



**2021 Annual Public Assembly**

**Remarks by Robert Spickler, Christa Dickenson and Cathy Wong**

**Online**

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**(Check against delivery)**

## **Robert Spickler, Chair of the Board**

Good afternoon.

Welcome to members of the great Canadian film and audiovisual industry. Welcome also to members of the public who are joining us from across Canada and to Telefilm's Board of Directors, Executive Leadership team and staff. I would also like to welcome my fellow board members and acknowledge a new member who is joining us, Sean Ponnambalam, from Halifax.

Thank you all for attending Telefilm Canada's 2021 annual public meeting.

Again this year, we're holding this meeting via videoconference because of the ongoing pandemic — which we all hope will be over as soon as possible. Until then, just as the film industry remains strong, so too is Telefilm staying resilient.

We are doing so by working together, by being resolute, and by staying cheerful. A state of mind that I very much hope members of the industry will experience and share throughout 2022.

Today, in accordance with our governing rules, Telefilm's management team and I will report on the past fiscal year.

- We'll provide an update on decisions and achievements for the 2020-2021 fiscal year
- We'll review the support provided to the industry in the context of the pandemic
- And we'll look to the future

Important things happened in the industry this year, which make us both hopeful and confident for the future.

Indeed, while the pandemic was raging, the industry acted with resolve and unity, putting the right precautionary measures in place, to continue to produce, create and distribute high-quality films.

To ensure the industry remains viable during the pandemic, the Government of Canada made emergency funding available to Telefilm to help companies, artists and artisans weather the crisis. The government has also committed to substantially increasing Telefilm's regular funding in the years to come to support the film and audiovisual industry.

Telefilm thus worked diligently to deliver emergency funds, processing more than 600 requests in 2 months — which is more than half of the requests we normally administer in an entire fiscal year.

Telefilm also administered the Short-Term Compensation Fund, which helped to compensate for the void created by the lack of insurance coverage due to COVID-19. To date, this fund provided compensation coverage worth close to three billion dollars for the audiovisual production budgets, supporting the equivalent of 20,000 full-time jobs.

While Telefilm deployed all its resources and expertise to administer these special funds, it also completed, during this same year, a vast cross-Canada consultation process that resulted in the modernization of its programs to better reflect the changes and constant evolution taking place in the industry as well as in society at large.

In addition, although Canadians haven't travelled much in the last year, our film industry certainly did — drawing the spotlight at home and around the world. Telefilm organized 10 virtual international pavilions and supported some 95 national festivals held online or in hybrid mode.

Films such as *Nadia, Butterfly*, by Pascal Plante, *Beans*, by Tracey Deer, and *No Ordinary Man*, by Chase Joynt and Aisling Chin-Yee, shone brightly here and abroad.

Throughout the year, Telefilm's Board of Directors and its management team, led by Christa Dickenson, worked together to successfully complete work on several complex issues.

Thus, because of the pandemic and its highly unpredictable nature, the Corporation revised its strategic plan to concentrate on a short-term horizon

of 18 months focused on bolstering the partnership between Telefilm and the industry.

We have also strengthened our approaches to equity. Equity in project selection. Equity in the geographic distribution of financial resources. Equity in official languages. Equity regarding the place of Indigenous peoples. Equity, also, with respect to a diversity of origins, genders and cultures. Equity, finally, as a fundamental value aimed at conveying all of Canada's creative voices.

I would also like to highlight the important thinking Telefilm has undertaken on how to promote Canadian content in the digital space. It will aim to identify how we can differentiate our films from the international product offering, how we can maximize access to Canadian content, and how we can interest more Canadians in our cinema.

This is a vital process — one that many other countries are also engaged in. It is being driven by the enormous potential — and challenges — flowing from the new modes of broadcasting and distribution. We'll come back to this in the months ahead.

These are some of the challenges Telefilm is currently facing as it pursues its mission to support the development, distribution and promotion of the film and audiovisual industry. These challenges call for sustained teamwork among all stakeholders charged with advancing this mission.

In this regard, I would like to thank the Government of Canada, which, through its funding to Telefilm and the confidence it has shown in our organization, is once again affirming its support for the viability of the Canadian film and audiovisual industry. My special thanks go to Minister Guilbeault and Minister Rodriguez. I also wish Minister Rodriguez a successful return to the Department of Canadian Heritage.

In closing, I would like to thank the members of Telefilm's Board of Directors for their support, their dedication and their wisdom. And I would like to say hello to Telefilm's management team and to staff across the country.

To the members of the industry, to its artists, craftspeople, technicians, broadcasters, producers — my best wishes for a healthy and successful 2022. I would now like to turn the floor over to Christa Dickenson, Telefilm's Executive Director and CEO.

## **Christa Dickenson, Executive Director & CEO**

Thank you, Mr. Spickler, for the kind introduction.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, our Board of Directors, and all of our Telefilm staff for your outstanding hard work and dedication over the past year. A very warm Telefilm welcome to all of our industry partners and talent to our 2022 Annual Public Assembly!

We are emerging from a period where our resiliency has been put to the test – and continues to be put to the test. And I can say with absolute confidence that it has made us stronger than ever.

As a champion for Canadian film at home and abroad, we have looked within to assess our strengths and opportunities as we approach the year ahead. We have been a change catalyst, a vital contributor in the national conversation around equity and diversity. We have top talent – a highly specialized workforce and unique expertise in national and international content creation, distribution and export.

In the face of a global pandemic, we came together to keep the lights on and the cameras rolling for Canadian productions. I can assure you we have all the right ingredients and a solid foundation to seize the opportunities that lie before us. That means leading by example when it comes to ensuring more diverse voices in our industry. That means reaching our audiences where they are by ensuring that cinematic experiences thrive in theatres and at festival screenings. And not mutually exclusive, developing stronger relationships with streaming platforms. That means bold, authentic storytelling to help shape the Canada of tomorrow.

My colleagues, partners and friends, we are still in the middle of this storm. We must stay strong. We must stay together. We must maintain that same spirit of collaboration that helped us move forward through some dark moments over the past two years.

Recall what we were able to accomplish when we backed each other up. When the pandemic first hit in 2020, our industry witnessed devastating impacts. Hundreds of cinemas across the country closed, hundreds of productions were halted, and over 160,000 workers were impacted.

Telefilm worked diligently with the Government of Canada to administer \$173 million dollars in COVID relief funding. Thanks to that quick thinking and collaboration, we were able to save over 766 camera-ready projects worth \$2.8 billion which supported 20,000 jobs.

And we did not stop there. In a similar vein, we updated and doubled our Development Program funding for fiscal year 2020-2021. Telefilm redirected funds during the pandemic to support all 607 projects submitted to the Development Program. We created a racialized stream in that fiscal year, and after collaboration with the industry, we further refined it to be a stream led by Black and People of Colour creators. We are learning how to listen and be clearer.

Even with widespread cinema closures and restrictions, our Canadian creators still beat the odds and found success.

Montréal director Daniel Roby's *Target Number One* became the sole Canadian release to gross over \$1 million dollars at the domestic box office since the start of the pandemic. *Nadia, Butterfly*, the second feature film by Telefilm's Talent to Watch alumnus Pascal Plante, was the only Canadian film selected for the 2020 Cannes Film Festival. The film went on to have virtual screenings around the world, including in the U.S., Japan, South Korea, Australia and Poland.

Pandemic or not, Canada is punching above its weight.

We have powerful stories to tell – stories that the world needs to hear right now – to drive meaningful change in our industry and beyond.

At Telefilm, we believe true resiliency is achieved when everyone can play a role. And this calls for a more representative screen-based industry. So much of our progress and success throughout the past year can be attributed to having diverse voices at the table.

It has been my personal priority as the head of this agency that Telefilm lead by example and to ensure our organization and productions are naturally inclusive. We needed to start that transformational change from the inside out. Telefilm launched our Equity and Representation Action Plan in July 2020.

Since then, we have taken steps to ensure our workforce and the projects we fund are more reflective of Canadian society as a whole. In 2021, we welcomed four new employees to our Project Financing, Business Affairs, and Senior Management teams. They are helping to shape our inclusion initiatives across the organization, supported by our leadership team and their peers.

In our programming, we are creating space for more diverse voices to come to the forefront of Canadian film and content.

To better support Indigenous creators, Telefilm earmarks \$4 million dollars annually for the development and production of Indigenous-led feature films under the Indigenous Stream.

Our work continues as we actively consult with Indigenous creators through our Working Group to better understand how to support and work with First Nations, Inuit/Inu and Métis people. Our support to the Indigenous Screen Office is ongoing.

This investment allowed Cree-Métis filmmaker, Danis Goulet, to come forward with her successful sci-fi thriller, *Night Raiders*. In October, the film opened in 80 locations across Canada, representing the widest theatrical opening ever for an Indigenous Canadian filmmaker.

Telefilm has welcomed the creation of the Black Screen Office and their inaugural executive director Joan Jenkinson. The BSO has quickly become a key collaborator and partner to Telefilm and the industry. Beyond our annual pledge of \$100,000 dollars, we are working collaboratively to expand the reach of Black screen-based talent.

Our next phase of data collection will give us more insight on who is coming through our pipeline and perhaps, more importantly, who is not. It will allow us to know where we need to put our focus next. Our work is far from over. We must

continue to break down barriers and demand better of ourselves – because the survival of our industry depends on it in this modern digital world.

Even before our present challenges, it was clear to me when I started as CEO of this agency three years ago that we needed to rethink the metrics for success.

We need to be more open and transparent as an industry – and that meant launching the largest pan-Canadian consultation ever on Telefilm’s Success Index, Development Program and Talent to Watch Program.

I’m pleased to report that consultation has been completed, with over 800 participants involved in six public forums and over 500 survey responses received from coast to coast to coast. The transformation of our programs, thanks to the consultation, can be consulted on our website.

I am so proud of what Telefilm has been able to accomplish in the last year, and we will only continue to grow, strengthen and celebrate our country’s talented and diverse voices.

I would like to take this opportunity to formally welcome three of the newest members of our Telefilm family. Cathy Wong has joined the organization as Vice President of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, & Official Languages. I am also pleased to welcome Mehernaz Lentin as the new National Director, Feature Film for the English Market. Finally, Adriana Chartrand joins Telefilm as Lead for Indigenous Initiatives and Content Analyst.

We also have a whole new team dedicated to the Short-Term Compensation Fund and we are pleased to welcome more staff to various departments to deliver the supports and programs the industry needs. Please join me in welcoming these wonderful additions to the Telefilm team.

With all of these exciting changes happening at Telefilm, we find ourselves in a strong position heading into 2022.

Now, I want to take this opportunity to address Telefilm's commitment in combating climate change with the industry. Last Fall, an intradepartmental team at Telefilm developed an Eco-responsibility Action Plan, with the support of external expertise. This work is only possible thanks to our industry partners whom have already accomplished so much in this space. With that, we are excited to advance in this work together and will be sharing our plan with the industry very soon!

We have made significant strides over the past year, but there is still work to do.

We need our government, business, academic, community and industry partners – and all Canadians – to join us in championing Canadian creators and their content.

We have all the ingredients we need for success:

- Top-notch, diverse talent;
- Compelling stories and resilient storytellers;
- A strong support system in Telefilm.

The stage is set. The cameras are rolling.

Let's call action on a bright future for Canadian storytelling.

Thank you.

And now, I'd like to introduce Cathy Wong to say a few words.

## **Cathy Wong, Vice-President, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion and Official Languages**

Hi. Happy to be here with you today.

I recently joined Telefilm Canada as the new Vice President of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and Official Languages, and it has been a pleasure getting to know Canada's film community over these last few months.

A special thank you to E.J. Alon and Kathleen Beaugé for their hard work and dedication over the course of 2020 and 2021, overseeing Telefilm's growth in the inclusion space. Thank you as well to Telefilm's Equity and Representation Action Committee and internal EDI Working Group for your contributions.

We've seen many efforts in breaking down barriers across the industry, and there is no slowing down. A more equitable film industry is here to stay.

Telefilm has made significant progress in the last year, following the release of our Equity and Representation Action Plan. Some notable achievements include:

Enhancements that have been made throughout our funding programs as a result of our consultations with the industry.

As well, the Development Program has a dedicated Stream for Black and People of Colour, having recently completed its second application period.

Additionally, the Talent to Watch program recently introduced the Filmmaker Apply-Direct Stream.

Here, financing is given to projects chosen among those submitted by emerging filmmakers who are: Indigenous, Black, People of Colour, Women, Gender-diverse and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, Persons with disabilities, and members of Official Language Minority Communities.

Telefilm has also expanded the language eligibility for film projects to now supporting all languages under the Production Program.

Internally, we are continuing our commitment to ongoing learning, with antiracism training completed for all 200 plus staff members, and more learning sessions to come.

Telefilm has also reviewed its recruitment process to increase inclusion measures and better reach candidates from underrepresented communities in a greater effort to build a more representative workforce.

Enhancements to Telefilm's Data Collection efforts are in constant evolution. Our next phase of Data Collection was introduced when the Production Program opened in the New Year.

This will allow us to better understand our community and their projects, and make more informed decisions, as well as continued improvements to our programs.

These are just several of many important steps.

There is still so much work to be done, and I look forward to leading Telefilm's efforts in the next chapter.

We will continue to increase representation throughout key roles, and further our support for the various career levels of filmmaking talent across the country. In the coming weeks, we will share recent data collected from our programs, and next steps to support creators.

I look forward to working with many of you through our collaborations while continuing to create lasting change together for our industry.

Thank you.