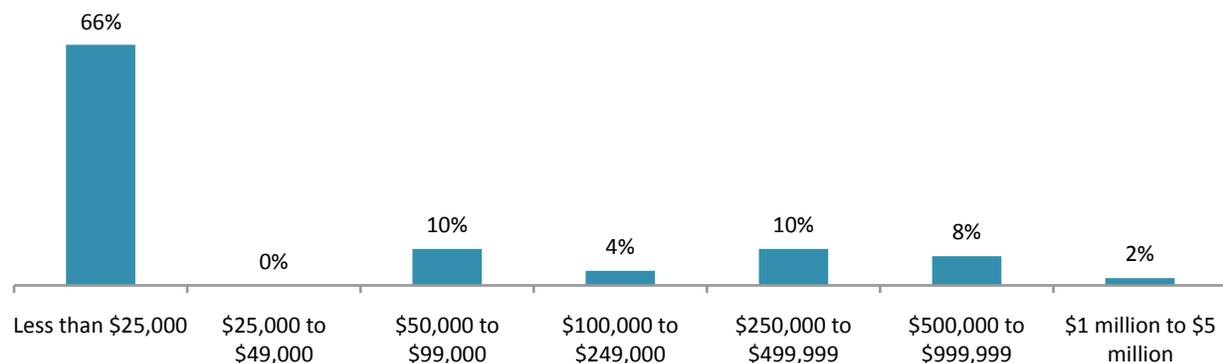


4. Trends in Distribution and Sales

4.1 Sales Revenues are Low

Total sales of less than \$25,000 were reported by two-thirds (66%) of companies. One French-language company had sales of over \$1 million. Figure 13 shows the percentage of companies by level of sales. 84% of companies achieved 90% or more of their sales in Canada. 23% achieved the totality of their sales in foreign markets.

Figure 13: Range of Sales by Percentage of Companies²⁷

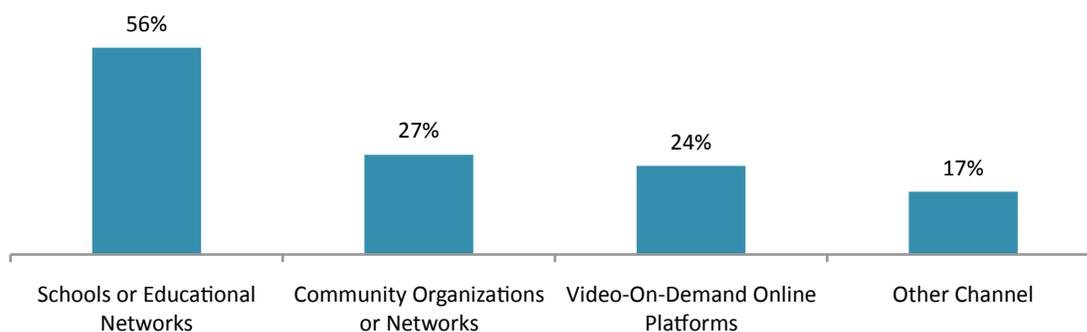


²⁷ Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

4.2 Alternative Distribution Channels are Important for Many Companies

77% of companies are using or have used alternative distribution networks. Over half have accessed schools or educational networks to distribute their works. Amongst the other channels mentioned were self-distribution, social media, online streaming, iTunes, the non-profit distributor Vtape, and word of mouth. (See Figure 14.)

Figure 14: Use of Distribution Networks²⁸



5. Examples of Award-Winning Television Programs, Feature Films and Digital Media

The independent Aboriginal screen-based sector today includes very established producers with an impressive track record of award-winning productions. Far from exhaustive, we offer a few noteworthy examples for the purpose of illustrating the vibrancy and breadth of Aboriginal expression, reflected in the scope, range, and diversity of award-winning films, television programs, and digital media content made over the last decade.

5.1 Indigenous Voices in Documentary: *Burnt Church*, *Ravens and Eagles*, and *The Sharing Circle*

From his illustrious beginnings as the creator and producer of the Aboriginal affairs series *First Story* for CTV, which won a Leo Award for Best Information Series in 2000, producer Jeff Bear first coined the phrase “The Indigenous Voice.”²⁹

His productions *Burnt Church: Obstruction of Justice* (produced with Marianne Jones) won the Telefilm Best English-Language program presented at the Banff Television Festival in 2001. Through Urban Rez Productions, many documentary projects, including the 26-



Ravens and Eagles

²⁸ Percentages may not equal 100 as some companies have used multiple alternative distribution networks.

²⁹ Ibid.

part documentary series, *Ravens and Eagles* for APTN, have been produced.

"Every culture has a right to tell its own story. I have produced my work in the shadows of the cultural hegemony of American and Canadian media giants without giving up the basic teachings of my past. I would like to be known as a person who is here to help create cinema that is by us, for us, about us!"³⁰



The Sharing Circle

Winnipeg-based producer Lisa Meeches has been described as one of the most dynamic Aboriginal producers working in film and television, with a range of partners in Canada and the U.S. She is an Executive Producer and the President of Eagle Vision Inc. and Meeches Video Productions, as well as Co-President of Century Street Distribution, Manitoba's only certified distribution company, and serves as vice-chair of Manitoba Film and Music.³¹

Her executive producing credits include the Gemini award-winning made-for-television movie, *Elijah*, the recently released, *We Were Children* and *Jack* as well as

The Sharing Circle, one of the longest running television series in Canada, and the winner of a 2003 Canadian Association Of Broadcasters Gold Ribbon Award in 2003 and a Special Jury Award at the 2006 Yorkton Short Film and Video Festival.

Ms. Meeches is the recipient of the 2007 Aboriginal Achievement Awards in the Media and Communications category.

"This series is an example of overall excellence in storytelling and does a magnificent job of breaking stereotypes, promoting a cultural perspective and sharing meaningful stories with the rest of the country. Episodes are well-crafted, and story topics are both entertaining and challenging."³²

5.2 *Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner: A Milestone in Indigenous Filmmaking*

Winner of the Camera d'Or for Best First Feature at the Cannes Film Festival in 2001, *Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner* (2000) is a milestone in the development of independent indigenous Canadian

³⁰ http://www.nativenetworks.si.edu/eng/rose/bear_j.htm.

³¹ Interview with Lisa Meeches.

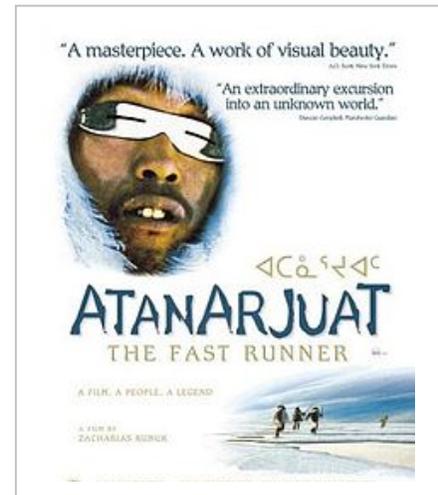
³² 2006 Yorkton Short Film and Video Festival jury comments. Source: <http://www.thesharingcircle.com>.

cinema. The film was Canada's top-grossing release of 2002, with more box office success in France, the U.S. and 20 other countries around the world.³³

Directed by Zacharias Kunuk and produced by Igloolik Isuma Productions Inc., it is the first Canadian dramatic feature film to be produced entirely in Inuktitut.

This critically acclaimed film won over 20 international film festival and industry awards, among them six Genie awards including Best Picture and Best Director (2002), and Best Canadian Feature Film at the Toronto International Film Festival (2001). More than 60 international film critics named it one of the 10 Best Films of 2002 and the Toronto International Film Festival included it in its list of top 10 Canadian films of all time in 2004.

A.O. Scott of the *New York Times* called it a “masterpiece...an extraordinary film, a work of narrative sweep and visual beauty that honours the history of the art form even as it extends its perspective,”³⁴ while the *Village Voice* lauded its “cosmic” vision that suggests “the rebirth of cinema.”³⁵



In recognition of his achievement, Zacharias Kunuk was made an Officer of the Order of Canada in 2002.

“Here in Igloolik ... we’re working with families and documenting them...We’ve been working with these people for a long time and we’ve been training them so they are professionals, professional actors.... In the Inuit way you learn by watching....The bottom line is that we’re trying to show our culture the way it was, since it’s been misunderstood a lot.”³⁶

5.3 First Aboriginal Television Drama Resonates with Youth: *Moccasin Flats*

Created by Laura Milliken and Jennifer Podemski of Big Soul Productions, the Gemini-nominated dramatic series *Moccasin Flats* was the first Aboriginal created, produced and controlled dramatic series in North America.³⁷ The show, which aired from 2004 to 2006 on APTN, Showcase Television and the Saskatchewan Communications Network, speaks to a youth audience and was nominated for three Gemini Awards, including for Best Dramatic Series, the first and only time an Aboriginal producing team was nominated for the highest honour of the Gemini Awards.

³³ Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atanarjuat:_The_Fast_Runner). IsumaTV website: <http://www.isuma.tv/lo/en/atanarjuat/>.

³⁴ A. O. Scott, “A Far-Off Inuit World, in a Dozen Shades of White,” *New York Times*, March 30, 2002.

³⁵ Jim Hoberman, “*Atanarjuat* – The Fast Runner,” *Village Voice*, March 20, 2002, p. 26.

³⁶ Canada Council website:

<http://www.canadacouncil.ca/aboutus/artistsstories/aboriginal/fc127135715494384896.htm>.

³⁷ Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moccasin_Flats#cite_note-2.

Moccasin Flats: Redemption, which aired on APTN in 2008, was named Best Picture – Native American Voices, at the Fargo Film Festival in North Dakota (2009) and Best Feature Film at the North American Indigenous Image Awards in Albuquerque, New Mexico (2009). The show received the Tonya Lee Williams Award for Outstanding Canadian Feature at the Reel World Film Festival, Toronto (2009), Best Drama at the Dreamspeakers Film Festival, Edmonton (2009) and a Best Actress award for Candace Fox at the American Indian Film festival, San Francisco, California (2008).



Still from *Moccasin Flats*

"Aboriginal youth are the fastest growing segment of Canada's population, but the least represented in all forms of media, and so, they do not feel empowered. The only way to change that is to get ourselves in the media."³⁸

5.4 Multi-Award-winning Stop-Motion Animation: *Wapos Bay*

Independent filmmakers Dennis and Melanie Jackson were awarded the National Aboriginal Achievement Award for the Arts (2009)³⁹ for their Gemini Award-winning stop-motion animation series, *Wapos Bay*, co-produced with the NFB. It aired on APTN and Saskatchewan Communications Network from 2005-2010. Dennis Jackson and producer Anand Ramayya developed *Wapos Bay* through the NSI Totally Television program.

Based on *Christmas at Wapos Bay*, produced for APTN with Anand Ramayya, which premiered at the 2001 Sundance Film Festival and won the Best of Saskatchewan and Best Children's Production Awards at the 2002 Yorkton Short Film and Video Festival, *Wapos Bay*, the series, won almost 20 awards. These included four Gemini Awards for Best Writing for a Children's/Youth Program (2010), Best Individual or Ensemble Performance in an Animated Program or Series (2008), Best Children's or Youth Fiction Series (2007), and the Canada Award (2006), as well as 14 Canadian and international festival and industry awards.



Still from *Wapos Bay*

³⁸ <http://www.bigsoul.net> ; http://www.nativenetworks.si.edu/eng/rose/milliken_1.htm.

³⁹ *Wapos Bay* production blog, <http://waposbay.com/blog/>.

The series' made-for-television movie finale, *Wapos Bay – Long Goodbyes*, created by the same team, won Best One-Off, Special or TV Movie at the 2012 KidScreen Awards in New York as well as Best Foreign Animation Award at the 17th Annual International Family Film Festival (2012).⁴⁰ According to the producers, working on the series was wondrous, and allowed them to develop local talent, creating “a little close-knit family of professionals working here in the city.”⁴¹

5.5 Compelling Drama Production with *Blackstone*

Referred to as “a step in the evolution of TV,”⁴² the ground-breaking series *Blackstone*, has been showered with awards since its pilot earned five Rosies after airing on APTN in 2010. Created and executive produced by Ron E. Scott through his company Prairie Dog Film + Video, the series, is a showcase for Aboriginal talent. *Blackstone* has won an impressive 20 awards that include two Geminis and two Leo Awards, for Best Performance, Best Writer, Best Director, Best Production, and Best Title Design. A testament to its popularity with audiences, *Blackstone's* Facebook page has over 17,500 likes, and 1,755 followers on Twitter.⁴³



Part of its appeal is its treatment of difficult issues: “There’s always value in wanting to speak to issues. Any great television series out there... always has something to say...I like to call it a big steak – there’s a lot to eat, a lot to take in.”⁴⁴ The series, which aired briefly on Showcase, has sold to New Zealand where it airs on Maori Television, and has a U.S. distributor.

“It’s very important that what we’re doing is recognized...The production is all Native controlled with a lot of Native actors who can compete with some of the best actors.”⁴⁵ ...

“As a content creator, as someone who wants to tell stories, it’s important the series is accessible to everyone... This is a business, and for that business to continue you have to penetrate certain markets.”⁴⁶

⁴⁰ David Giles, “Saskatoon produced *Wapos Bay* wins international animation award,” *Global Saskatoon online*, March 28, 2012.

⁴¹ Stephanie MacKay, “*Wapos Bay* is Winding Down,” *The Star Phoenix*, May 12, 2010.

⁴² Colleen Simard, “Blackstone is a Big Step,” *Winnipeg Free Press – Print Edition*, May 2, 2011.

⁴³ Etan Vlessing, “Ron E. Scott on the challenges of promoting *Blackstone* to viewers,” *Playback*, February 29, 2012.

⁴⁴ Diane Wild, “TV, eh? Interview: Ron E. Scott of *Blackstone*,” *tv-eh.com*, February 1, 2012.

⁴⁵ Ron E. Scott quoted in Sandy Arndt, “*Blackstone* TV Series Earns Accolades,” *Alberta Sweetgrass*, Volume: 18, Issue: 9, 2011.

⁴⁶ Diane Wild, Op. Cit.

5.6 Changing the Language of AAA Games: *Papo & Yo*

One of the hottest indie video games of 2012, is a unique, “emotional 3D adventure”⁴⁷ created by Minority Media, an independent Aboriginal AAA game studio co-founded by award-winning film and television production company Rezolution Pictures. It’s headed by Ernest Webb and Vander Caballero, former Design Director at Electronic Arts in Montreal in 2010.

The studio’s aim is to deliver “meaningful” game experiences, and its first game is about a young boy learning to live with his father’s alcoholic doppelganger, Monster. Reviewers have hailed the game, developed in partnership with Sony’s Pub Fund, and distributed on the PlayStation® Network, as “a lyrical tale” that “feels like a landmark” and “has set a new and altogether different standard in gaming for representing the world as it is.”⁴⁸

The game has garnered a number of prestigious awards, including the Best Narrative and Audience Awards at the Brazilian International Game (BIG) Festival (2012), the Editor’s Choice Award for PSN Stores (2012), an Honourable Mention for Excellence in Narrative at the Independent Games Festival in 2013, the Herman Melville Award for Best Writing in a Game at New York Videogame Critics Circle Awards (2012) and The Central Park Children’s Zoo Awards for Best Kids Game.



Still from *Papo & Yo*

Executive Producer Ernest Webb’s other production credits include the highly acclaimed *Reel Injun*, directed by Neil Diamond, and the Gemini-nominated documentary series *Down the Mighty River*.

"This game is made for people like you, really. It's so people can represent themselves in the game. We're human. We grow from other people's stories. We want to share, and we want to be cheered up. You can't bring people somewhere you haven't been yourself so we're making *Papo & Yo* to show that others have been there too."⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Minority Media website: <http://www.rezolutionpictures.com/>.

⁴⁸ Chris Suellentrop, “A Monster, but No Epic Battle,” *New York Times*, September 25, 2012.

⁴⁹ Cassandra Khaw, “E3 2011: Hands-On Impressions of *Papo & Yo* (Minority),” *Indie Games Weblog*, June 9, 2011.

5.7 New Voices: Award-Winning Writer-Directors



Club Native

Perhaps most indicative of the strength and diversity of Aboriginal production is the rise of talented new voices attracting new audiences and appreciation nationally and internationally. Emerging from their recent successes on the festival circuit and recognition from the industry in the form of awards and television programming commissions, these young writer-directors demonstrate the depth of new Aboriginal talent working in an array of genres and formats.

Writer-director Tracey Deer is the award-winning writer-director of acclaimed feature-length documentary *Mohawk Girls* about three teenaged girls growing up on the Mohawk reserve of

Kahnawake. The film won the Alanis Obomsawin Best Documentary Award and spawned a new comedy/drama (“dramedy”) series of the same name, produced by Rezolution Pictures, set to begin production in 2013 for airing on APTN and OMNI.

Her follow-up film, *Club Native* (2009) won two Gemini awards: the Canada Award and Best Documentary Writing, as well as the Colin Low Award for Best Canadian Documentary at DOXA/Documentary Film and Video Festival in 2009. Tracey Deer was named one of “The Next 25: Canada's Rising Stars and Dealmakers” by *Playback* magazine.

"All of my work to date has dealt with Native issues because that is what I feel passionate about. Our stories and our communities have so much vibrancy to offer and I'm very committed to expressing that on the big and small screen. With all of my work, my ultimate goal is to try to make a difference, even if it is just with one person."⁵⁰

Writer-director Jeff Barnaby is an award-winning filmmaker best known for his short films using the horror and sci-fi genres to explore aspects of alienation and colonialism. *The Colony* (2007), was named one of Canada's Top 10 Short Films of 2007 by the Toronto International Film Festival, and won Best Short Film awards at ImagineNative Film + Media Arts Festival, the Whistler Film Festival, and the Winnipeg Aboriginal Film Festival.

The CBC-commissioned *From Cherry English* premiered at the 2005 Sundance Film Festival and won three Golden Sheaf Awards at the Yorkton Film Festival.

His newest project, the \$1.5 million feature-length drama *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* slated for theatrical release in the



Still from *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*

⁵⁰ http://www.nativenetworks.si.edu/esp/rose/deer_t.htm.

fall of 2013, won the Tribeca 2012 Creative Promise Award for Narrative. This project was supported through the Canadian Film Centre.⁵¹

“First and foremost, I wanted to make a movie that makes money...I wanted to stay honest to my investors. They invested in me because of a certain way I approach films. I didn’t want to start with a political agenda. I don’t rail against stereotypes. I just know where I’m from, so it’s going to happen, anyway.”⁵²



Shane Belcourt won critical acclaim and Best Director at the Dreamspeakers Film Festival, and Best Director and Best Actress awards at the Talking Stick Film Festival for his debut theatrical feature film, which he wrote and directed, *Tkaronto* (2008). The film was released theatrically throughout Canada in 2008 by Canadian distributor Kinoshift Films. Winner of the 2007/08 IFC Mentorship Award at the ImagineNative Film + Media Arts Festival, Shane Belcourt was invited to be Filmmaker in Residence at the Winnipeg Film Group in 2010. For his work as a music producer, Shane Belcourt has been nominated for a Juno Award and for several Aboriginal Music Awards.

This versatile writer-director is also the author of *Boxed In*, a short film produced by the NFB and shown at the Canadian Pavilion during the 2010 Winter Olympics. Two new half-hour animation films are also

underway: one on problem gambling in Aboriginal communities and the other about growing up the son of Métis Rights Leader, Tony Belcourt.

“I think we're all born with a bit of a broken heart and a constant desire for union. And in that gap we do the damndest of things to make matters worse and we do the most amazing things to try to sew it all back together again. And that's what storytelling is all about to me: on the one hand trying to dive into the fissures and on the other hoping the work somehow lifts us up, inspires us, or points a way towards making us more whole.”⁵³

6. Summary Observations

The examples of award-winning films, television programs, and digital media profiled in this section represent a fraction of the work being done by Aboriginal peoples across the country.

Many trailblazers have experimented with film, video, and multimedia within the networks of film and video cooperatives, distribution centres, and artist-run centres. These works found audiences via independent film festivals and other distribution networks. While they have not been profiled in this study, they nevertheless have helped nurture the rich screen Aboriginal culture that exists today.

⁵¹ Supported through the CFC Features program. Source: Canadian Film Centre Website: http://www.cfccreates.com/what_we_do/cfc_film/feature_film_project/index.php

⁵² T'Cha Dunlevy, “Rhymes for Young Ghouls: Home on Native Land,” in *The Montreal Gazette*, November 22, 2012.

⁵³ http://www.nativenetworks.si.edu/eng/rose/belcourt_s.html.

Our analysis shows that the Aboriginal production companies responsible for these works are SMEs, primarily located in Western Canada, where the Aboriginal population is the largest. Most companies employ fewer than five people on a permanent basis. These trends are generally consistent with the nature of the independent production sector in Canada, which is also comprised of SMEs.

However, a number of unique characteristics mark this sector: production companies typically employ Aboriginal people, producers also take on the roles of writer/and or director, and companies are committed to producing programming in Aboriginal languages in addition to English and French.

Television is the primary market. In terms of genres of production, documentary is the most important, although the sector also produces drama, including series, one-offs, and movies of the week, children and youth programming, animation, variety, and short films.

Digital production is being undertaken, with much activity taking place in web-based content, including games, though few, if any, webisodes. Having greater information on Aboriginal-owned companies working primarily in digital media would allow a more complete picture to emerge. Our interviews with stakeholders suggest there may be more activity taking place in this regard than what is documented.

Access to distribution channels for the works created is a key challenge, as are achieving sales of significant value. Alternative distribution networks are important, particularly for the educational market, where there is a need for works in Aboriginal languages.

“With their long oral tradition, varied histories and experience... Aboriginal...people are natural storytellers.”

- Dreaming in Motion: Celebrating Australia’s Indigenous Filmmakers⁵⁴

III. Public Funding to Aboriginal Screen-Based Production: 2007-2008 to 2011-2012

1. Preamble

The goal of this section is to provide the larger context in terms of public funding to the independent Aboriginal screen-based sector in Canada. Our review is focused on a five-year perspective, from 2007-2008 to 2011-2012.

A number of federal agencies support the development, production and distribution of television, feature films and digital media content made by Aboriginal producers and filmmakers. Of all the agencies, the CMF provides the most significant funding to Aboriginal producers through the Aboriginal Program as well as through APTN’s performance envelopes, which in 2011-2012 represented approximately \$16 million dollars.

The Canada Council, like the CMF, has targeted programs of support for Aboriginal writers and directors. In contrast, Telefilm, the NFB and the Bell Fund, while also supporting Aboriginal production, do not have targeted programs, making trends analysis a challenge.

To the extent that there are trends that can be identified in the funding of Aboriginal television, feature films, and digital media content, we have included them in this section.

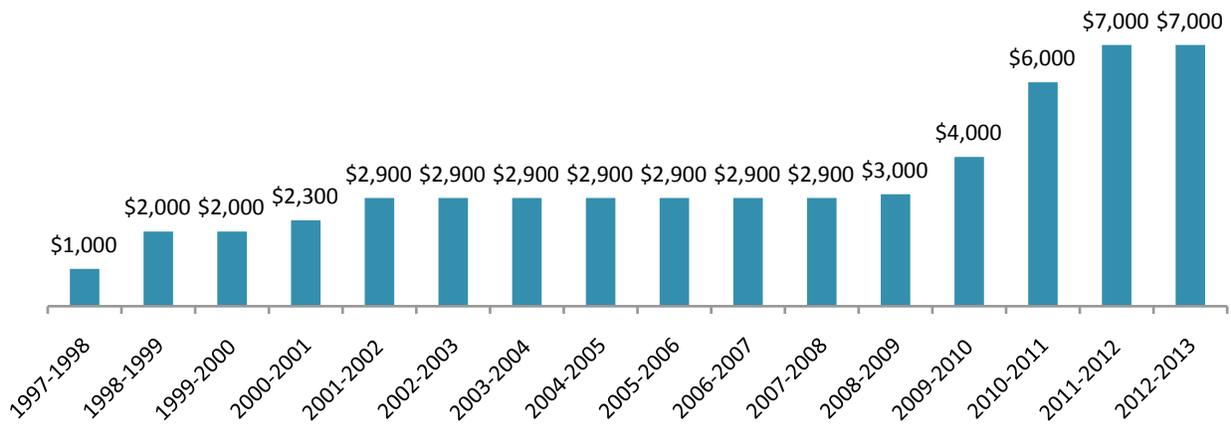
2. Trends in the Canada Media Fund’s Support to Television

2.1 More than 200 Projects Supported Worth \$172.7 Million

Since its inception in 1996, the CMF’s Aboriginal Program has grown from an initial \$1 million per year in funding to \$7 million in 2011-2012. Figure 15 shows the history of funding to the Program from 1997-1998 to the current fiscal year, 2012-2013.

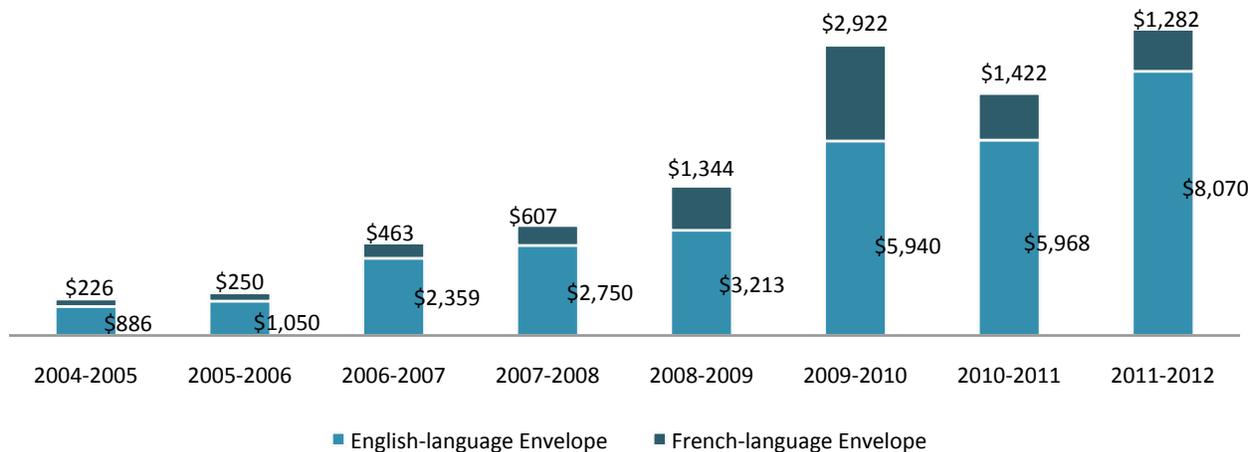
⁵⁴ *Dreaming in Motion: Celebrating Indigenous Filmmakers*, Australian Film Commission, March, 2007.

Figure 15: CMF Aboriginal Program Budget Allocations, 2000-2001 to 2011-2012 (\$ thousands)⁵⁵



In addition, APTN’s performance envelopes (English-language envelope of \$8,069,650 and \$1,282,052 for French-language production)⁵⁶ meant that in 2011-2012, Aboriginal independent producers had access to more than \$16 million dollars in available funding for television production. Figure 16 provides the allocations to APTN’s performance envelope for every year since its inception in 2004-2005.

Figure 16: APTN Broadcaster Performance Envelope Allocated Through the CMF, 2004-2005 to 2011-2012 (\$ thousands)



⁵⁵ Budgets for 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 are estimates.

⁵⁶ 2011-2012 Performance Envelope Allocations at August 12, 2011, Canada Media Fund.

The funding provided by the CMF Convergent Stream in the five years from 2007-2008 to 2011-2012 supported 198 convergent projects with total production budgets of \$172.7 million. Total budgets ranged from a low of \$23.1 million in 2007-2008 to a high of \$43.5 million in 2009-2010. Total production volume declined thereafter, to \$35.8 million in 2011-2012. (See Figure 17.)

Figure 17: Number of Projects and Total Production Budgets, 2007-2008 to 2011-2012 (\$ thousands)

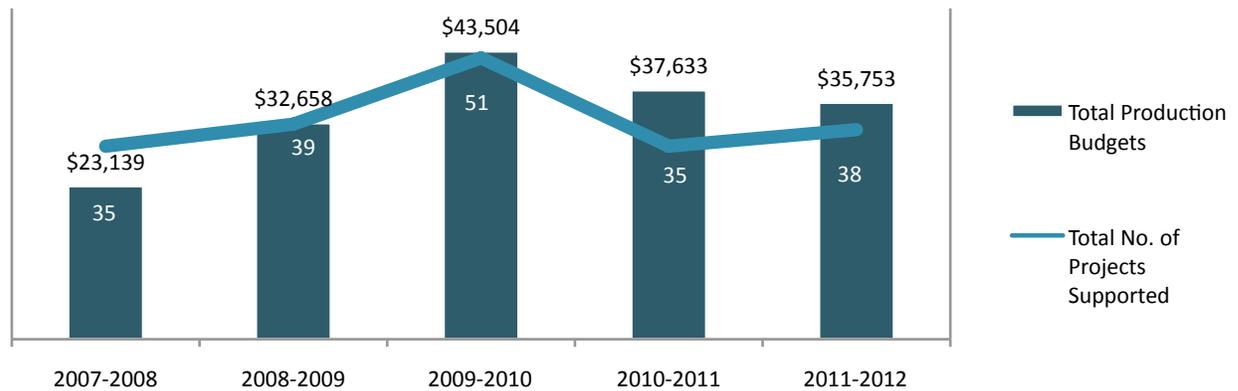
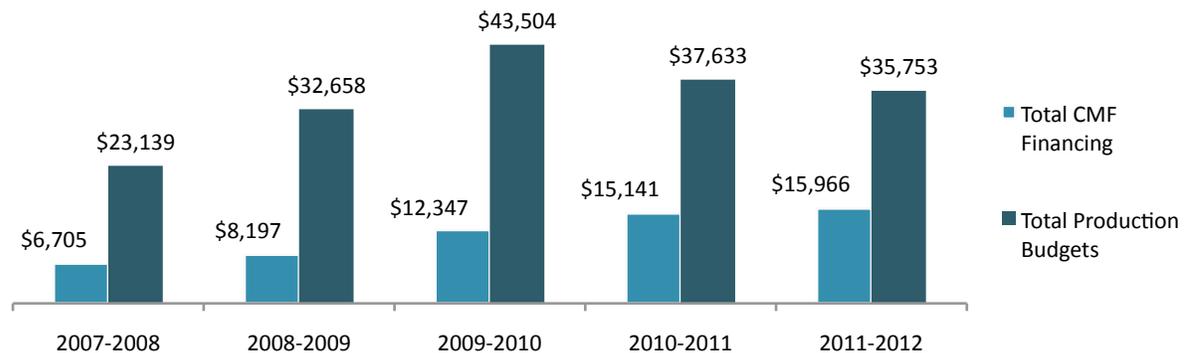


Figure 18 shows that the sharp increase of 33% in total production budgets in 2009-2010 coincided with an even sharper increase (50%) in funding due primarily to an increase in APTN's performance envelope. As a result, a greater number of television series productions were funded in 2009-2010 (35, compared to 23 in the previous year). In addition, two children's programs received substantial contributions from private funders (Shaw Rocket Fund and the Rogers Cable Network Fund).⁵⁷

Figure 18: Total Production Budgets and CMF Financing, 2007-2008 to 2011-2012 (\$ thousands)⁵⁸

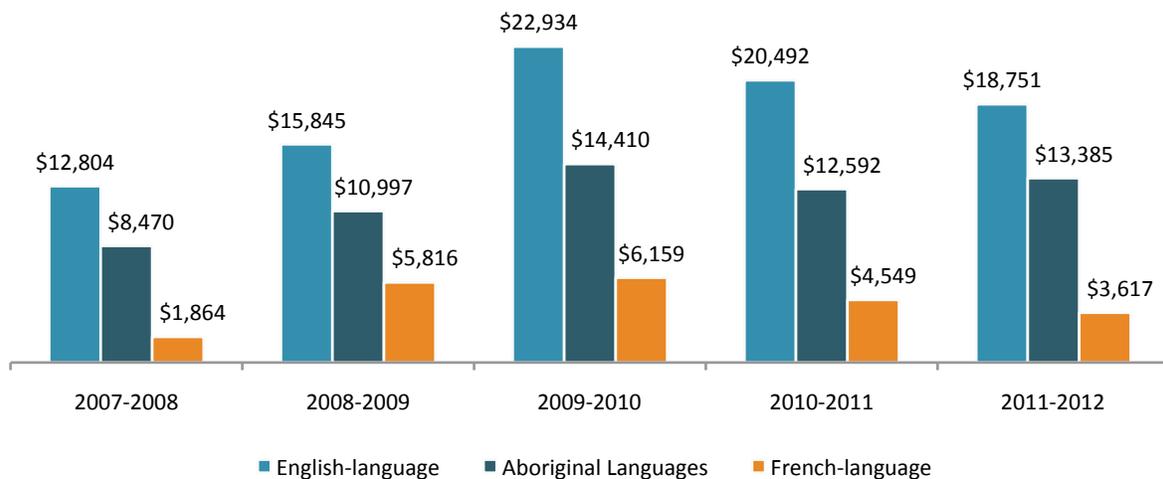


⁵⁷ Information provided by the Canada Media Fund.

⁵⁸ Total CMF Financing refers to total financing through the *Aboriginal Program* and APTN performance envelopes.

Total production budgets for Aboriginal-language programming supported by the CMF totalled \$59.9 million. This compares to \$91.8 million for English-language Aboriginal production, and \$22 million for French-language Aboriginal production. Figure 19 shows the total volume of production, by language, between 2007-2008 and 2011-2012.

Figure 19: Total Production Budgets by Language, 2007-2008 to 2011-2012 (\$ thousands)



2.2. More than 3,000 Direct and Indirect Jobs Created

Based on the volume of production between 2007-2008 and 2011-2012, an estimated 1,536 highly skilled full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs were created directly as a result of Aboriginal production supported by the CMF over the five-year period from 2007-2008 to 2011-2012. 75% of permanent hires are Aboriginal producers, and producers interviewed said that where possible they hire Aboriginal people. Thus, it is fair to conclude that to the extent possible, the more than 1,500 industry FTE jobs created by Aboriginal production supported by the CMF were filled by Aboriginal people.

A further 1,797 FTE jobs are estimated to have been created in other industries that supplied goods and services to productions, totalling 3,333 estimated FTE jobs created between 2007-2008 and 2011-2012 in the Canadian economy.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Communications MDR arrived at its estimates of the number of FTE jobs created through Aboriginal screen-based production using a similar methodology to that employed by Nordicity in *Profile 2012: An Economic Report on the Screen-based Production Industry in Canada*, for the CMPA and APFTQ in conjunction with the Department of Canadian Heritage, 2013.

2.3 Production is Based Primarily in the West

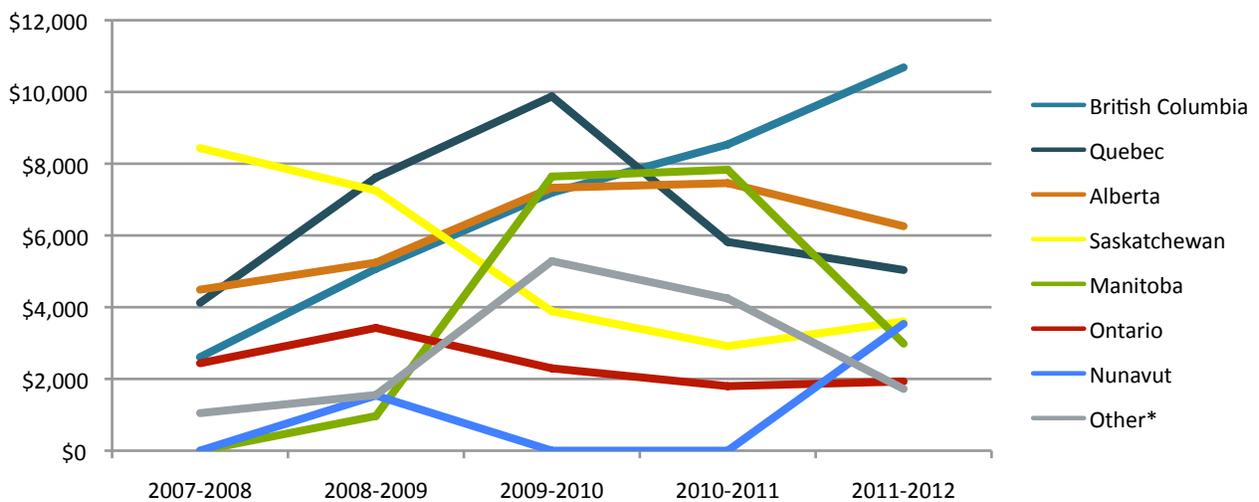
When examined on a regional basis, we can see in Figure 20, that British Columbia had the highest volume of Aboriginal production, at \$33.1 million, followed by Alberta at \$30.8 million and Saskatchewan at \$26.1 million. (Figure 20.)

Figure 20: Total Production Budgets by Region, 2007-2008 to 2011-2012 (\$ thousands)



As can be seen in Figure 21, over the five-year period from 2007-2008 to 2011-2012, production levels by region fluctuated, with steady growth occurring in British Columbia and overall decreased production levels in Saskatchewan and Ontario.

Figure 21: Trend in Production Budgets By Region, 2007-2008 to 2011-2012, (\$ thousands)⁶⁰



⁶⁰ Amounts in "Other" are combined from different regions to protect the confidentiality of individual projects.

2.4 The Slate of Production Includes Documentary, Children and Youth, and Drama

Between 2007-2008 and 2011-2012, the CMF supported the production of 91 Aboriginal documentary productions, followed by 44 productions for children and youth. Figure 22 provides an analysis of the total volume of production budgets by genre supported by the CMF.

Figure 22: Total Production Budgets, by Genre, 2007-2008 to 2011-2012 (\$ thousands)

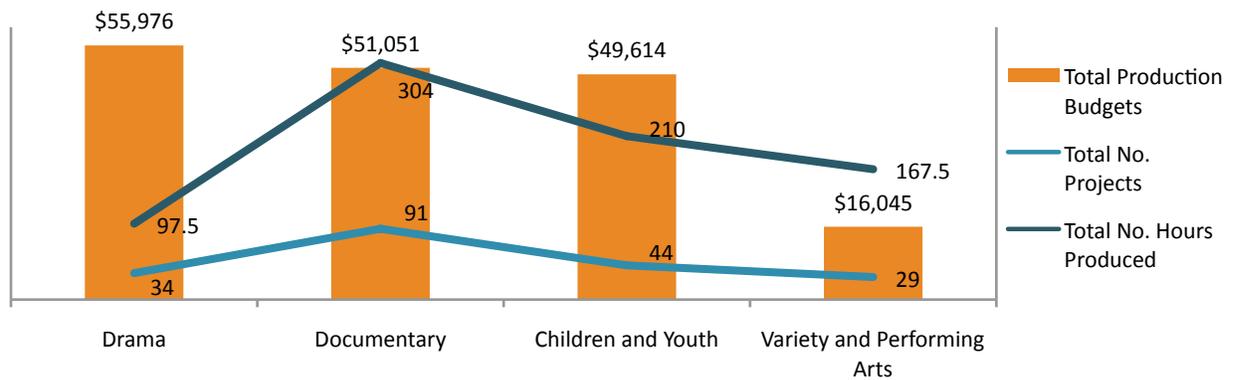
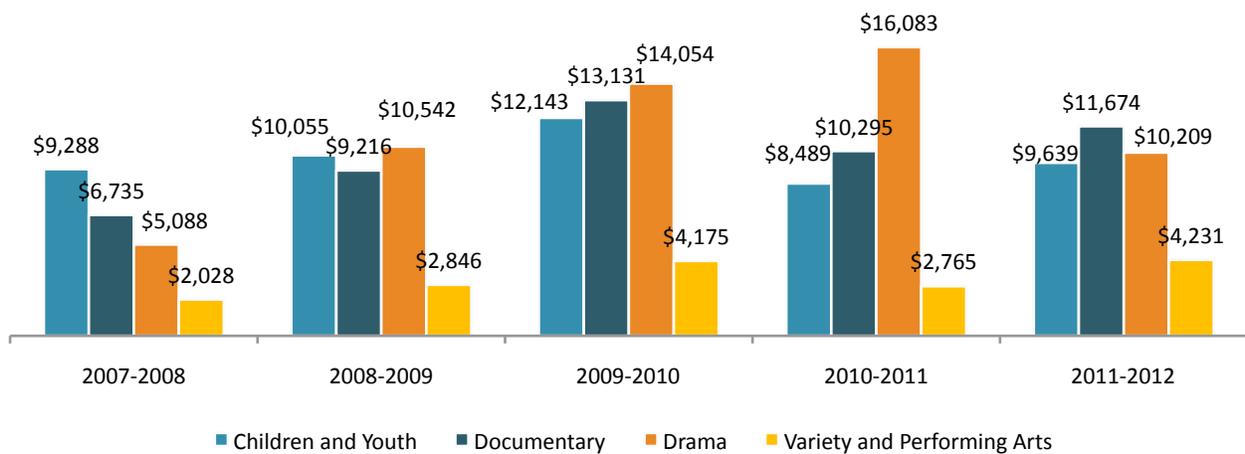


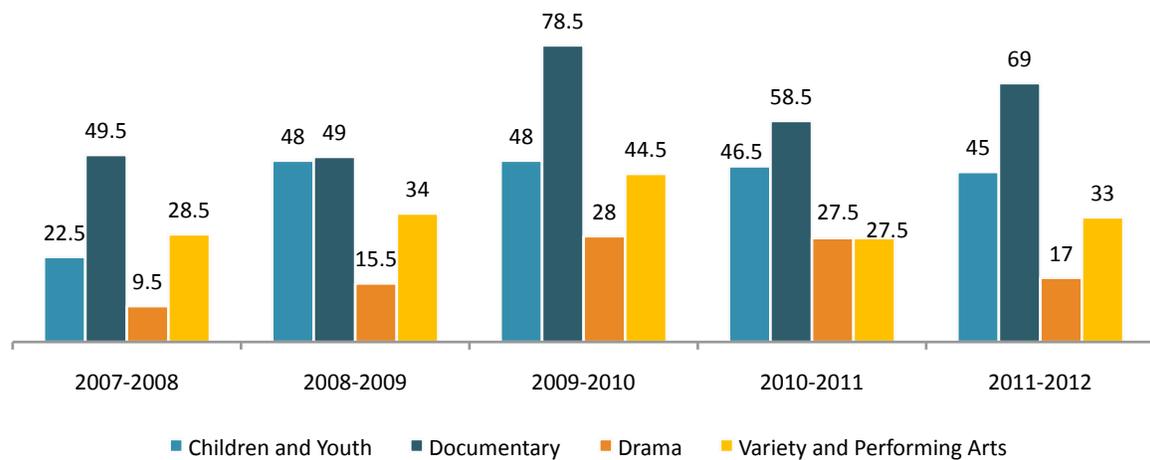
Figure 23 provides a year-by-year view of production volumes by genre, showing that drama projects had total production budgets (\$10.5 million, \$14 million and \$16 million, respectively) as compared to other genres in the years 2008-2009, 2009-2010 and 2010-2011.

Figure 23: Trend Analysis of Total Production Budgets, by Genre, 2007-2008 to 2011-2012 (\$ thousands)



When looked at the perspective of total hours of programming produced, we can see in Figure 24, there were more hours produced in documentary than any other genre in the five-year period under examination. The second greatest number of hours produced were for children and youth programming.

Figure 24: Total Number of Hours Produced, by Genre by and by Year, 2007-2008 to 2011-2012



2.5 Average Production Budgets are Comparable to French-language Market

The average budget per hour of programming between the years 2007-2008 and 2011-2012 can be seen in Figure 25. Average budgets per hour of Aboriginal production were lowest for variety and performing arts of \$96,000 per hour and highest for drama with budgets of \$574,000 per hour on average. Documentary had average budgets per hour of \$168,000 and children and youth shows averaged production budgets of \$236,000 per hour of programming.

Figure 25: Average Budget Per Hour, 2007-2008 to 2011-2012 (\$ thousands)

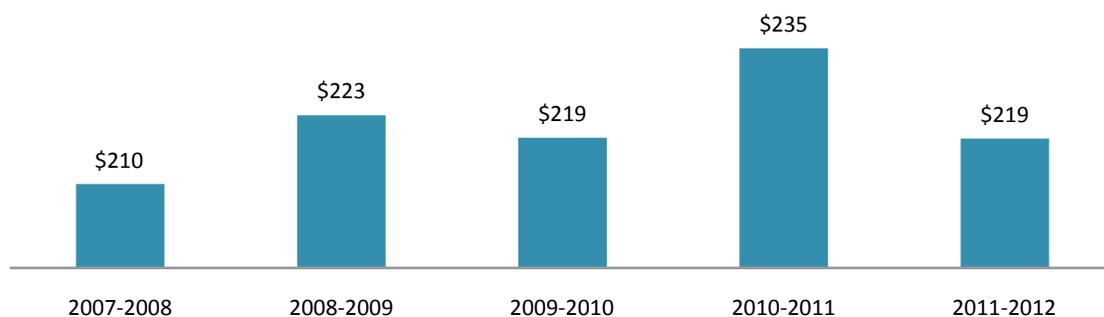
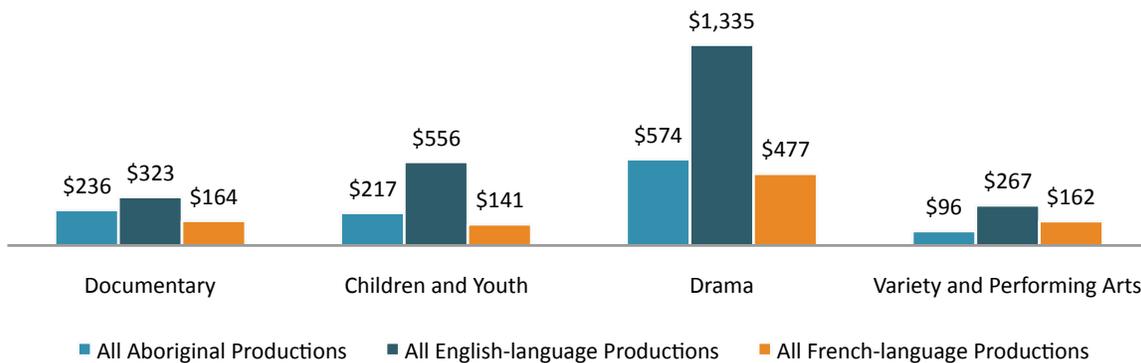


Figure 26 provides an analysis of average budgets per hour in 2011-2012 for all Aboriginal projects as compared to English- and French-language productions supported through the Convergent Stream of the CMF in the same year. The figure shows that average budgets per hour for Aboriginal productions funded were comparable to average budgets per hour for French-language productions.

Figure 26: Comparison of Average Budgets per Hour, by Genre, All CMF Convergent Stream Projects, 2011-2012 (\$ thousands)

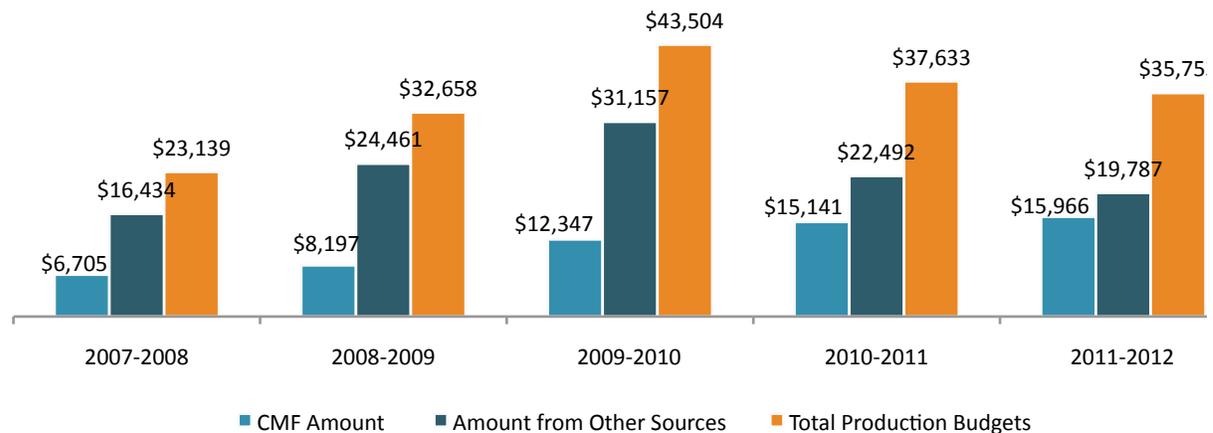


Aboriginal productions funded through the CMF between 2007-2008 and 2011-2012 were dominated by series television projects. The number of series supported peaked in 2009-2010, at 35. One-off shows declined from a high of 12 in 2007-2008 to a low of three in 2011-2012.

2.6 Ability to Attract Financing Other Than CMF Funding is Low

Figure 27 shows the amount of financing for Aboriginal productions that came from sources other than the CMF. Overall, Aboriginal productions attracted \$2.70 in other financing for every \$1 invested by the CMF.

Figure 27: Financing of Aboriginal Productions Received from the CMF and Other Sources (\$ thousands)



The ability of Aboriginal productions to attract other sources of financing is low when compared to all projects supported through the Convergent Stream of the CMF. In 2011-2012, every dollar invested by the CMF in Aboriginal productions attracted \$2.24 of additional financing, compared to \$3.89 attracted by all projects supported through the Convergent Stream. (See Figure 28.)

Figure 28: Comparison of Leverage Factors, CMF Supported Production, 2011-2012⁶¹



An analysis of financial participants in projects funded through the Aboriginal Program illustrates the important role played by the CMF in the financing of Aboriginal language productions. The proportion of financial structures funded through the CMF has risen steadily from 35.5% in 2007-2008 to 54.7% in 2011-2012. During the same period, the financial participation of Canadian broadcasters declined from a 26.7% in 2007-2008 to 10.5% in 2011-2012. (See Figure 29.)

Figure 29: Financial Structures of Television Components of Projects Funded Through the CMF Aboriginal Program, 2007-2008 to 2011-2012

Percentage of total financing	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
CMF	35.5	31.9	29.7	46.4	54.7
Broadcasters	26.7	26.3	19.0	11.3	10.5
Provincial Governments	17.4	17.7	23.7	19.4	19.6
Federal Government	11.0	10.8	10.3	9.4	8.9
Private Funds	5.5	8.2	15.5	4.7	4.2
Producers	3.2	3.5	1.5	7.9	1.7
Distributors	0.3	0.0	0.3	0.8	0.2
Foreign	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other	0.1	1.5	0.0	0.1	0.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

⁶¹ 'All Aboriginal Production Supported by the CMF' refers to funding provided through the Aboriginal Program, APTN Performance Envelope and Production Incentives.

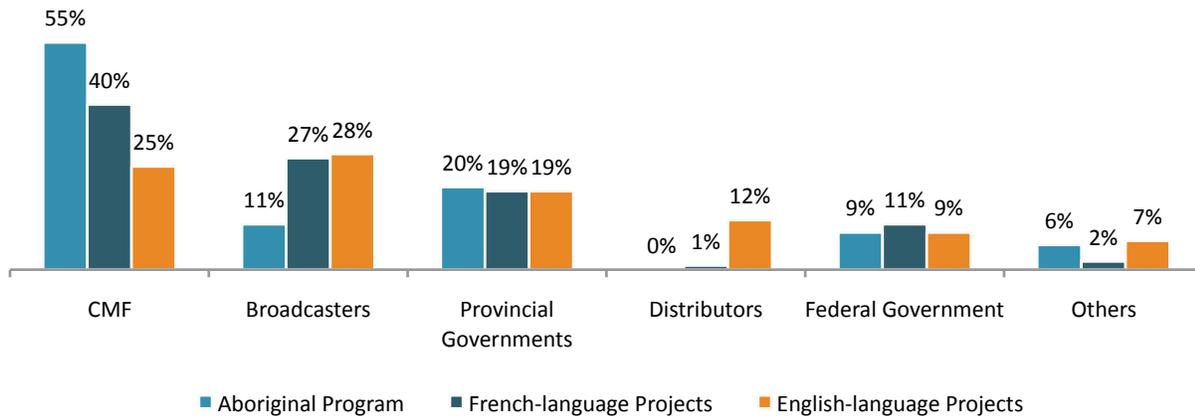
At the same time, changes in the marketplace have led to a decrease in demand for Aboriginal programming from Canadian broadcasters other than APTN. APTN is the primary broadcaster to trigger funding from this program. APTN triggered 73 projects between 2007-2008 and 2011-2012 out of a total of 85. Figure 30 provides a list of broadcasters that participated in Aboriginal productions supported by the CMF.

Figure 30: Broadcasters Participating in CMF-Funded Aboriginal Television Productions, by year

Broadcasters with First Window Licence	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	Total no. of projects
APTN	15	13	15	14	16	73
Nunavut Independent Television Network		2	1	1	2	6
CBC / Radio-Canada		1		1		2
CHUM	1					1
History	1					1
SCN (now City Saskatchewan)	1					1
TFO		1				1
Total	18	17	16	16	18	85
Broadcasters with Second Window Licence	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	Total no. of projects
APTN		1		1		2
ACCESS (now CTV Two Alberta)	1					1
ARTV		1				1
Bravo		1				1
CBC / Radio-Canada	1			1		2
CHUM	1					1
CLT (now OWN)	1					1
SCN (now City Saskatchewan)	5	3	5			13
Total	9	6	5	2	0	22

Figure 31 provides a comparison of financing in 2011-2012, which shows that productions funded through the Aboriginal Program of the CMF received 11% of their financing overall from Canadian broadcasters, as compared to 27% for French-language projects, and 28% for English-language projects.

Figure 31: Comparison of Financial Structures of Television Components, All Projects, CMF Convergent Stream, 2011-2012



Between 2007-2008 and 2011-2012, financial participants other than broadcasters have included federal government participants such as the Canadian Production Tax Credit, the NFB, and the Canada Council for the Arts. The following provincial and territorial governments also participated in financial structures: Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Nunavut, Ontario, Quebec, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, and Yukon.

Producers also accessed the following private funds: Canwest Alberta Fund, Cogego Fund, Independent Production Fund, Rogers Cable Network Fund, Rogers Documentary Fund and the Shaw Rocket Fund.

The Nunavut-based distributor Isuma Distribution International Ltd. provided a small number of licences.

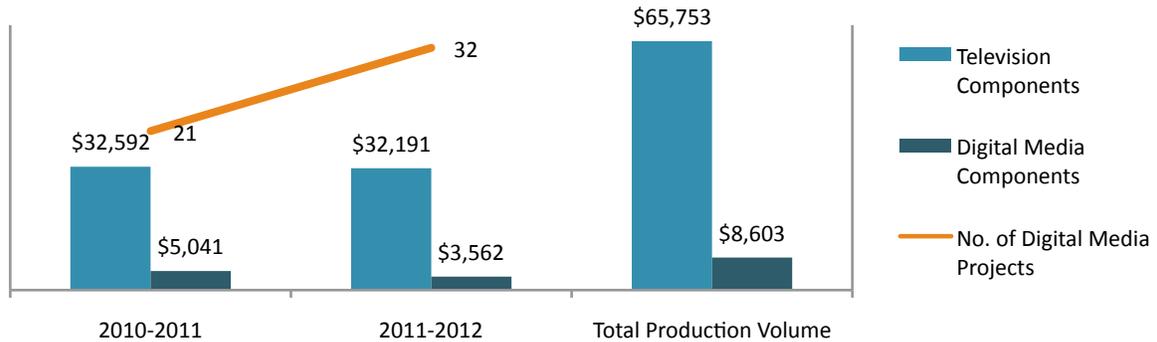
3. Trends in Support to the Development and Production of Digital Media Production

3.1 The Canada Media Fund and the Bell Fund Supported Interactive Digital Media Production Worth \$14.5 Million

The data on the participation of Aboriginal production companies in the financing of interactive digital media through the CMF Experimental Fund and the Bell Fund is limited due to a lack of self-identification by Aboriginal digital media producers. The CMF's Convergent and Experimental Streams support digital media productions as does the Bell Fund and the Canada Council for the Arts.

As can be seen in Figure 32, the CMF supported total production volume for the digital media components of Aboriginal convergent productions amounting to \$8.6 million through the Convergent Stream in 2010-2011 to 2011-2012.

Figure 32: Total Production Volume of Digital Media Components of Aboriginal Convergent Productions Funded through the CMF, 2010-2011 to 2011-2012 (\$ thousands)

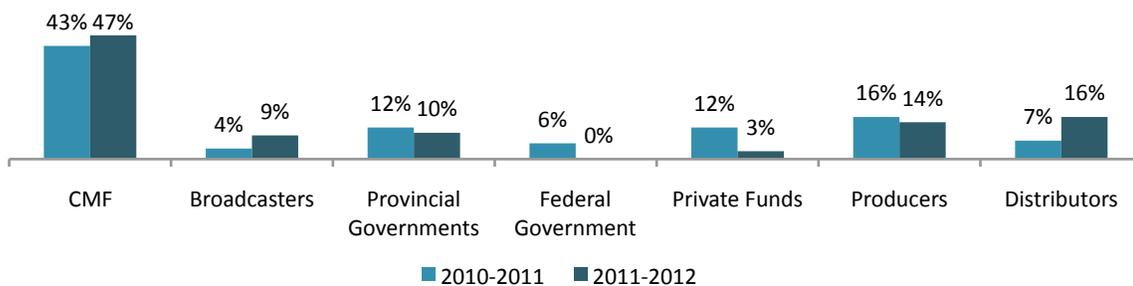


Total production budgets for interactive digital media productions fell 30% from 2010-2011 to 2011-2012, and average production budgets also decreased significantly over the two years, from \$240,000 per project to \$111,000 per project, a drop of 54%.

Figure 33 shows a breakdown of financial structures for digital media components of productions funded through the Aboriginal Program in the two years of the Convergent Stream program: 2010-2011 and 2011-2012. Digital media components had fewer financing partners than television. The main contributor was the CMF, followed by producers, who contributed a significant share of financing (16% and 14%, respectively, in 2010-2011 and 2011-2012).

Three broadcasters participated in the financing of digital media components: APTN, Nunavut Independent TV Network and Radio-Canada. The two distributors were Isuma Distribution International Ltd., and Raining Thoughts. Seven provincial and territorial governments also participated: British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nunavut, Ontario, Quebec, and Saskatchewan.

Figure 33: Analysis of Financial Structures of Digital Media Components of Productions Funded through the CMF's Aboriginal Program

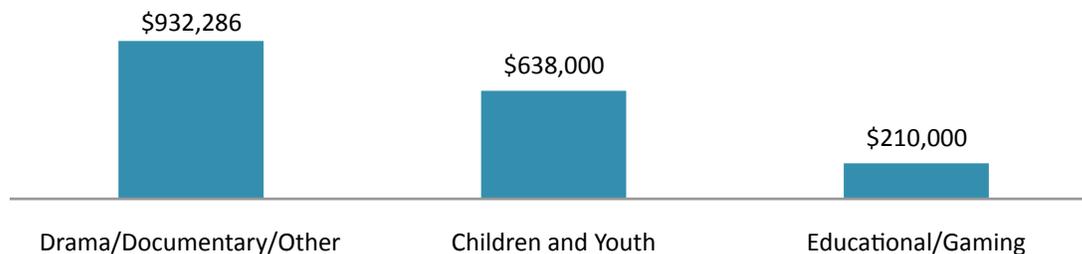


Two Aboriginal-owned companies received financing through the Experimental Stream of the CMF in 2010-2011 and 2011-2012: Isuma Distribution International, creator of Isuma.TV, and Minority Media, a relative newcomer (established in 2010) to the AAA game space.

In all, four productions were funded between 2010-2011 and 2011-2012, with total production budgets of \$5 million, through the CMF's Experimental Stream.

Between the years 2008 and 2012, the Bell Fund-supported 12 digital media projects in production associated to television programs whose lead broadcaster was APTN,⁶² for a total of \$1.9 million of production. (See Figure 34.) It is important to note that four digital media projects funded through the Bell Fund also accessed the CMF. These four projects accounted for just over half of all production budgets (\$994,098) of Bell Fund-funded Aboriginal productions. In order to arrive at a total production volume for interactive digital media projects funded through the CMF and the Bell Fund, these four projects were only counted once.

Figure 34: Total Production Budgets, by Type of Production, Supported by the Bell Fund, 2008 to 2012



The average budget was \$156,367. The majority of productions were aimed at viewers in the drama, documentary, lifestyle, comedy and variety genres. All projects had English as at least one language of production. Two projects also had French as a language of production, and two had an Aboriginal language in addition to English.

3.2 The Canada Council's Support to Independent Digital Media Arts Production Totaled Almost \$670,000

Between 2007-2008 and 2011-2012, the Canada Council awarded a total of almost \$670,000 dollars to independent digital media artists and organizations.

Six interactive digital media projects by artists were supported through the Canada Council's Aboriginal Media Arts Program. These projects often involved other disciplines such as performance art and video art. A total of \$143,000 in grants was awarded, representing 7% of all projects funded through the program. It appears that there has been little growth in independent new media art production over the period examined.

⁶² The Bell Fund provides grants to convergent media productions involving a television and an interactive digital media component.

The Canada Council for the Arts also supports a network of media arts production centres across the country that provide access to production facilities and training for independent artists. Among these, two Aboriginal organizations received funding: The Nunavut Independent TV (NITV) network and Arnavit Video Collective. These organizations support and facilitate access to digital media, for example, by collaborating with Isuma.TV.

Between 2007-2008 and 2011-2012, NITV and Arnavit Video Collective received grants totalling \$525,680 from the Canada Council towards their operating, equipment and project costs. Figure 35 provides a summary of funding to Aboriginal digital media arts production.

Figure 35: Summary of Canada Council Support to Aboriginal Digital Media Arts Production, 2007-2008 to 2011-2012

	Total Grants Awarded
Support for Aboriginal Media Arts Production Organizations	\$525,680
Support for Aboriginal New Media Artists	\$143,000
Total	\$668,680

4. Trends in Funding to the Development and Production of Feature Films

4.1 A Number of Public Agencies Support Aboriginal Feature Film Production

Telefilm provides support for Aboriginal film production through programs aimed at the general community of film producers. Between 2007-2008 and 2011-2012, Telefilm invested a total of \$415,000 in two Aboriginal feature film productions, of which one was financed through the Low Budget Independent Feature Film Assistance Program (which provides support to feature films with production budgets of up to \$1.25 million), the other through the Theatrical Documentary Program. (See Figure 36.)

Figure 36: Aboriginal Feature Film Production Commitments, Telefilm Canada, 2007-2008 to 2011-2012

	No. of Projects	Language	Total Committed
Production	2	English	\$415,000

Telefilm Canada also provided support to feature film screenwriters through the Featuring Aboriginal Stories Program, an intensive program aimed at helping Aboriginal writers take their scripts to the next level of development, which ran from 2008 to 2011. The NSI designed and delivered the training component for this Program.

Development support is also available through the regular development program of the Canada Feature Film Fund.

Between 2007-2008 and 2011-2012, Telefilm supported the development of 50 feature film projects, with a total commitment of \$1.1 million. The majority of development projects were financed through the Featuring Aboriginal Stories Program. (See Figure 37.)

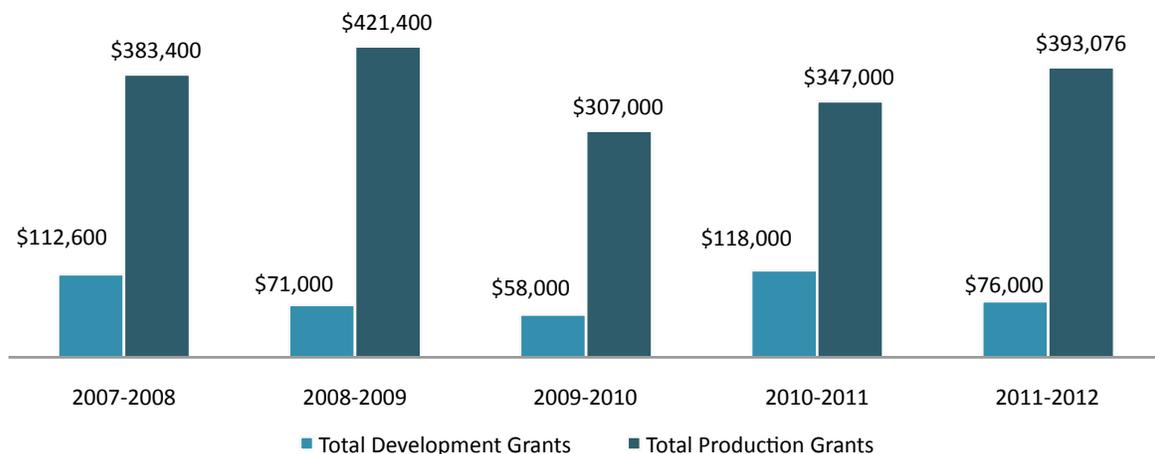
Figure 37: Aboriginal Feature Film Development Commitments, Telefilm Canada, 2007-2008 to 2011-2012

	No. of Projects	Language	Total Committed
Featuring Aboriginal Stories Program	39	English	\$880,057
CFFF Development Program	11	English	\$214,601
Total	50		\$1,094,658

Along with Telefilm, the Canada Council and the NFB play a significant role in developing talented writers and directors, providing them with opportunities to hone their skills as writers, directors, and independent producers.

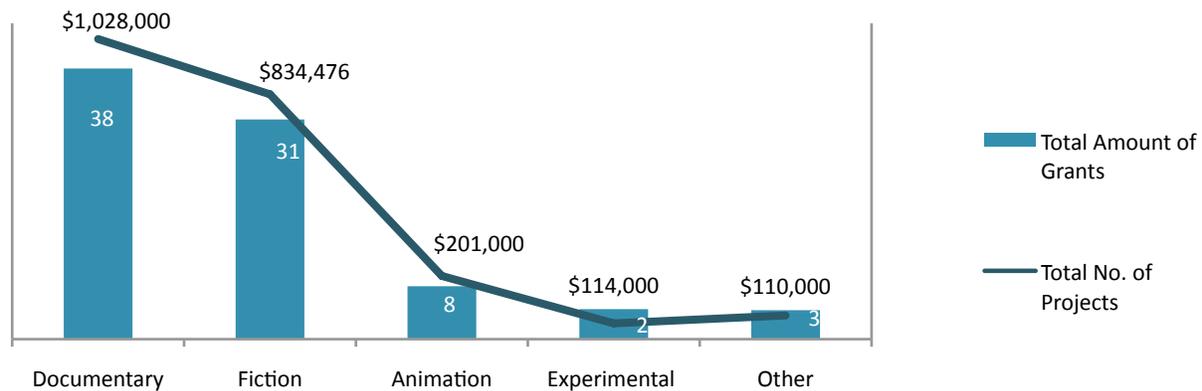
Through its Aboriginal Media Arts Program, the Canada Council for the Arts provides support in the form of grants to individuals to develop or produce film or video projects. Between 2007-2008 and 2011-2012, the Canada Council awarded 82 grants to independent writers and directors to produce or develop their own films or videos in short- and long-form formats. Of the projects supported, 11 were for feature films, including three production grants totalling \$180,000. The Canada Council awarded \$2.3 million for production and development projects. (See Figure 38.)

Figure 38: Total Film/Video Grants Awarded to Aboriginal Media Artists by the Canada Council for the Arts, 2007-2008 to 2011-2012



The majority of projects supported from 2007-2008 to 2011-2012 were documentaries, followed by fiction and animation. Figure 39 shows the distribution of projects supported by genres. The majority of projects supported were in English. Of 82 projects supported, six were in French (7%).

Figure 39: Number of Projects Supported by the Canada Council and Total Grants, by Genre, 2007-2008 to 2011-2012



For its part, the NFB has entered into a number of co-productions with Aboriginal film producers, investing a total of \$165,539 in five English-language film co-productions with Aboriginal production companies. The five co-producers were located in Manitoba, Nunavut, Saskatchewan and Quebec. (See Figure 40.)

Figure 40: NFB Investments in Film Co-Productions with Aboriginal Production Companies, 2007-2008 to 2011-2012

	No. of Coproductions	Total NFB Cost
NFB Co-productions with Aboriginal Producers	5	\$165,539

The NFB invested a total of \$736,607 in 13 English-language NFB productions directed by Aboriginal directors. Twelve were documentaries and one was a short animation film. NFB interactive productions directed by Aboriginal filmmakers had a total cost to the NFB of \$79,373. Figure 41 provides a summary of NFB projects directed by Aboriginal filmmakers.

Figure 41: NFB Productions Involving Aboriginal Directors, 2007-2008 to 2011-2012

	No. of Projects	Total NFB Cost
English-language Film Productions	13	\$736,607
English-language Interactive Productions	6	\$79,373
French-language Film Productions	2	\$224,171
Total	21	\$1,040,151

The NFB also funded initiatives to support the development of emerging Aboriginal filmmakers. In the five-year period from 2007-2008 to 2011-2012, the NFB invested \$133,538 in English-language initiatives and \$32,225 through its French-language Equity Program.

5. Summary Observations

\$173 million in production activity was supported by the CMF Convergent Stream over the five-year period from 2007-2008 to 2011-2012, contributing to the creation of an estimated 3,333 direct and indirect jobs. Of this, \$8.6 million was in interactive digital media production components. In addition, the CMF Experimental Stream and the Bell Fund together supported total production budgets of \$5.9 million of interactive digital media production.

In terms of feature film production, very few films were produced, with the majority of funding supporting the development of projects. In all, Aboriginal filmmakers accessed \$4.8 million, the majority provided by the Canada Council (\$2.3 million), followed by Telefilm Canada (\$1.5 million) and the NFB (\$1.2 million).

The slate of productions being produced is increasingly diverse, though still dominated by documentary production. As compared to English-language productions overall, average production budgets per hour are significantly lower in Aboriginal productions. Our analysis of the financial structures of projects funded through the CMF reveals that Aboriginal-language productions have less access to financing beyond the CMF than other Canadian productions.

The data available does not provide a clear portrait of interactive digital media production activity. It is reasonable to assume that the requirements of the CMF Convergent Stream, which require that content be distributed on at least two platforms, is stimulating production. This assumption is borne out by our informant interviews, which suggest that a greater amount of production is taking place than can be measured based on available data. APTN recognizes that interactive digital production and distribution is a priority and has made its DigitalDrum.ca platform a centrepiece of its future strategy.

Having a more complete view of funding would provide valuable intelligence with which to consider capacity-building and skills development issues. One example would be to better understand the trend in convergent digital media seen over two years, in which production volumes and average budgets declined, in contrast to convergent production overall.⁶³ Few feature films are being produced and little financing is being allocated to Aboriginal feature film production. Film production is a high-risk undertaking involving a longer development cycle, accounting in part at least for the higher proportion of feature films financed in development.

While there is currently no way to track the career trajectory of successful producers, it is reasonable to assume that they would have received some sort of funding from the Canada Council or the NFB at some point in their careers, as these agencies play an important role in developing the skills of emerging filmmakers.

⁶³ An increase in convergent production volume and in average budgets from 2010-2011 to 2011-2012 is noted in *Profile 2012: An Economic Report on the Screen-based Production Industry in Canada*, Op. Cit., page 13.

“The overall production of Aboriginal artists demonstrates a vision that has not been constrained by divisions of pre-existing and predetermining individual arts disciplines, but one that honours story and strives to make the best match with production methodology – whatever that may require. New media was taken up for expression, when appropriate, by artists working in various other disciplines, but primarily the already interdisciplinary media arts.”

- Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew⁶⁴

IV. Perspectives on Challenges and Priorities for the Future

1. Preamble

This section describes the key challenges facing the Aboriginal screen-based independent production sector. Our analysis is based on the results of informant interviews with Aboriginal producers, both established and emerging, writers, and directors and other key stakeholders.

2. Challenges

2.1 Access to Financing

The greatest challenge identified in informant interviews is lack of access to sufficient financing.

Television producers are challenged by low license fees that APTN offers, a lack of interim financing and the lack of participation by other broadcasters in financing television programs. There is a need for higher license fees, and in this regard, producers support an increase in APTN’s resources. Some producers would like to have APTN’s investment in productions produced by its related company, Animiki See, instead in independent production companies.

Many producers who access the CMF’s Aboriginal Program note that they are producing in more than one language, which drives the cost of the program much higher. These producers point out, however, that making content available in Aboriginal languages is a top priority.

Some producers express an interest in partnering with other producers – both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal – but where intellectual property (IP) ownership would not be unfairly compromised, and many would like the opportunity to gain valuable producing experience on higher budget projects. There is also a concern expressed by some producers that they may be giving up too much IP to partner with other companies, in particular with non-Aboriginal companies.

“Because APTN is the only broadcaster, its low license fees are a challenge. We do not have a provincial tax credit to help with financing in the Northwest Territories. We can raise about 80% of the budget, but it is really hard to close the financing...”

- Amos Scott, Director of Television Programming, Native Communications Society of the Northwest Territories

⁶⁴ Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew quoted in Bruce Sinclair, *We Have to Hear Their Voices: A Research Project on Aboriginal Languages and Art Practices*, prepared for the Canada Council for the Arts, 2012.

There is a great need to increase financing opportunities for Aboriginal feature films. Funding for development is seen as critical, as is access to funding to produce feature-length films, including documentaries. Access to the Canada Feature Film Fund as well as international co-production are identified as top priorities. Without a dedicated envelope for feature film production, producers find it difficult to access financing for feature films. Some express a desire to have Telefilm create a dedicated Aboriginal production fund, believing it is virtually impossible to have a feature film produced without it.

“Digital media is a growing component. It’s expensive to produce. People are still coming to terms with how to use it. There is a collective of younger artists that are promising – they do web and multimedia installation. It will grow. Hopefully, the digital media requirements at the CMF will have an impact. Facilitating access between TV producers and Aboriginal digital media creators is a challenge.”

- Jason Ryle, Executive Director,
ImagineNative Film + Media Arts Festival

Another key challenge mentioned by producers is the impossibility of attracting a distributor to a feature film project.

In Saskatchewan, the loss of the Film Employment Tax Credit has had a detrimental effect on the industry. Provincial tax credits were identified by producers as

being very important to the financing of productions and to the sustainability of their companies.

With respect to convergent digital media production, there is a lack of adequate financing for well-developed rich content. Funding and licence fees are described as being too low which is generally a factor in inhibiting innovation. Some producers point out that insufficient resources are being allocated to ensure the presence of Aboriginal languages online. Having access to federal tax credits is cited as a top priority for the sector.

A number of producers note that they require assistance in applying to programs such as the Bell Fund or the CMF’s Experimental Stream in order to be competitive with other applicants.

Aboriginal producers also share the challenge faced by other interactive digital media producers to develop business models that will help monetize their content.

2.2 Need for Capacity-Building

An overlying theme from our informant interviews is that capacity in the screen-based sector has been built over the years and there are now a core of companies that have the skills, expertise, and track records to produce for a broader market. These producers point out that there is a need for greater infrastructure development to support the entire value chain of Aboriginal screen-based production.

Producers interviewed for this study are committed to mentoring emerging talent from the community but more opportunities for training, production, and distribution must be made available.

“There needs to be an education process for Aboriginal producers, who must learn how to manage the producing process. Film school does not teach you about financing. There is a huge gap there. Nothing in the curriculum that teaches you how to navigate the CMF application process, how competitive the Bell Fund is, how do you navigate all that, how do you maintain creative control over your idea? So education of Aboriginal producers has to happen on that global scale so that they can function around the world and sell their product.”

- Dennis and Melanie Jackson, Dark Thunder Productions

There are many strengths in the sector, but also gaps, which must be addressed through capacity-building initiatives.

There is a need to strengthen distribution, and producers consider that there are opportunities in digital distribution over the Internet, in theatrical distribution to Aboriginal communities and in greater educational programming. A number of producers indicated that they distribute their own works, including in one instance, creating a dedicated distribution company for the purpose of getting the work seen.

A directory was mentioned often as a useful tool that would help producers network and identify Aboriginal producers and digital developers.

Opportunities are also seen in the growing awareness of Aboriginal screen-based production internationally. Producers would like opportunities to develop international relationships and access international financing opportunities by co-producing with others. Emerging producers need opportunities to learn business and financing skills so they can compete at a national and international level, and learn to sell their products.

"In TV, we are now maturing as drama directors with tons of experience. We want to coproduce with other Aboriginal producers around the world. There is momentum"

- Jeremy Torrie, High Definition Pictures

Producers expressed the importance of being able to develop greater digital capacity in-house as third-party digital media production is costly and can present production challenges. There is currently a lack of an overall strategy to help companies gain digital expertise. Companies seek to access expertise and find experienced Aboriginal people with digital media expertise. Without access to a directory of Aboriginal companies, this is said to be difficult.

The single most important factor in the development of successful producers, writers, and directors is said to be opportunities to work professionally. The investment by APTN in productions is said to have allowed producers to hire and train hundreds of Aboriginal people across the country. Successful television producers report having had opportunities to work on successively larger projects. There is a perception that financing more feature films in production would build the capacity of Aboriginal film production companies.

"It would be great to [have] a healthy infrastructure where there is a symbiotic relationship with the rest of Canada and not just with APTN. So for example, where a show like Blackstone...becomes more prevalent and where young talented people are inspired to get involved in the industry. The hope is to build a healthy industry where you have the young up and comers, and then you have the mid-level producer or artist and then you have a more seasoned producer."

- Ron E. Scott, Prairie Dog Film + Television

Writers and directors also value the opportunity to produce work independently. In this regard, the Canada Council plays an important role in developing new voices. To work in the industry,

writers and directors require access to opportunities to pitch to and work with producers with business expertise.

Writers and directors also seek coordinated and sustained opportunities to develop professionally, for example, through opportunities for mentoring at all stages of script development, or through longer-term director and producer labs. Assistance with transitioning to digital storytelling was identified as a top priority.

2.3 Greater Access to Broadcasters

One of the greatest challenges identified by television producers interviewed for this study is the lack of access to broadcasters other than APTN for financing their projects. Producers observed that the participation of broadcasters other than APTN in Aboriginal television production is very low to non-existent. Producers are finding it difficult to interest other Canadian broadcasters in their productions, both Aboriginal- and non-Aboriginal-themed projects. This presents a particular challenge for established production companies interested in gaining access to a wider range of broadcasters and other financiers to produce larger budget productions with broad audience appeal while retaining their intellectual property (IP) rights so as to develop new revenue streams for their productions. It was noted that broadcasters may not have confidence that Aboriginal productions can reach a larger public with their productions.

“We need a perfect storm where broadcasters see that their audiences are interested and we have product that appeals to them.”

- Tracey Deer, Mohawk Princess Pictures

Many producers interviewed for this study are interested to have APTN create partnerships with other broadcasters to produce higher budget productions and also pave the way for Aboriginal producers to work with other broadcasters and extend their audience reach. As one producer stated, “excellence is costly, and very difficult to achieve without the participation of multiple broadcasters.”

“We need a breakthrough production with a mainstream broadcaster to gain access to a wider number of outlets.”

- Barbara Hager, Aarrow Productions

Some producers emphasized the importance of the Canadian broadcasting system reflecting Canada’s diversity and that more could be done by the CRTC to ensure greater accountability on the part of Canadian broadcasters to be more reflective of Canadian society in general, and Aboriginal society in particular.

Access to broadcasters via shared first windows or second-window commitments was defined as a top priority. A lack of access to broadcaster licence fees for feature films is making it difficult to close financing on projects. Many producers commented on the need for dedicated resources for feature film production. Producers are forced to defer their fees when there is a lack of support from broadcasters and distributors.

Initiatives on the part of major Canadian broadcasters that showcase the work of Aboriginal producers, writers, and directors are also seen as important in inspiring young Aboriginal people to get involved and continue to build the industry.

Producers report that there are fewer opportunities to obtain broadcast licences from APTN, in particular as regards one-off documentaries. This is making it more difficult for emerging producers to gain needed work experience to develop.

3. Summary Observations

Our interviews with stakeholders confirm that there is a vibrant and dynamic independent production sector. Many of the established producers interviewed for this report are concerned about the long-term sustainability of their businesses since their lack of access to broadcasters other than APTN represents a key barrier in their growth. There is a perception by some that Aboriginal productions may have limited audience potential.

Other challenges cited by television producers include lack of sufficient financing to produce higher-budget productions. (See Figure 42 for a summary of challenges.) Many producers have a commitment to mentoring Aboriginal professionals and producing in Aboriginal languages.

Digital media production is a particular challenge. Producers are expressing the need for the CMF to make more funding available for Aboriginal-language productions and generally for the government to take a lead in helping to build the digital media production capacity of the sector. Producers of feature films point to the unique challenges facing their sector including lack of access to the Canada Feature Film Fund, and lack of access to distributors to attach to potential projects.

Writers and directors interviewed for this study are interested in greater access to experienced producers so that they can pitch their ideas and expand their professional work experiences domestically and internationally. They would also like to be able to transition to digital storytelling. (See Figure 43 for a summary of challenges for writers and directors.)

Figure 42: Summary of Challenges for Aboriginal Producers

Television	<p>Access to Funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Licence fees from APTN are too low - Access to interim financing <p>Access to Broadcasters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to broadcasters other than APTN to build long-term sustainability
Interactive Digital Media	<p>Access to Funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - License fees are too low - Need for a federal tax credit - Need for funding to produce more Aboriginal language digital media <p>Lack of Capacity for Digital Media Production</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need to develop increased in-house digital media production expertise as use of third-party people is expensive - Access to qualified digital media professionals from the Aboriginal community - Need for a professional directory
Feature Film	<p>Access to Funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased financing for films to levels sufficient to close financing - Access to a distributor - Need for a dedicated Aboriginal production fund

Figure 43: Summary of Challenges for Aboriginal Writers and Directors

Writers and Directors	Access to Professional Work Opportunities Access to greater opportunities to work professionally <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Greater opportunities to pitch to producers- Access to opportunities to work to gain experience- Need for partnership opportunities to co-produce domestically- Need for international development opportunities Sustained Professional Development Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Mentoring at all stages of script development- Transitioning to digital storytelling
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“We will manage our own destiny and maintain our humanity and pride as Indigenous peoples through Screen storytelling.”

- International Sami Film Centre

V. Future Directions

1. Proposed Future Directions

The last decade has seen the rise of an Aboriginal-screen based independent production sector in Canada. A network of training institutions, funding agencies and Aboriginal community media organizations have contributed to this rise.

The sector shares many characteristics of the independent production sector generally in Canada, such as SMEs that face challenges in achieving long-term sustainability. At the same time, the sector is defined by the unique characteristics of production companies employing Aboriginal peoples, taking on the roles of writer and/ or director in addition to producer, and producing programming in Aboriginal languages.

There are economic, social, and cultural benefits being generated by the sector: jobs are being created, mentoring is taking place in communities across the country where skills are being transferred, and content is being made in Aboriginal languages which is preserving Aboriginal cultures.

Against this backdrop, the sector requires a supportive framework to drive sustainability and we propose the following directions for consideration by governments, funders, training institutions, and broadcasters.

1.1 Develop an Audiovisual Policy for Aboriginal Screen-Based Production

As noted in the report, a number of studies in the last decade identified a need for the federal government to develop an audiovisual policy aimed at supporting the capacity of the Aboriginal screen-based production sector. Such a policy would identify priorities for the sector in Canada.

The development of such a policy is particularly timely. First, the sector now has a national professional association, the AAMP, with a mandate to help the industry grow and achieve sustainability.

Second, APTN, which plays a critical role in the industry, has identified a number of future priorities within the context of an upcoming license renewal including making available more content on more platforms in all categories of programs. With its license renewed for the next seven years and potentially increased resources, APTN could help address outstanding challenges expressed by producers in this study that continue to impede their growth.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ The CRTC has scheduled a licence renewal for the APTN to begin on April 23, 2013.

Third, on an international level, the Berlin Film Festival through its special program, NATIVE – A Journey into Indigenous Cinema, may provide opportunities for producers to expand financing, distribution and sales of films.

In the context of these initiatives currently underway, we would suggest that a national summit be held in 2014 with the goal of developing a policy framework for independent Aboriginal screen-based production. Participants would be called on to identify a blueprint on how to build capacity for film and television production for the coming years. The summit would include the participation of the federal and provincial governments, funders, producers, training institutions, writers, director, broadcasters, and the CRTC.

A lesson learned from the jurisdictions of Australia and New Zealand which support Aboriginal screen-based production is the benefit of combining sustained funding, training and screening platforms, which are described as unprecedented anywhere else in the world.⁶⁶

1.2 Increase Funding to APTN

As APTN stated in its license renewal application presently before the CRTC, “APTN [has] triggered the development of a much more substantial Aboriginal independent production industry than had previously been considered possible leading to the emergence of distinctive, professional content reflecting a wide range of Aboriginal perspectives. This is having a spin off effect throughout the broadcasting system. In the 2011-2012 broadcast year, of the 59 productions supported by APTN, 56 were produced by Aboriginal independent production companies.”⁶⁷

The coming decade is expected to be transformative and APTN has adopted an Aboriginal-language and multi-platform strategy to make content more readily accessible on multiple platforms.

To the extent that APTN could be provided with additional resources to address the challenges that have been identified in this report by producers, this sector would have tools to grow. These include higher license fees for television productions, more higher budget production including drama series, more feature films, and digital media production.

Producers surveyed for this report identified the need for higher license fees from APTN (within its overall conditions of license) as their highest ranking financing priority, ahead of all other forms of financing.

1.3 Create Incentives to Increase Access to Canadian Broadcasters by Aboriginal Producers

One of the key barriers to growth identified in this report is producers’ lack of access to broadcasters other than APTN.

While APTN provides vital broadcast licenses for programs that Aboriginal producers produce, our study shows that it has evolved into the primary broadcaster for the entire Aboriginal production

⁶⁶ *Dreaming in Motion: Celebrating Indigenous Filmmakers*, Op. Cit.

⁶⁷ “Appendix 4,” *Supplementary Brief to the CRTC Licence Application for Renewal*, APTN, 2013.

sector. Aboriginal producers report that when they pitch television programming to Canadian broadcasters, they are steered towards APTN.

To promote and encourage the distribution of Aboriginal programming to a wider range of broadcasting services in Canada, the CMF could consider the introduction of incentives to encourage broadcasters other than APTN to trigger projects by Aboriginal producers. In this regard, CBC/Radio-Canada has a special responsibility as a public broadcaster to reflect Aboriginal peoples on television and to provide employment opportunities for Aboriginal producers, writers, and directors.

There is a need to consult with Canadian broadcasters on incentives that would create favourable conditions for their financial participation in Aboriginal productions.

The CRTC, for its part, could play an important role in ensuring that Canadian broadcasters meet the requirements of the *Broadcasting Act*.

1.4 Introduce Capacity-Building Initiatives for the Digital Media Sector

There is a need to implement several capacity-building initiatives aimed at helping the independent production digital media sector develop.

In its submission to the federal government's consultations on the development of a national digital strategy, APTN pointed out that Aboriginal peoples are entitled to be fully engaged in the development of Canada's digital economy strategy, and that a strategy should take into account the special place of Aboriginal Peoples in Canadian society.⁶⁸

This study demonstrates the need to undertake research so as to gather intelligence on the number of Aboriginal people working in the digital media sector, their locations and their skillsets. In this regard, there is a lesson to be learned from Screen Australia, which has developed a portal called The Black Book, a comprehensive directory of Aboriginal organisations and individuals working across 95 professions in the arts, media, and cultural industries. A similar tool could be developed for use in the digital media sector.

In order to improve the competitiveness of applications by Aboriginal producers to access the Bell Fund and the CMF's Experimental Stream, the CMF, the Bell Fund and APTN could consider organizing funding "clinics" for Aboriginal producers interested in applying to their support programs for digital media. Consideration should be given to applicants based in remote communities.

The CMF, the Bell Fund, APTN and the NFB could consider collaborating on a pilot project aimed at the development, production and distribution of digital media content by Aboriginal production companies. One example could be to host a national game competition similar in format to the Great Canadian Game Competition led by Telefilm a number of years ago, with the purpose of stimulating the development of new interactive game content and building expertise in young interactive digital media companies.

⁶⁸ *Improving Aboriginal Peoples' Place in Canada's Digital Economy*, APTN, July 13, 2010.

The Canada Council could consider developing initiatives to stimulate engagement by Aboriginal youth. For example, the Canada Council's "Artists and Community Collaboration" program could be leveraged to support initiatives that engage Aboriginal youth in new media projects and provide them with opportunities to develop interactive digital media skills. One recent initiative is the Doig River Nation's Indigital Warriors program for local youth.⁶⁹

The NFB could similarly consider projects specifically tailored to Aboriginal youth, for example, modeled on some of their former youth-centred initiatives, such as in animation.

Business accelerators have become an important vehicle for helping promising startups in the digital media sector to quickly ramp up. There is an opportunity for the industry to create a specialized accelerator for Aboriginal interactive digital media companies. Digital media funders and government-funded venture capital funds for digital media could be approached as potential partners. The Driven accelerator program in Toronto provides an interesting model of a specialized not-for profit accelerator targeted at minority- and women-led technology startups, with the aim of creating social impact.

1.5 Increase Support for Production of Feature Films

There are particular challenges being faced by Aboriginal producers regarding feature film production. Unlike television, there is not a dedicated fund specifically targeted at the Aboriginal community.

There is a need for targeted funding for feature film production to capitalize on the wealth of talent and large number of Aboriginal films being developed.

To the extent that new initiatives can contribute to sustained funding for feature films, from development to production, untapped activity could emerge, and additional capacity built in the sector.

As an interim measure, it is proposed that several agencies including Telefilm Canada, the Canada Council, the CMF, APTN and CBC/Radio-Canada pool resources to launch a pilot initiative to support the production of a slate of feature films by Aboriginal producers. These funders could consider the possibility of partnering with existing initiatives in the Aboriginal feature film sector, as a means of further consolidating the industry. We understand there is an initiative underway by the Adam Beach Film Institute to create a feature film fund in Canada to support Aboriginal filmmaking. Also, APTN would like to support a greater array of feature-length fiction films but these require new resources.

Currently, the NSI is running the fully-funded NSI Aboriginal Documentary program – a year-long, part-time course culminating with four short documentaries produced by the teams, and a guaranteed broadcast on television and online.

⁶⁹ Interview with Gary Oker for this study. See also <http://www.changemakers.com/fnmi-learning/nominations/digital-literacy-and-media-production-making-indigital>.

Funders could also consider sponsoring competitive pitch sessions for dramatic television and feature fiction films, bringing producers together with commissioning editors of broadcasters or film distributors, in conjunction with major industry events such as the Banff Television Festival, the Toronto International Film Festival and ImagineNative Film + Media Arts Festival. Prizes could be sponsored to support the production of winning pitches.

1.6 Address Gaps in Professional Development Opportunities

There are gaps in the professional development opportunities of producers, writers and directors. Three areas were identified as meriting attention: scriptwriting, digital storytelling, and development of business and marketing skills.

Some producers identified the “TIFF STUDIO” as a possible model that could be used to further the professional development of mid-career producers to acquire business and marketing skills. Writers and directors of feature films point to the Native Lab of the Sundance Film Institute as a model to emulate to enhance skills in scriptwriting.

Professionals point to the NSI as a successful model and would like to see more opportunities being offered.

These and other training institutions could consider offering digital media programs tailored for Aboriginal producers.

There is a need to develop training opportunities for producers, writers and directors working in remote communities.

The Canada Council could consider prioritizing the provision of travel grants to writers, directors and producers to attend industry events in the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal screen-based sectors. A particular focus could be on professionals working in remote communities with fewer opportunities to attend key festivals, markets or professional development programs.

1.7 Conduct Study on the Distribution and Sales of Aboriginal Screen-Based Content

More information is needed to better understand the distribution networks being used by Aboriginal producers in the sale of their works. Informant interviews reveal that access to distribution is a challenge and that alternative distribution networks are important, particularly for the educational market, where there is demand for works in Aboriginal languages.

Aboriginal films, television programs and digital media are made for specific audiences and consumed by these audiences in a variety of situations. This ranges from small community environments to international audiences. This content may be tailored to these different markets and serve different outcomes, such as education. With the advent of online distribution platforms, increased access to broadband Internet in Aboriginal communities, and increased awareness of Aboriginal screen-based production internationally, the opportunities for the exhibition of Aboriginal content is expanding considerably.

Aboriginal language programs in Canadian schools, the rising popularity of Aboriginal studies in North American colleges and universities, spotlights on Indigenous films at key international film

festivals, and growing awareness and appreciation for Aboriginal television programs are fuelling demand for more Aboriginal content in a variety of networks. Efforts to distribute Aboriginal programs are currently being undertaken by a range of players, including producers, not-for-profit video distributors, and online platforms such as Isuma.TV.

The NFB could be playing a larger role in this regard, for example through its educational distribution program. Similarly, through its support for artist-run distribution centres, the Canada Council could consider providing targeted support to enhance distribution of Canadian Aboriginal screen-based productions.

The Canada Council, for its part, has contributed to the funding of the Nunavut Independent TV (NITV) network, an outgrowth of the Tarriaksuk Video production centre and partner in Isuma.TV. The CMF and Telefilm have also been funding partners in the creation of Isuma.TV.

With the potential disappearance of Isuma.TV, it is not clear what distribution platform would take its place. The Canada Council could consider ways to ensure that the opportunity for online distribution created through Isuma.TV is not lost, within the scope of its current interest in supporting online distribution of Canadian independent media arts.

One of APTN's goals is to significantly enhance distribution of Aboriginal content through the development of a VOD system accessible to schools, and the expansion of DigitalDrum.ca to allow emerging filmmakers to post their films.

While APTN serves a critical function as a national distributor of Aboriginal screen-based content, local initiatives are also needed to continue to engage communities and Aboriginal youth and to ensure the continued development of a rich pipeline of content for a wide range of Canadian broadcasters and distributors.

In the feature film sector, the lack of distributors is an impediment to the financing, distribution, and marketing of feature films by Aboriginal producers.

An in-depth study that could explore the issues outlined above and examine the current distribution networks available to Aboriginal screen-based content should be undertaken, with a view to identifying possible options to expand the reach of Aboriginal content.

In the meantime, funders could consider working together with existing initiatives to ensure the distribution and accessibility of films and videos produced by Aboriginal producers to local, national, and international audiences. An initiative that could serve as an inspiration is Screen Australia's The Black Screen program, which makes Aboriginal Australian films available to individuals and organizations for use at screening events, festivals and community celebrations.

The imagiNATIVE Film + Media Arts could consider using its funding from the CMF to develop events relating to financing, interactive digital media production and greater access to Canadian broadcasters. Through its industry series, the festival offers panel discussions, pitch sessions and one-on-one micro meetings with industry representatives. The festival could also consider approaching other funders, such as the Bell Fund, for additional support.

1.8 Expand Opportunities Internationally

On the international front, producers are interested in developing co-productions with partner countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and Germany. Producers would benefit from co-production financing immersions and market preparedness boot camps.

One such opportunity is the Norwegian International Sami Film Centre, created in 2007 with a mandate to develop, produce and screen films in the Sami language. The Centre serves professionals from Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Russia and is interested in co-producing films, documentaries, and children's programming.

The Berlinale focus on Indigenous Cinema, and efforts by the ImagineNative Film + Media Arts Festival to develop international markets, may provide further opportunities to develop co-producing opportunities. We understand that APTN, as a member of the World Indigenous Television Broadcasters Network (WITBN), is seeking potential distribution outlets for sales.

A boot camp should be organized for producers interested in pursuing co-productions. Such an initiative could be organized with the support of Telefilm Canada, the CMF (which also has an interest in assuring that financing and sales opportunities are maximized for Canadian content), the ImagineNative Film + Media Arts Festival, and other agencies.

As part of the boot camp experience, organizers could also consider coordinating a special delegation of Aboriginal producers to countries where there are concrete opportunities to access financing.

The NSI launched the Aboriginal Cultural Trade Initiative (ACTI) in 2003-04. It was a program designed to help Canadian Aboriginal film and television producers advance their projects as international co-productions through guidance and access to new markets. The first year culminated with a trade mission to Australia and New Zealand. In 2005, Aborigine and Maori producers travelled to Winnipeg to meet the Canadian producers at NSI's former film festival. Finally in late 2005, now named NSI Storytellers, participants went to New Zealand for a 10-day intensive trade mission.

Participants to a boot camp could include the Norwegian International Sami Film Centre, the Berlin Film Festival and Market, and APTN, in conjunction with World Indigenous Television Broadcasters Network.

To the extent that these efforts can be leveraged for the benefit of the Aboriginal screen-based production sector, then Canadian-made Aboriginal content can expand its reach internationally.

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Annex 2: List of Stakeholders Interviewed

1. Francesca Accinelli, Canada Media Fund, Program Administrator
2. Jeff Bear, Urban Rez Productions
3. Kelly Ann Beaton, Department of Canadian Heritage
4. Bernard Beaupre, Chinook Communications Inc.
5. Shane Belcourt, Filmmaker
6. Tracey Kim Bonneau, Of the Land Productions Inc.
7. Danielle Bouvet, Department of Canadian Heritage
8. Stephane Cardin, Canada Media Fund
9. David Christenson, National Film Board
10. Nathalie Clermont, Canada Media Fund
11. Norman Cohn, Kunuk Cohn Productions
12. Valerie Creighton, Canada Media Fund
13. Tracey Deer, Filmmaker
14. Cory Generoux, National Film Board
15. John Gill, National Screen Institute
16. Barbara Hager, Alliance of Aboriginal Media Producers
17. Dennis Jackson, Dark Thunder Productions
18. Melanie Jackson, Dark Thunder Productions
19. Monika Keene, Canada Media Fund, Program Administrator
20. Jean Larose, Aboriginal Peoples Television Network
21. Derek Mazur, Nunavut Film Development Corporation
22. Lisa Meeches, Eagle Vision Inc.

23. Laura Milliken, Big Soul Productions Inc.
24. Garry Oker, Cultural Educator, Doig River, Yukon
25. Michel Pradier, Telefilm Canada
26. Louise Profeit-Leblanc, Aboriginal Arts Office, Canada Council for the Arts
27. Jason Ryle, ImagineNative Film + Media Arts Festival
28. Amos Scott, Northern Communications Society Northwest Territories
29. Ron E. Scott, Prairie Dog Film + Video
30. Andra Sheffer, Bell Broadcast and New Media Fund
31. Ariel Smith, National Indigenous Media Arts Coalition
32. Jeremy Torrie, High Definition Pictures Inc.
33. Chris Vajcner, National Screen Institute
34. Helene Vaysette, Canada Media Fund, Program Administrator

