

Indigenous Feature Film Production in Canada: A National and International Perspective



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Rhymes for Young Ghoils. Jeff Berraby, Director

Indigenous Feature Film Production in Canada: A National and International Perspective

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About the imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival

Now entering its 14th year, the imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival is the world's largest exhibitor of Canadian and international Indigenous film and media. With a mandate to foster and promote the Aboriginal film and media sector, the organization has created the largest industry event for Aboriginal filmmakers at its annual festival at the TIFF Bell Lightbox in Toronto and is recognized globally as the leading presenter of Indigenous film and media content.

Case Statement

In terms of Canada I would say there is a huge untapped resource there of stories which, if you take the lid off it, is going to explode.

*~ Kath Shelper, Producer, *Samson and Delilah* (Camera d'Or winner, Cannes, 2009)*

In this digital age, the screen-based industry is rapidly changing to meet the demands of an increasingly competitive and global marketplace. Statistics Canada reported operating revenues of \$3.3 billion in 2010 for the Canadian film and television industries.¹ A 2011 study by the Canadian Media Production Association (CMPA) found that film and television production in Canada generated GDP of \$7.46 billion for the Canadian economy, including \$3.07 billion in production-industry GDP and \$4.39 billion in spin-off GDP.² Despite the 2008 economic recession, Canada's screen-based industry continues to flourish. However, media industries are not only key economic drivers, they are also one of the most important influencers of our national culture, and of our identities.³

A thriving screen-based sector requires distinct and innovative content. Canada's screen industry has yet to fully leverage one of the richest cultural resources this country has to offer — the stories of Aboriginal people. The stories and perspectives of Aboriginal people are vibrant, distinct and uniquely Canadian, and have commercial potential.

Aboriginal stories are a fundamental part of our shared history and our collective identity.⁴ Aboriginal stories offer all Canadians an opportunity to engage in what defines us as a nation. The Canadian public has shown an interest in Aboriginal cultures. As early as 2004, 77% of respondents to a public opinion poll on views of Aboriginal peoples felt that "there is a great deal to learn from Aboriginal heritage (and) culture," and 70% of Canadians with exposure to Aboriginal arts and cultural activities agreed that "Aboriginal arts and cultures play an important role in Canada's tourism industry, both domestically and internationally."⁵

The proliferation of Aboriginal stories and perspectives has a vital outcome — it enables Canada to carve out a new legacy that celebrates and includes Indigenous stories and perspectives. Our nation's colonial history has created social and economic challenges unique to Aboriginal peoples and has impacted cultural expression. Fostering Aboriginal stories and perspectives on screen enables Canada to forge a new era of inclusion and recognition of the Aboriginal storytellers who shape our cultural landscape and reflect the diversity of our nation.

The work of Aboriginal storytellers also counters the history of misrepresentation and appropriation that has plagued the representation of Indigenous people on screen for the past century. From the proliferation of stereotypes to the reinforcement of false narratives, the work of Indigenous filmmakers, in the words of Jesse Wentz, Head of Film Programmes for TIFF Bell Lightbox, “consciously establishes itself as a counter-cinema...or rebuke to a century’s worth of falsities propagated by mainstream cinema.”⁶

A recent study of the Aboriginal screen-based production sector in Canada, undertaken by Communications MDR and funded by the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, the Canada Media Fund, the National Film Board of Canada, the Bell Broadcast and New Media Fund, Telefilm Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts and the National Screen Institute, found that the Aboriginal screen-based sector is dynamic and vibrant. The report states that “the last decade has seen the astonishing rise of a sector responsible for award-winning television programs, films and digital media,” and that “there are economic, social and cultural benefits being generated by the sector: jobs are being created, (and) mentoring is taking place where highly valued skills are being transferred.”⁷

Yet, according to a comprehensive Canadian screen-based industry employment study from 2012, Aboriginal people are underrepresented in almost all areas of screen-based media.⁸ Furthermore, the Communications MDR study reveals a particularly significant gap in Aboriginal feature film production. The study found that the Aboriginal films being produced are primarily documentaries and that there is little financing for Aboriginal feature film production.

The following report examines Aboriginal feature film production in Canada. This study is an initiative of the imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival in an effort to broaden an understanding of the gaps in the Aboriginal screen-based sector.

The rapidly evolving Aboriginal screen-based sector has been on the rise in Canada, situated within a growing international Indigenous cinema network. A boost in Aboriginal feature film production would increase and diversify Canada’s cultural offerings to domestic and international markets, and also create a new national legacy of inclusion and recognition for the incredible value of Aboriginal film and media makers to our nation’s identity and cultural landscape.

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Executive Summary

The goal of this research is to examine Aboriginal feature film production in Canada, specifically within the genre of drama. This report documents the rise of Indigenous cinema worldwide and examines Canada's public funding landscape including funding allocations to Aboriginal feature film production from Canada's public funders of film over a five-year period from 2007 to 2012. This report also examines the barriers to feature film production for Aboriginal content creators in Canada, and suggests areas of opportunity that can be targeted in order to boost production in this sector.

Aboriginal film production is a relatively young sector, with scarce research existing on the industry. To address this gap in the available information on the sector, the researchers expanded the scope of the study beyond public funding agencies in Canada to include data from public funding agencies in Australia and New Zealand. Aboriginal feature film production in Canada is situated within a global Indigenous cinema context. Australia and New Zealand, in particular, are two pillars of global Indigenous film that offer a realistic point from which to compare Canada's progress. As a result, data from Australia and New Zealand are included in the study, as well as one model in the United States.

KEY FINDINGS

The key findings have been summarized into the following categories: Indigenous Film in Canada and Abroad, Barriers to Aboriginal Feature Film Production in Canada, and Opportunities for Increasing Indigenous Feature Film Production in Canada.

Indigenous Film in Canada and Abroad

1. Indigenous cinema is an evolving area of the worldwide film industry that spans numerous countries and is gaining increased recognition. Canada is considered to be one of the “pillars” of Indigenous cinema.

Indigenous cinema is a global phenomenon that has gained unprecedented momentum in recent years. International festival recognition for Indigenous film at TIFF, Cannes, Berlin and Sundance, as well as recent box office successes, are testament to this growing wave of cinema. Recent landmark retrospectives at the TIFF Bell Lightbox in 2012 and at the Berlin (Berlinale) International Film Festival in 2013 identify Canada as one of the four pillars of Indigenous cinema, with significant contributions

made by award-winning documentary filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin and Zacharias Kunuk, whose film *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* represents a landmark in Canadian cinema. More recently, a new generation of Canadian Aboriginal filmmakers is finding success with their short films, with many gaining recognition at festivals such as Sundance, and Berlinale, as well as inclusion on TIFF's Top Ten lists and in Genie Award nominations. The 2013 Toronto International Film Festival premiered three new Aboriginal feature films, created by directors from Quebec and a producer from Ontario, making it a banner year for Aboriginal film at the festival.

2. In Canada, the success and growing recognition that Aboriginal filmmakers have garnered for their work has not yet translated into the sustained production of feature films. There are still very few Aboriginal dramatic feature films being produced.

A recent Communications MDR study revealed that the Aboriginal films that are being produced are primarily documentaries and that there are few dramatic feature films being produced in Canada. Additionally, little financing in Canada is flowing to Aboriginal feature film production. From 2008-2012, Telefilm Canada funded the production of 310 feature films in Canada, with five of the feature films being made by Aboriginal filmmakers, an average of one Aboriginal feature film per year. From 2008-2012, the Ontario Media Development Corporation, a provincial agency, supported the production of a total of 115 theatrical feature films and, of this total only one was an Aboriginal feature film.⁹

3. Targeted funding programs at the public federal funding agencies have greatly contributed to the growth of the Aboriginal film sector.

The Canada Council for the Arts, the National Film Board of Canada and Telefilm Canada have, at various times, created targeted initiatives to support and foster Aboriginal filmmakers. These targeted programs for Aboriginal filmmakers have greatly contributed to the sector's growth. With a dedicated Aboriginal arts office since 1994, the Canada Council for the Arts has played an important role in boosting the careers of Aboriginal filmmakers through its targeted Aboriginal Media Arts Program. Notably, the Canada Council has supported a wave of successful Aboriginal short filmmakers, most, if not all, of whom have received Canada Council support at some point in their careers.

Within documentary, early-targeted initiatives by the National Film Board of Canada such as Studio One and the Aboriginal Filmmaking Program contributed to creating a robust Aboriginal documentary production sector. Telefilm Canada has also made a substantial investment in the development of Aboriginal feature films through its targeted Featuring Aboriginal Stories Program (FASP), which developed 35 projects over a four-year period, significantly boosting investment and the number of Aboriginal feature films in development.

4. Public funders in Australia and New Zealand have made strategic and long-term investments in Indigenous film that have led to increased international recognition, critical and box office success for Indigenous film.

Screen Australia established an Indigenous Department in 1993 that has a mandate to develop Indigenous writers, directors and producers. Through long-term short and feature film initiatives that include funding and training, the Indigenous Department has fostered the careers of the most successful Indigenous filmmakers working in Australia today. Filmmakers supported by the Indigenous Department include Wayne Blair, writer/director of *The Sapphires*, which had its premiere at Cannes and made over \$14 million at the domestic box office, and Warwick Thornton, writer/director of *Samson and Delilah*, which won the Camera d'Or at Cannes and made over \$4 million at the domestic box office. In New Zealand, support for Maori film is in the founding principles of the New Zealand Film Commission. From 2009-2013, five of 27 feature films produced by the commission included films written, directed and/or produced by an Indigenous person, representing 18.5 % of the feature film output of the commission. The New Zealand Film Commission also funds the Te Paepae Ataata, an autonomous feature film development organization that supports the creation and distribution of culturally-specific Maori cinema. The New Zealand Film Commission has supported the careers of many Indigenous filmmakers including Taika Waititi, writer/director of the Sundance and Berlin hit *Boy*, which became the highest-grossing New Zealand film of all time.

5. The majority of successful Indigenous-specific film funding programs are Indigenous-run.

Indigenous involvement and representation as decision-makers in the industry is a characteristic of successful Indigenous-specific funding and training programs. In Canada, the Aboriginal Media Arts program at the Canada Council for the Arts is run by an Aboriginal program officer, with funding decisions made by an all-Indigenous panel. The Indigenous Department at Screen Australia also has a dedicated office within the agency that has been run an Indigenous person since its inception. At the Sundance Institute in the United States, the Native program within the institute is also Indigenous-run, and 50% of the creative advisors to the program are Indigenous. In New Zealand, the Te Paepae Ataata supported by the New Zealand Film Commission is a national Maori feature film development organization. A panel of senior Maori filmmakers make the funding decisions and the panel is autonomous from the Film Commission.



BARRIERS TO ABORIGINAL FEATURE FILM PRODUCTION IN CANADA

The researchers recognize that there are barriers for all filmmakers trying to make feature films in Canada. There is a limited amount of money for feature film production in a competitive environment where, even if a film is successful in getting to the production stage, there are few outlets for wide distribution, particularly in theatres.

This study looked at additional barriers to feature film production that are specific to Aboriginal filmmakers, and identified the following four key obstacles:

1. Systemic Barriers and Cultural Misconceptions

Canada has a colonial history that has led to disparities for Aboriginal people in all areas of society, including education, employment, health and social mobility. As a result of this historical context, Aboriginal people are underrepresented, or not represented at all, in institutional funding, broadcasting agencies and other screen-based companies and organizations responsible for the production and dissemination of Canadian cultural content.

The under representation of Aboriginal people within the industry means that Aboriginal filmmakers must often navigate a “culture gap” when it comes to their work. Aboriginal writers, directors and producers alike cited a lack of cultural understanding of Aboriginal content, process and stories as a barrier to working within the larger industry to develop and produce content. Filmmakers reported being challenged by pre-existing beliefs or perceptions within the industry of what defines an Aboriginal film or content or that Aboriginal content will not succeed in the marketplace. This challenge was manifest within the industry in the relationships between filmmakers and funders, distributors, story editors, broadcasters, potential producing partners, trainers and mentors.

2. Access to Industry Partners and Networks

Aboriginal writers, directors and producers expressed difficulty in finding project partners. Producing partners were cited as a particular challenge. Writers and directors reported a lack of access to established producers and other industry partners outside of their networks. In addition, industry standard production agreements between partners in feature film development and production can be at odds with how Aboriginal filmmakers wish to develop their work. In particular, the requirement for Aboriginal writer/directors (and producers working in partnership) to sign away their story rights in order to access funding is a challenge.

3. Access to Financing

One of the key barriers identified is a lack of access to project financing, with targeted feature film production funding identified as a priority for both development and production. Recent changes to Telefilm's development guidelines mean that there are very few Aboriginal production companies that can access development funding without partnering with a production company that has theatrically-released a feature film within the last five years. Other factors that can affect access to funding are the lack of a star system within the Aboriginal talent pool, and transitioning from television or short film production where the funding systems and requirements differ.

4. Access to Distribution

With so few distributors in Canada that can trigger financing, access to distribution is a key challenge in the sector. Aboriginal filmmakers are working within a relatively untested market for Aboriginal feature films. Also, Aboriginal filmmakers often self-distribute their films to Aboriginal communities, and these audiences are not included in box office numbers. Therefore, the current criteria to measure a film's box office is a barrier for Aboriginal filmmakers.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCREASING ABORIGINAL FEATURE FILM PRODUCTION IN CANADA

The authors of this report see the following opportunities as potential areas that could be explored to increase Aboriginal film production in Canada. These areas for further discussion and, hopefully, collaboration between filmmakers, funders and other industry sectors are based on information gathered from the filmmaker focus group, one-on-one interviews, and research on international models that have demonstrated success.

Short-Term:

1. Consider on-going short film production initiatives

Although filmmakers may access short film funding through the Canada Council, an ongoing short film production initiative targeted to filmmakers who may be on the cusp of making the leap into feature film will increase the numbers of filmmakers ready to advance into feature film production.

2. Explore models for an Aboriginal feature film development lab

Script development is essential to feature film production and the goal of this initiative could be to support filmmakers with screenwriting during this important stage of filmmaking. A development lab focused on screenwriting support could be run through any number of existing training institutions, however, it is important that an intensive lab such as this be Indigenous-managed and involve Indigenous mentors.

3. Explore the feasibility of an Aboriginal feature film production fund

Targeted funds towards Aboriginal production have boosted the Indigenous film sector in Canada and beyond. The Canada Media Fund's targeted Aboriginal television fund has played a key role in the vitality of the Aboriginal television sector in Canada, the most robust sector of the Aboriginal screen-based media industry. Targeted funding at the Canada Council for the Arts, and internationally at Screen Australia, have also made a significant impact. An Aboriginal feature film production fund could be feasible if funders and industry partners aligned resources. A low or micro-budget feature film program such as the Indigenous Department's Feature Initiative at Screen Australia is one example of a model.

4. Discuss setting targets to increase Aboriginal representation within funding agencies, broadcasting agencies, distributors and training institutions

An increase in Aboriginal representation within organizations and institutions in the screen-based sector would address a number of challenges and create a crucial bridge between institutions and communities by boosting outreach efforts and talent scouting. Aboriginal representation also creates an environment where filmmakers feel as though an Aboriginal cultural context will be understood and it also promotes cultural understanding within the larger institution. It also addresses systemic barriers that have led to the exclusion and low levels of participation of Aboriginal people in our society's key institutions and media.

5. Consider revising systems/definitions to better track and measure the sector

Without a clear definition of Aboriginal film, many institutions cannot effectively track films made by Aboriginal writers, directors and producers. An optional declaration on application forms could be highly effective in tracking Aboriginal films. Also, further discussion of what defines an Aboriginal production within feature film funding systems is needed. For example, the Canada Media Fund defines an Aboriginal production as a production company in which a self-declared Aboriginal person owns 51% of the production company and copyright in the eligible project. This criteria enables Aboriginal producers to enter into strong, equal partnerships where their intellectual property rights are protected. There are also opportunities to track screenings in communities and on reserves, as well as emerging markets outside Canada for Aboriginal films. In addition, current eligibility criteria for feature film funding could be revisited to enable Aboriginal filmmakers and existing experienced production companies to transition into feature filmmaking from either short or television production.

6. Consider a producer match-making initiative

There is room to explore ways in which Aboriginal filmmakers could pitch their work to interested producers, expand their industry network, and access collaborative opportunities and mentoring.

Long-term:

7. Consider training initiatives for Aboriginal producers

More Aboriginal producers are needed to create a robust and thriving talent pool for the sector. It is worth discussing whether training programs exclusive to producers would be beneficial, with specific talent development aimed at creating skills for Aboriginal people in this key role. Business development training was identified as a key barrier for Aboriginal filmmakers, who often take on the role of producer without adequate training because they are unable to find like-minded producing partners for their films.

8. Examine the success of dedicated Aboriginal film offices in other jurisdictions

The Indigenous Film Department is a singular model of success for Indigenous filmmaking in the world. The careers nurtured at the Department are defining the landscape of Australian cinema, as well as moving on to produce ground-breaking television. In New Zealand, Te Pae Pae Ataata is just starting the work of fostering emerging talent and connecting with communities to create new distribution platforms. These models could be explored to create new opportunities in Canada.

9. Research new distribution models that would increase audiences and create niche markets for Aboriginal film

While distribution remains a key barrier for all filmmakers in Canada, new opportunities may be found in the realm of digital distribution, an area still in development. Digital distribution models may be moving towards niche audiences for packaging content, with the idea that global audiences will drive demand for niche and targeted programming. If this proves to be the case, Indigenous films will have the potential to reach a global niche market of Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences seeking this content. The interconnectivity of global online Indigenous communities offers a potential niche market for content distribution.



Introduction: Aboriginal Demographics and Colonial History

Canada's potential is inseparable from Aboriginal potential.¹⁰

~ Paul Davidson, *The Toronto Star*

New statistics from the 2011 National Household Survey indicate that 1.4 million people in Canada reported an Aboriginal identity, or 4.3% of the total population.¹¹ This is up 20% from the last completed census (2006), where the Aboriginal population of Canada was indicated to be 3.8% of the total population. Statistics Canada has warned that voluntary statistics in particular are likely to underrepresent the Aboriginal population, which is likely higher than reported.¹²

This is the fastest growing segment of Canada's population, and one of its youngest: almost half of the entire Aboriginal population is under the age of 24. Between 1996 and 2006, the Aboriginal population in Canada grew by 45%, compared with 8% for the non-Aboriginal population. From 2006-2011, the Aboriginal population grew by 20.1, compared to 5% growth among the non-Aboriginal population.

It is impossible to report on the landscape of Aboriginal cultural industries in Canada without acknowledging a colonial history that led to the systematic repression of language, storytelling traditions and cultural practices. In Canada, policies of assimilation and exclusion have had a profound impact on Aboriginal peoples in the past century. It has been only 53 years since Aboriginal people gained the right to vote in Canada in 1960.

Today, the effects of colonization are manifest in the socio-economic challenges facing Aboriginal peoples such as disproportionate levels of Aboriginal poverty, incarceration, and substance abuse, as well as lower levels of education than the national averages. This environment informs the systemic barriers that exist for Aboriginal filmmakers when they endeavour to work within institutional systems that have been historically inaccessible to them.

A 2009 report analyzing census data for artists found that Aboriginal artists, including filmmakers, were the lowest paid in Canada, with pay averaging 30% less than the average for all artists.¹³ A national study on the screen-based workforce found that “16% of worker-level Aboriginal respondents from the film and television production industry identified “overt discrimination as having a severe or significant impact on their workplace.”¹⁴

A recent study by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards concluded that Canada’s young and growing Aboriginal population will play a key role in shaping the nation’s economic future. What that role will be depends on the level of investment made in closing the labour and education gaps. The researchers estimated that if the Aboriginal population were able to experience the same educational and labour market outcomes as non-Aboriginals over a 25-year period, the aggregate additional GDP to Canada’s economy would be a staggering \$400.5 billion. The report concluded that “improving the social and economic well-being of the Aboriginal population is not only a moral imperative; it is a sound investment that will pay dividends in the coming decades.”¹⁵

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The primary method of gathering information for this report was through the collection and analysis of first-person data from interviews and a focus group with a targeted group of Canadian Aboriginal writers, directors and producers. Interviews were also conducted with key Canadian industry stakeholders as well as international funders, trainers, and filmmakers. This approach was taken in order to capture a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the field from diverse perspectives, both nationally and internationally. The consultants also conducted an environmental scan of the landscape of Indigenous film production on a global scale, which included data collection and analysis of existing statistics from Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

A key challenge in gathering statistical data for this report was the lack of clarity and consistency around what constitutes an “Aboriginal film”. The imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival considers an Aboriginal film to be that written, directed and/or produced by a person who self-identifies as being Aboriginal. This is the definition used as the basis for this report.

In the case of Telefilm, films are categorized in their database as Aboriginal films if the content is Aboriginal, regardless of whether or not an Aboriginal person played a key creative role on the project.

In order to adequately determine the statistics for films written, directed and/or produced by an Aboriginal person, the consultants analysed the data provided by Telefilm by cross-referencing it against imagineNATIVE’s database of Aboriginal writers, producers and directors who self-identify as being Aboriginal. Those who were not in the imagineNATIVE database were contacted through a first-person fact check.

DATA COLLECTION AND RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

1. Environmental Scan

An environmental scan was conducted to determine the landscape of Aboriginal film production in Canada and internationally, including existing funding and training models. In particular, both short and feature film funding programs in Australia and New Zealand were examined for dollar amount invested, guidelines, objectives, and outcomes.

2. Focus Group and Survey

A focus group was conducted in Toronto on October 20, 2012 with nine established Canadian Aboriginal writers, directors and producers, who also received a survey. The selected filmmakers were chosen based on their level of experience. Participants had either completed a feature film or had one currently in development. Eight of the participants focused primarily on writing and directing, while one of the participants focused primarily on producing. The goal of the focus group and survey was to capture the barriers and opportunities that exist within the sector. The focus group participant list is attached to this report as Addendum: Interview List.

3. First Person Interviews

A series of interviews were conducted over a period of four months with additional Canadian Aboriginal writers, directors and producers to expand on the focus group. In addition, interviews were conducted with leading professionals in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal film production, institutes and funding agencies in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Germany, and Holland. An interview participant list is attached to this report as Addendum: Interview List.

4. Statistical Data and Analysis

The consultants analyzed internal data provided by Telefilm Canada, Canada Council for the Arts, Canada Media Fund, Toronto International Film Festival, Screen Australia and the New Zealand Film Commission. Statistics from the Ontario Media Development Corporation and the National Film Board of Canada were sourced from public online reports. Data from the National Screen Institute were gathered during first-person interviews. In cases where statistics have been sourced from reports, these reports are referenced. Additional statistical information was sourced directly from the imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival's database of self-identified Aboriginal filmmakers in Canada.

The Rise of Indigenous Cinema

(Indigenous) cinema is not simply a niche, special-interest cinema, but a global cinema ... Indigenous filmmakers are not only giving voice to their people and communities, but helping to redefine the cinematic landscape for the twenty-first century.

~ N. Bird Runningwater, Director, Native American and Indigenous Program, The Sundance Institute

Indigenous cinema is a global phenomenon that has been gaining unprecedented momentum and recognition in recent years. In the summer of 2012, the TIFF Bell Lightbox presented *First Peoples Cinema: 1500 Nations, One Tradition*, the most expansive series on Indigenous film ever seen in North America. According to the headline in the *Globe & Mail*, this “Toronto First Peoples festival spotlights an indigenous new wave that’s ‘starting to crest.’”¹⁶

In 2013, the Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale) launched *NATIVE – A Journey into Indigenous Cinema*, a landmark series devoted to Indigenous cinema. In the program’s introduction, NATIVE curator Maryanne Redpath wrote: “This special series is striving to make a connection with the diverse spectrum and vast body of this cinematic wave and to give recognition to its importance and relevance in the international arena.”

These retrospectives sought to capture the growing Indigenous cinema movement that extends beyond the borders of any one country. In both exhibitions, the pillars of Indigenous cinema were identified as Australia, New Zealand, the U.S. and Canada. Indigenous filmmakers are linked by shared similarities of colonial histories and Indigenous worldviews, and connected internationally through film festivals and events that showcase the work.

In recent years, the rise of Indigenous cinema has been reflected in a recent wave of distinctive and accomplished films from Aboriginal filmmakers that have achieved international festival recognition from festivals such as Cannes, the Toronto International Film Festival, Berlin and Sundance, as well as critical acclaim and box office success. In 2009, the Australian film directed by Warwick Thornton (Kaytetye) *Samson and Delilah* won the Camera d'Or at Cannes. In 2010, the New Zealand film *Boy* directed by Taika Waititi (Maori) won the Grand Prize in the Generation Section at the Berlin International Film Festival after its premiere at the Sundance Film Festival. In 2012, Wayne Blair's (Butchala) *The Sapphires* from Australia premiered at Cannes to a 10-minute standing ovation and was later released around the world by the Weinstein Company.

In addition to increasing the presence that Australia and New Zealand have on the international festival circuit, Indigenous films have also found incredible success at the domestic box office in their respective countries. After its run at Sundance and Berlin, the New Zealand film *Boy* went on to become that country's highest grossing film of all time within eight weeks of its release,¹⁷ (the previously-held box office record was by the 1994 Maori film *Once Were Warriors*). Seven of the top ten grossing films of all time in New Zealand are Indigenous stories.¹⁸ In Australia, Aboriginal films have reached the critical and commercial tipping point. *The Sapphires* grossed more than \$14.2 million in 2012 at the domestic box office (Australia's top domestic grossing film that year) and Rachel Perkins's *Bran Nue Dae* (2008), starring Geoffrey Rush, grossed over \$7 million at the box office.¹⁹

Within Canada, 2013 was a banner year for Aboriginal film at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF). The 2013 festival showcased the debut feature films *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* by acclaimed writer/director Jeff Barnaby and *Empire of Dirt* from producer Jennifer Podemski and writer Shannon Masters. Alanis Obomsawin's documentary *Hi-Ho Mistahey!* also premiered at the festival. The screening of three Canadian Aboriginal-made feature films (one of which is a documentary) in one year at TIFF is exceptional, as only three Aboriginal-made dramatic feature films (two dramas and one documentary) have screened at TIFF over the previous five-year period from 2008-2013²⁰. The films garnered extensive media coverage during the festival with the CBC declaring 2013 a "Big year for First Nations at TIFF."²¹ The Globe & Mail's headline quipped "TIFF's native-Canadian features leave stereotypes in the dust," and ended with the conclusion that "real Indians are making reel Indians a lot more real."²²

Jeff Barnaby was included on the Globe & Mail's list of 5 Rising Stars to Watch at TIFF 2013²³ and Variety stated "among this year's emerging talents, Jeff Barnaby is generating buzz with his eye-catching, 1970s set feature box *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*."²⁴ The film was also on CBC's list of films generating the most buzz at the festival²⁵ and on Cineplex's Must-See TIFF list.²⁶ During the festival, Barnaby said, "There is a huge contingent of native filmmakers coming up...our iconography has been peppered through film since the inception of film. (Yet) we have never been truly represented and you're starting to see a shift in that."²⁷



Rhymes for Young Ghouls, Jeff Barnaby, Director



Empire of Dirt, Jennifer Podemski, Producer

For the City of Toronto + Canada Goose Award for Best Canadian First Feature Film, the jury presented a special citation to the cast of *Empire of Dirt* for “three generations of extraordinary, honest and courageous performances.”²⁸ The film’s lead actor Cara Gee was also selected as one of the four “TIFF Rising Stars” in 2013, featured on the cover of *Now* magazine, and named in the *Toronto Star*’s “People to Watch” feature.²⁹ The film will be released in Canada in November by Mongrel Media, hitting the rare benchmark of a theatrical release for an Aboriginal feature film in Canada. Following the sold-out premiere at TIFF, Cara Gee said, “I got to stand up on the stage in front of all these amazing people and say how important it was to me to say that last line in the movie. I say: ‘Right now, it feels really good to be Indian.’ It was quite emotional.”³⁰

In the past decade, there has been an incredible momentum for Indigenous cinema in Canada. Prior to 2000, Aboriginal filmmakers in Canada were working primarily in the realm of documentary, pioneered in the early 1970s by acclaimed filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin through the National Film Board of Canada. In 1999, documentary and other media makers gained an unprecedented platform with the launch of the Aboriginal Peoples’ Television Network (APTN), the first national network dedicated to Indigenous programming.

In 2000, writer/director Shirley Cheechoo completed *Bearwalker*, the first dramatic feature film to be made by an Aboriginal person in Canada (it debuted at 2000 Sundance Film Festival under the title *Backroads*).³¹ That same year the first imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival launched in Toronto and has now become the world’s largest presenter and market for international Indigenous film and media.

In 2001, director Zacharias Kunuk’s *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*, only the second feature film ever made by an Indigenous person in Canada, won the Camera d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival. Marking a huge milestone for Canada, the film won six Genie awards in 2002 including Best Picture and Best Director, and was included in the Toronto International Film Festival Group’s list of the Top 10 Canadian Films of All Time.³² Igloolik Isuma Productions went on to make two theatrically-released feature films after *Atanarjuat*. *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* (2006) opened the 2006 Toronto International Film Festival and *Before Tomorrow* (2008) won the Best Canadian First Feature award at TIFF, was nominated for nine Genie Awards in 2010, and also had its U.S. premiere at Sundance.

More recently, Aboriginal filmmakers have increased Canada’s presence on the international festival circuit through their short films, the success of which can be measured by their festival run. In addition, short films may be a stepping-stone to feature film production, as most feature film funders consider a short film to be a prerequisite to making a feature. Between the years 2009-2013, Aboriginal short films have increased Canada’s short film presence at Sundance by 17.4% and at Berlin by 36.4%.³³ Below is a list of the notable achievements of Canadian Aboriginal short films on the international festival circuit between 2009-2012. This list is not exhaustive in nature, but is meant to capture notable examples to illustrate the reception of Aboriginal short films in Canada and at key international festivals.

Notable Achievements, Aboriginal-made Short Films, 2009-2012³⁴

Title	Filmmaker	Year	Festivals	Awards/Successes
Barefoot	Danis Goulet (Cree/Metis)	2012	TIFF, Berlin, Seattle	Special Mention, Berlin Generation 14+ International Jury
Choke	Michelle Latimer (Metis)	2011	Sundance, Rotterdam, Oberhausen	Honourable Mention in Short Filmmaking, Sundance; Genie Nomination; TIFF Top Ten list
File Under Miscellaneous	Jeff Barnaby (Mi'kmaq)	2010	TIFF, Rotterdam, Clermont-Ferrand	Genie Nomination; TIFF Top Ten list
The Cave*	Helen Haig-Brown (Tsilhqot'in)	2009	Sundance, Berlin, Rotterdam	TIFF Top Ten list
Savage*	Lisa Jackson (Anishnaabe)	2009	Sundance, Berlin, SXSW	Genie Award, Best Short Film; Golden Sheaf Award; ReelWorld Outstanding Canadian Award

*Part of the Embargo Collective short film commission

The commissioning of new short films by Aboriginal filmmakers has also made an impact at festivals. In the past five years, imagineNATIVE has commissioned two short film programs, the *Culture Shock* program of four Canadian short films in 2008 and the *Embargo Collective* program that included three Canadian short films in 2009. Both programs were selected for the 2009 and 2010 Berlin International Film Festivals, increasing Canada's presence in Berlin by 27% in 2009 and by 20% in 2010. From the *Embargo Collective* commission, Lisa Jackson's film *Savage* went on to win the Genie Award for Best Short Drama in 2011 and Helen Haig-Brown's *The Cave* was listed on the Toronto International Film Festival's Top Ten list and selected for the 2011 Sundance Film Festival.

Beyond short film success on the festival circuit, the Aboriginal screen-based sector as a whole has been growing significantly, notably within television and documentary production. Aboriginal filmmakers have gained Gemini awards in recent years for their documentary and television work. A recent Communications MDR report found that "television is the primary market (for Aboriginal content) with documentary production being the most prevalent." The report also stated that Aboriginal producers felt that the targeted Aboriginal funding program at the Canada Media Fund was partly responsible for the success of the sector.

top: Savage, Lisa Jackson, Director
bottom: ?E?anx The Cave, Helen Haig-Brown, Director



Across Canada, there is also a vibrant network of Aboriginal film festivals. The imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival is recognized as the world's largest festival of its kind. In addition, festivals across Canada celebrate the success and vitality of Aboriginal cinema such as the Terres En Vues / Land In Sights festival in Montreal, the Dreamspeakers Film Festival in Edmonton, the Vancouver Indigenous Media Arts Festival, the Mispon Festival in Regina, the Winnipeg Aboriginal Film Festival, the Biindigaate Indigenous Film Festival in Thunder Bay, and the recently established Asinabka Film & Media Arts Festival in Ottawa.

ABORIGINAL FEATURE FILM PRODUCTION GAP

Cinema has had a large role in Indigenous culture since its inception. There needs to be a cultural response to this larger history, which has had a detrimental impact. Canada is an Indigenous country; that is the history of this land. In terms of fostering and stewarding this land, there is nothing more important than this.

~ Jesse Wentz, Head of Film Programmes, TIFF Bell Lightbox

In Canada, Aboriginal film and media makers have garnered international and national recognition for their short, documentary and television work. In addition, two dramatic feature films were launched to acclaim at TIFF in 2013, with one of the films slated for a theatrical release in Canada in November 2013, marking an important milestone for Indigenous film. However, this success and momentum has not yet translated into the sustained production of Aboriginal feature films, particularly dramatic features. It has been 12 years since *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* premiered at Cannes, and since that time, there have been relatively few Aboriginal dramatic feature films produced in Canada and none that have experienced its level of critical and commercial success.

The recent Communications MDR³⁵ study revealed the gap in Aboriginal feature film production. The study found that primarily, the Aboriginal films that are being produced are documentaries and that “few feature films are being produced and little financing is being allocated to Aboriginal feature film production.” The study also found that “only 6% of Aboriginal production companies had revenues primarily from feature film.”

In Canada, the key federal public funder for dramatic feature films is Telefilm Canada (Telefilm). Although feature films can be made without Telefilm funding, support from Telefilm is key to triggering additional funding, making it an important revenue source for producers. Provincial funding agencies, such as the Ontario Media Development Corporation (OMDC), also play an important role in feature film production as the provinces offer provincial tax credits that are an important source of funding to production companies and offer film funding through programs such as OMDC's Film Fund.

From 2008-2012, Telefilm Canada funded the production of 310 feature films in Canada, an average of 62 feature films per year. Over the same five-year period, Telefilm funded the production of five feature films made by Aboriginal filmmakers, an average of one Aboriginal feature film per year. Overall, Aboriginal feature film production made up 1.61% of Telefilm-supported feature films over these five years.³⁶

Provincially, Ontario has Canada's largest provincial Aboriginal population, providing a solid point of reference for how Aboriginal feature film production is faring at the provincial level in Canada.³⁷ In Ontario, the OMDC is an agency of the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport that serves as the central catalyst for the province's cultural media cluster, including the screen-based industries. From 2008-2012, OMDC supported the production of a total of 115 theatrical feature films and, of this total, only one was an Aboriginal feature film. Overall, Aboriginal feature film production made up 0.87% of OMDC-supported feature films over five years.³⁸ While Aboriginal films are eligible for tax credits and funding like any other film, these opportunities are not being accessed for the production of Aboriginal feature films in Ontario.



Before Tomorrow, Marie-Hélène Cousineau and Madeline Ivalu, Directors

The Film Funding Landscape in Canada

It is imperative that Canadian cultural policy continues to protect and to promote independent Canadian voices, in all languages and in all narrative forms.

~ Ted Magder, author, "Canada's Hollywood: The Canadian State and Feature Films".³⁹

On the one hand, you have commercial considerations but you also have subsidized filmmaking in Canada and in Europe, so clearly there is a cultural aspect to this as well which governments are prepared to endorse.

~ Charlotte Mickie, Executive Vice President, International Sales and Acquisitions, Entertainment One Films International

In Canada, there are three federal funding agencies for feature film development and production: the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), the Canada Council for the Arts (Canada Council) and Telefilm Canada (Telefilm).⁴⁰

All three of the public federal funding agencies for feature film are within the portfolio of the Department of Canadian Heritage. The Film and Video section of the Canadian Heritage website states: "The Government of Canada is committed to fostering a more cohesive and creative Canada, and to ensuring that a strong Canadian identity is reflected in and accessible to Canadians in a wide variety of cultural products." Canadian Heritage's audiovisual policy and program activities also prioritize "reflecting ourselves by reflecting Canada's rich linguistic, ethno-cultural, Aboriginal, and regional diversity as our shared citizenship and common values."⁴¹

Telefilm, the NFB and the Canada Council have a history of providing support to Aboriginal media makers. Over the years, each agency has conducted numerous consultations with Aboriginal media makers. Public sector support for the Aboriginal film sector has evolved with the recognition that specific barriers exist for Aboriginal peoples who endeavour to participate in the cultural sector and that Aboriginal stories and perspectives have historically been underrepresented and misrepresented.

In response to the history of misrepresentation on screen, Aboriginal media makers have emphasized the importance of fostering Aboriginal perspectives on screen and supporting Aboriginal peoples in key creative roles within the media sector. A crucial shift in the evolution of support for Aboriginal media was the recognition on the part of public funders that it is not only important who is represented in the story, but also who is telling the story. During TIFF 2013, Writer/Director Jeff Barnaby said, “I think in a really crazy way, native films are undoing a lot of the damage that the films that came before did, in giving native people an identity onscreen.”⁴²

All of the programs at the public funding agencies are open to Aboriginal filmmakers (as they would be to any other Canadian filmmaker) who meet the eligibility criteria. However, to address historical barriers within the cultural sector, all of the federal film funders have, at various times, created targeted initiatives to support and foster Aboriginal media makers. This targeted support for Aboriginal media makers has greatly contributed to the sector’s growth.

NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA

The NFB is a public producer and distributor of audiovisual works based on Canadian points of view and values. The NFB’s focus has been predominantly on short and long-form documentary and auteur animation. In recent years, the NFB has been focused on digital media creation and has also made many films available online.

In 1968, the National Film Board of Canada established the Indian Film Crew as a part of the Challenge for Change program, which marked the beginning of Aboriginal people making Aboriginal films at the NFB. This project evolved into a training program by 1971, which was instrumental in the first surge of Aboriginal documentary filmmakers making work including the beginning of Alanis Obomsawin’s distinguished career. Obomsawin, a member of the Order of Canada, has been supported by the NFB since the early 1970s in the production of over 40 documentary films, which have won numerous awards and worldwide acclaim.⁴³

In 1991, the NFB began Studio One, with the objective that Studio One films would only be made by Aboriginal filmmakers. Graydon McCrea, the executive producer of the NFB’s North West Centre at the time stated: “Non-Native people have documented what they perceived to be the mystery and romance of North America’s Indian, Inuit and Métis people since the earliest days of filmmaking. . . it is no longer acceptable for Native people to be portrayed as only others see them – they must be portrayed as they see themselves.”⁴⁴

In 1996, Studio One was replaced with the Aboriginal Filmmaking Program (AFP), and the “success of the Program can be seen in the prevalence of AFP films in the CVs and resumes of most of the Aboriginal filmmakers working today.”⁴⁵ In 2005, the NFB created the First Stories initiative to produce short films and provide training opportunities, which was shortly followed by Second Stories, a program to create half-hour documentaries. These initiatives, in conjunction with the launch of APTN as a platform for documentaries, helped to create a thriving Aboriginal documentary production sector.

Beyond commissions and other initiatives, the NFB currently does not have a targeted Aboriginal fund or office. However, the NFB's Saskatchewan office recently hired the agency's first in-house Aboriginal producer in 2011 (in addition to the NFB's long-time support of Alanis Obomsawin as an in-house filmmaker). The NFB's website has a channel dedicated to Aboriginal Peoples and a website called Aboriginal Perspectives, a resource to present Aboriginal films and themes within an educational context. According to the Communications MDR report, between the years 2007/08 to 2011/12, the NFB engaged in five co-productions with Aboriginal production companies, produced 15 film productions with Aboriginal directors and six interactive productions with Aboriginal directors for a total of 26 produced works over a 5-year period.

CANADA COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS

Canada Council for the Arts is the national funding body for artistic work and the advancement of artistic careers with an annual budget of approximately \$180 million. The council funds several artistic disciplines and includes film funding within its media arts office, which aims to "support Canadian professional independent artists who use cinema and video as a mode of artistic expression."

Canada Council supports all lengths of films as well as drama and documentary. Guidelines require that the artist retain full creative control, as well as the rights to their film projects. Feature-length films are eligible for funding, however, the maximum grant amount for mid-career and established artists is \$60,000 and the overall budget of the film must not exceed \$250,000. Therefore, the arts council's funding levels for feature films can only support micro-budget feature film production.

Canada Council for the Arts created an Aboriginal Arts Office in 1994 to play an advocacy role to support the development of Aboriginal arts in Canada. The Canada Council's website states: "The Council has identified Aboriginal arts to be one of the three strategic population groups for support. The emphasis on Aboriginal arts was increased significantly beginning in 1998-99 with additional funding for dedicated programs in media arts, dance, visual arts and the Aboriginal Arts Office."

Canada Council offers a targeted program for Aboriginal artists working in film through their Aboriginal Media Arts Program, with an aim to reduce the historical barriers to media arts experienced by Aboriginal artists. At the Canada Council, an Aboriginal filmmaker may apply to the general media arts program or within the targeted Aboriginal media arts program.

Canada Council has played an important role in the development of Indigenous film and media in Canada. In the period from 2007-2011, the Canada Council's Aboriginal Media Arts Program granted \$2,430,476 to Indigenous media artists, which includes filmmakers working in all genres and lengths. The council also fosters feature filmmakers through funding short and feature films. Short film production is an essential stepping-stone for filmmakers endeavouring to make a feature film. Canada Council has notably played a role in the success of Aboriginal short films on the festival circuit, funding most, if not all of the professional filmmakers working in independent film at some point in their careers.

The following chart shows a snapshot of the period 2007 to 2011 of funding allocations from the Aboriginal Media Arts Program, for dramatic feature and short film production.

**CANADA COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS
ABORIGINAL MEDIA ARTS PROGRAM FILM FUNDING - DRAMA⁴⁶**

Year	Number of Short/ Medium-length Films	Short/Medium- length Film Investment	Number of Feature Films	Feature Film Investment
2007	4	\$63,400	2	\$36,000
2008	0	\$0	2	\$120,000
2009	4	\$73,000	3	\$84,000
2010	3	\$70,000	4	\$72,000
2011	6	\$263,076	2	\$21,000
TOTAL	17	\$469,476	13	\$333,000

Of the total investment into Aboriginal media arts, \$469,476 (19%) went to the development or production of a short or medium length dramatic films and \$333,000 (14%) went to the development and production of dramatic feature films for a total investment of \$802,476 into short and long-form dramatic films.⁴⁷ Of the \$333,000 invested in dramatic feature films, the Canada Council invested \$153,000 in ten projects for script development, and \$180,000 in three projects for production.

As noted, Indigenous filmmakers are also able to access the Canada Council's mainstream media arts funding programs, not captured for this report, meaning the actual numbers may be higher. Film and media art represents only one of the six key recognized disciplines supported by the Canada Council through its mandate. Targeted programs for Aboriginal artists exist across disciplines and the Aboriginal arts office supports all disciplines through their capacity building and collaborative initiatives.

TELEFILM CANADA

Telefilm is Canada's federal funding body for feature films. The key fund administered by Telefilm is the Canada Feature Film Fund, which encompasses several programs for development, production, marketing, theatrical documentary and micro-budget production. Telefilm supports a range of budgets, genres, international co-productions and also supports and promotes Canadian film at festivals and markets. Telefilm measures the success of their investment in film through a "Success Index," which comprises weighted attributes that include 60% Commercial, 30% Cultural and 10% Industrial. In terms of development and production for Aboriginal feature film (drama), Telefilm has been a key funder, making the largest investment in dramatic features over a five-year period.

Although all three public funders support film, there are some key differences. While both the NFB and Telefilm have a mandate to support the audiovisual sector, the NFB focuses primarily on documentary, animation and digital media, and acts as a distributor, while Telefilm focuses primarily on feature film production (including one fund for theatrical documentaries) and does not distribute film. Unlike both the NFB and the Canada Council, Telefilm does not fund the production of short films.

In 2008, Telefilm identified "Building Industry Capacity" as a key strategic objective, with the stated goal of providing Aboriginal and other culturally diverse professionals in the sector with opportunities to advance their careers. The target was stated as maintaining or increasing the level of financing and resources "designed to promote professional development within culturally diverse communities".

In 2008 in partnership with APTN, Telefilm launched the *Featuring Aboriginal Stories Program* (FASP), their first targeted investment program to support the development of feature-length scripts. The training component of FASP was delivered by the National Screen Institute of Canada. The FASP program goal was described by Telefilm as follows: "The *Featuring Aboriginal Stories Program* aims to encourage and support Aboriginal filmmakers to develop original script material that will be attractive to producers, financiers and other film industry representatives in the marketplace."⁴⁸ The program was designed to enable Aboriginal filmmakers to access the Canada Feature Film Fund, thus implying that there was recognition of inequity in terms of access to this program for Aboriginal filmmakers.

The FASP program was a pilot that was discontinued after 2011, ending the targeted funding available for Aboriginal producers from Telefilm. According to reports gathered from Telefilm, the total spent on development in the FASP program over a four-year period was \$986,461. An additional \$880,057 was spent on mentoring. A total of 35 projects were supported through FASP, none of which has gone into production at the time this report was written. The FASP program was a pilot that was discontinued after 2011, ending the targeted funding available for Aboriginal producers from Telefilm. According to reports gathered from Telefilm, the total spent on development in the FASP program over a four-year period was \$986,461. An additional \$880,057 was spent on mentoring. However, one of the FASP screenplays, *Wild Medicine* by writer/director Adam Garnet Jones, has recently won the prestigious Jim Burt Screenwriting Prize at the 2013 Writers Guild of Canada Screenwriting Awards, a major accomplishment.

The following table provides an overview of Telefilm development funding for Aboriginal dramatic feature films from 2007/08 – 2011/12. Over five years, FASP provided a significant boost to development funding for Aboriginal feature films. In the three most active years of FASP from 2008/09 – 2010/11, FASP doubled, on average, the amount of development funding allocated to Aboriginal filmmakers.

TELEFILM CANADA ABORIGINAL FEATURE FILM FUNDING - DRAMA DEVELOPMENT FUNDING AND FASP FUNDING 2007/08 - 2011/12⁴⁹

Year	Development Funding - *Other Telefilm Programs	Development Funding - FASP	Total Telefilm Development Funding	Development Funding Increase Due to FASP (%)
2007/08	\$81,504	\$0	\$81,504	0%
2008/09	\$142,910	\$180,940	\$323,850	126.6%
2009/10	\$166,379	\$372,831	\$543,760	226.8%
2010/11	\$121,970	\$322,314	\$445,387	265.2%
2011/12	\$128,060	\$110,376	\$238,436	86.2%
TOTALS	\$640,823	\$986,461	1,632,937	146.8% average

*includes funding from the Canada Feature Film Fund, Official Languages Activities and the Writer's First Program. Project funding outside of the FASP program was researched by the consultants for the involvement of Aboriginal people in key creative roles as writer, producer or director. The method included online research and cross-referencing projects against imagineNATIVE's database of Aboriginal filmmakers in Canada. In cases where Aboriginal involvement was unclear, the researchers conducted first-person inquiry with production companies to determine Aboriginal involvement. Projects that had an Aboriginal person credited as a Consultant, Associate Producer or Executive Producer credit were not included. This data relies on filmmakers who self-identify as Aboriginal.

In 2011/2012, Telefilm received \$105.7 million from the Department of Canadian Heritage. From 2012/2013, their budget will be cut by \$10.6 million over 3 years, a reduction of 10%.⁵⁰ Currently, Telefilm is in the midst of an extensive Program Redesign initiative and revamped many of their programs in 2012/13. Also in 2012/13, \$7.5 million was allocated to production companies for feature film development.

Under the new development guidelines, production companies must have produced a feature film that was theatrically released in Canada in the last five years. Aboriginal production companies have accessed development funds from Telefilm in the past. However, currently there are very few Aboriginal producers in Canada who fit the criteria of having released a theatrical feature within the last five years, and therefore the majority of Aboriginal producers in Canada no longer meet the eligibility criteria needed to directly access development funds. However, as a part of the Program Redesign initiative, Telefilm implemented a new strategy to support Aboriginal producers. Telefilm created a mentorship component within their development program that identifies Aboriginal producers as a priority group (in addition to a few additional identified target groups). The component enables producers belonging to a targeted group to partner with an eligible production company, who becomes their mentor and helps shepherd the project.

Telefilm has reported that 11% of program funds went to mentorships, with an aim to ensure the presence of new talent and diverse voices in the Telefilm funding portfolio, with \$161,280 of this going to Aboriginal content creators for development. In 2013/14, Telefilm will allow for two mentorships per application, from the following three groups: Aboriginal producers; Francophone producers working outside Quebec; and Anglophone producers working in Quebec. A total of four mentorships per application will be allowed.

The FASP program was a targeted program that allocated development funds to Aboriginal filmmakers. For production, Telefilm's Canada Feature Film Fund supports feature film production through their production and micro-budget production programs. The micro-budget program, launched in 2012, targets emerging talent and supports the production of a first feature. This program will support 8-10 projects per year, with funding of up to \$120,000 per film for projects with maximum budgets of \$250,000. Eligible candidates must be a graduate of a production program or a member of a film cooperative recognized as a Telefilm partner. Telefilm's production program supports films with budgets over \$250,000, with those over \$2.5 million requiring a distribution agreement. Aboriginal producers are eligible for both of the production programs. In the case of production funding, Aboriginal producers can apply directly to Telefilm and do not have to partner with a production company that has made a feature film within the past five years.

Telefilm has played a key role in the development and production of Aboriginal feature film (drama), making the largest investment. The following data gives an overview of Telefilm's feature film development funding compared to production funding for projects written, directed and/or produced by an Aboriginal person over the last five years. From 2007/08 – 2010/11, as development funding for Aboriginal projects increased significantly due to FASP, a similar boost in investment in production financing did not occur over the same period of time.

**TELEFILM CANADA ABORIGINAL FEATURE FILM FUNDING - DRAMA
DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCTION*
2007/08 - 2011/12**

Year	Development Investment	Production Investment	Total Number of Projects Produced
2007/08	\$116,504	\$650,000	1
2008/09	\$323,850	\$200,000	1
2009/10	\$543,760	\$645,000	2
2010/11	\$445,387	\$500,000	1
2011/12	\$238,436	\$0	0
TOTAL	\$1,667,937	\$1,995,000	5

*Project funding outside of the FASP program was researched by the consultants for the involvement of Aboriginal people in key creative roles as writer, producer or director. The method included online research and cross-referencing projects against imagineNATIVE's database of Aboriginal filmmakers in Canada. In cases where Aboriginal involvement was unclear, the researchers conducted first-person inquiry with production companies to determine Aboriginal involvement. Projects that had an Aboriginal person credited as a Consultant, Associate Producer or Executive Producer credit were not included. This data relies on filmmakers who self-identify as Aboriginal.

The data above shows five Aboriginal feature films produced with Telefilm support in a five-year period, which is an average of one film per year. This data was sourced by request from Telefilm Canada (see chart footnote for data collection method) to ensure that only funding to self-identified Aboriginal writers, directors and producers were included. The data does not include marketing funds for feature films.

The total number of feature films produced in Canada with Telefilm support is listed in Telefilm's annual catalogue, which gives an indication of the state of Aboriginal film production in Canada, in terms of films that are actually completing the production cycle and making it on screen. While Telefilm is not the only funder of feature films in Canada, they are the key funder for dramatic feature films and their catalogue provides a critical snapshot of the country's feature film output. The following chart indicates the total number of dramatic feature films produced in Canada from 2007/08 – 2011/12 according to the Telefilm catalogue of overall films produced.

**TELEFILM CANADA
PERCENTAGE OF ABORIGINAL FEATURE FILMS PRODUCED
COMPARED TO THE NUMBER OF FEATURE FILMS PRODUCED*
2007/08 – 2011/12⁵¹**

Year	Total Number of Feature Films Produced with Telefilm Support	Total Number of Aboriginal Feature Films Produced – Drama	% of Aboriginal Feature Films Produced
2007/08 – 2011/12	310	5	1.61%

*Project funding outside of the FASP program was researched by the consultants for the involvement of Aboriginal people in key creative roles as writer, producer or director. The method included online research and cross-referencing projects against imagineNATIVE's database of Aboriginal filmmakers in Canada. In cases where Aboriginal involvement was unclear, the researchers conducted first-person inquiry with production companies to determine Aboriginal involvement. Projects that had an Aboriginal person credited as a Consultant, Associate Producer or Executive Producer credit were not included. This data relies on filmmakers who self-identify as Aboriginal.

It is worth noting that some feature films do get made without the support of Telefilm. However, as Telefilm support is key to triggering funding from other sources, Telefilm is a crucial revenue source for feature films. Of the eight Canadian Aboriginal dramatic feature films screened at imagineNATIVE from 2008-2012, six of the films received Telefilm funding, representing 75% of the funded feature films. In addition, both of the dramatic feature films that played at TIFF in 2013 also received Telefilm support.

NOTES ON FUNDING DATA

This data analysis does not account for the following factors: there is a possibility that a small number of films were made by Aboriginal writers, directors and/or producers who did not self-identify as being Aboriginal. However, the available data shows that there are very few Aboriginal feature films funded for production in Canada. In addition, the data for the number of Aboriginal applicants to any given program was not included. Some funders and industry stakeholders reported that their programs may be under-applied to by Aboriginal filmmakers.

Aboriginal producers are eligible to apply to both federal and provincial film funding agencies, however there are currently no programs with targeted investment for Aboriginal feature film production, beyond those offered by the arts councils for micro-budget films. The Canada Media Fund does make a significant investment in the production of Aboriginal screen-based content, however, it is specifically made for television. The federal Department of Canadian Heritage has some additional funding programs, the Aboriginal Peoples' Program/Northern Aboriginal Broadcasting, that filmmakers may also access for projects, although they are not film specific.⁵²

Public film funding agencies in Canada currently do not have a system of identifying and tracking projects where an Aboriginal person played a key creative role as a writer, director and/or producer, with the exception of the Canada Council for the Arts. As a result, tracking statistics for Aboriginal-made productions was a challenge in data collection. For this reason, an analysis of the statistics of every provincial funding agency was beyond the scope of this research report. In the case of Telefilm, the consultants were able to track data within a five-year period through Telefilm's now defunct *Featuring Aboriginal Stories Program (FASP)* and within Telefilm's main programs.

Telefilm also supports the Aboriginal film sector by providing funding to events such as Aboriginal film festivals and training initiatives across Canada. Given the report's focus on how filmmakers and production companies develop and produce feature films, the Telefilm funding for events are not captured in the data.

NATIONAL SCREEN INSTITUTE

Although the National Screen Institute (NSI) is not a public funder, the organization has a history of programs that support Aboriginal filmmakers that are worth noting. The NSI is Canada's non-profit national film, television and digital media training school for writers, directors and producers. There are currently two training and development programs available for Aboriginal filmmakers: New Voices Program and the Aboriginal Documentary Pilot Program.

The NSI New Voices is an entry-level training course that exposes young Aboriginal people aged 18-35 to a variety of creative and challenging employment opportunities in the film and television industry. The NSI has made a concerted effort to work with Aboriginal advisors and faculty at all stages of program design and delivery, describing the program as "culturally sensitive".

According to NSI data, gathered during the interview process, 80% of New Voices graduates are currently working in film and television or are enrolled in training programs in the field. John Gill, CEO of NSI, reports that New Voices is the single best-supported program in its course offerings, with a high level of engagement from funders and sponsors: "People got it immediately; it appealed to funders across the spectrum."

The NSI started the New Voices program nine years ago in response to internal research undertaken by the organization that found that the numbers of Aboriginal people working in the film and television industries were not reflective of the national population.⁵³ Those that did work in the sector were in below-the-line positions (non-key creative roles) and the NSI recognized that it was important to train key creatives (writers, directors, producers) to address this imbalance.

The NSI Aboriginal Documentary initiative is a pilot program for producer/director teams looking to produce a short documentary film. Each team is paired with an industry mentor to help with the final development and production of a short documentary film project. They receive a cash award of up to \$16,000 to put towards production costs, attend the Hot Docs Film Festival in Toronto and have their documentary broadcast on Manitoba's MTS Video on Demand and APTN. The NSI reports that the pilot program model has been an effective tool for them to develop their Aboriginal programs, allowing them to work with advisors and gain buy-in from funders while testing the efficacy of their models.

The NSI also ran a program in 2004 and 2005 that was the first to recognize the potential inherent in the international Indigenous film and media network. The NSI Cultural Trade program was an exchange program with Australia and New Zealand that saw a delegation of Canadian Aboriginal filmmakers embark on a tour that allowed them to form important partnerships with Aboriginal filmmakers and broadcasters in those countries. One example of a result of this initiative was the animated series *Wapos Bay*, by Dennis and Melanie Jackson, which was acquisitioned and broadcast on New Zealand's Maori TV. Lisa Meeches' *Tipi Tales* was re-versioned into the Maori language and also aired on the same station. The NSI discontinued this program to focus on more development work for Aboriginal filmmakers and there has not been a similar exchange to date.



The International Context: Models of Success Outside Canada

Certainly all the opportunities are there, and the money is there. It's got to the point in Australia where they are looking for Indigenous films; it's cracked it. It makes the country look good.

- Erica Glynn, Head of Indigenous Film Unit, Screen Australia

Early in the process of formulating this research study, it became apparent that in order to fully understand the context of the Aboriginal production sector in Canada, the research would have to extend beyond our own borders. The Indigenous filmmaking sector is a global one, connected by shared experiences and a commonality in approaches and perspectives. The rise of Indigenous-specific film festivals, training initiatives and international programs has further solidified a strong and growing network of Indigenous film professionals.

In the last decade, Australia and New Zealand have emerged as the leaders in producing a consistent and growing body of compelling and high-quality Indigenous work. This work garners annual selections in the world's top festivals, where Indigenous films win awards and go on to break domestic box office records in their home countries. Each of these countries have nurtured individual Indigenous voices who have become leaders, mentors and auteurs in the field of independent cinema, with many crossing over into television production.

Australia and New Zealand both have fluid and dynamic film and television industries, where there is a heavy crossover between the two. Short films are also a highly valued cultural product, and have been proven to be a key stepping stone into feature film and television series production. The leading Indigenous filmmakers in both countries, including Wayne Blair, Warwick Thornton, and Taika Waititi, all started with a number of successful short films before making the leap to feature films.

The following section of this report looks closely at the key factors, funding levels, and program design that have led to the successful growth of Indigenous feature film production in Australia and New Zealand, with the purpose of identifying opportunities that may be leveraged in Canada. Australia offers the most similar comparison to Canada, and therefore funding levels have been compared.

SCREEN AUSTRALIA

Feature length films such as Catriona McKenzie's *Satellite Boy* and Warwick Thornton's *The Dark Side*, along with Ivan Sen's *Mystery Road*, mean we can confidently say, within a generation, Australian Indigenous filmmakers have become a force to be reckoned with worldwide.

~ Sandra Levy, Chief Executive, Australian Film Television and Radio School⁵⁴

Australia offers an opportunity for comparison to Canada in the Aboriginal film sector, as the two countries have strong historical, political and demographic similarities. As of 2011, Australia's recorded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is much smaller than Canada's at 548,370, or 2.7% of the total population, compared to Canada's 4.3%. Like Canada, however, Australia's Indigenous population is young and growing fast. Between 2001 and 2006, the estimated Australian Indigenous resident population increased by 58,700 or 13%, a much faster rate than the rest of the country.⁵⁵

Screen Australia is the national funding body for film production, funded mainly by the Government of Australia, with a budget similar to that of Telefilm Canada. In 2012, Screen Australia's budget was \$108,124,185.⁵⁶

Feature films are supported by Screen Australia through two mainstream programs with a total budget of \$23 million:

- Development Support
- Production Support

Aboriginal filmmakers are eligible to apply to these programs and other initiatives at supporting career development including:

- Shorts Programs;
- Internships, placements, workshops;
- Targeted Initiatives (ie. script and development workshops);
- Travel grants to festivals;
- Promotion and festival materials.

Screen Australia also has an Indigenous Department within the agency.

SCREEN AUSTRALIA: OVERVIEW OF THE INDIGENOUS DEPARTMENT

“Screen Australia’s Indigenous Department aims to assist the career development of talented writers, directors and producers who have the potential to make a significant contribution to screen culture and the national cultural life. We engage actively at all stages with key creatives in the development and production of their works.”

- Mandate, Indigenous Department

Established in 1993, the Indigenous Department is celebrating its 30th year in 2013 with a slate of recent critical and commercial successes. Since its founding, its annual budget has grown from \$800,000 in the early years to approximately \$5 million.⁵⁷ The language of the department’s mandate, above, indicates a long-term strategy aimed at fostering career development and production. There is a strong recognition of the importance and distinct cultural value that Indigenous film has in a nation that, like Canada, was founded on a colonial relationship whose tensions have not been fully resolved after over a century.

The Indigenous Department is Indigenous-run, and has been focused for three decades on building capacity within the sector through skills and creative development as well as strategic funding. The Indigenous Department takes an active approach to the development and production of works, working hands-on with filmmakers to develop and produce their first short films, and brokering relationships between broadcasters and Screen Australia when those filmmakers are ready to take on a feature or television series. The Indigenous Department scouts talent, builds careers over a long-term period, and creates initiatives that provide training to filmmakers as well as project financing with broadcasters already attached.

Their long-term approach has created capacity within the sector that is now demonstrating its potential on both national and international scales. A wave of Australian Indigenous feature films have been released in recent years to international acclaim at Cannes, Berlin, Sundance and TIFF. Recent theatrical and television success stories from filmmakers fostered over several years by the Indigenous Department include:

Australia: Indigenous Filmmaker Successes 2008-2013

Title	Filmmaker	Year	Gross Domestic Box Office	Awards/Successes
<i>Mystery Road</i>	Ivan Sen	2013	Not yet available, US release in 2014	Starring Hugo Weaving, Opening Night Film - Sydney Film Festival, TIFF
<i>The Sapphires</i>	Wayne Blair	2012	\$14 million	Cannes Film Festival, TIFF, distributed by Weinstein Company
<i>Samson and Delilah</i>	Warwick Thornton	2009	\$4 million	Camera d'Or, Cannes Film Festival, TIFF
<i>Bran Nue Dae</i>	Rachel Perkins	2009	\$7 million	Starring Geoffrey Rush, Best Feature - Melbourne Film Festival, Sundance, TIFF
<i>First Australians</i>	Rachel Perkins and Beck Cole	2008	Ground-breaking seven-part television series	Described as the most significant program in the history of Australian television
<i>Redfern Now</i>	Darren Dale	2012	Six-part series	2 AACTA awards

Each of these filmmakers' careers have been developed over the years through the programs offered by the Indigenous Department, namely the short and feature film production programs. The Indigenous Department and the partnerships they have fostered with state-run organizations, broadcasters and the mainstream programs at Screen Australia have created an Indigenous film ecology that has allowed filmmakers to flourish and thrive. Writing about the rise of Australian cinema, Sally Riley, Head of the Indigenous Branch at the Australian Broadcasting Corp. and former Head of Screen Australia's Indigenous Department, writes:

Indigenous filmmakers as a group have an uncanny knack for representing their stories with a truthfulness onscreen that resonates with many different audiences. And as the years have gone by, the technical skill and proficiency of the filmmakers have increased remarkably, which raises the bar higher and higher to inspire those following in their footsteps.⁵⁸

Riley goes on to quote Australian film journalist Sandy George, who articulates this momentum in an article for *Screen International*:

Some of the most exciting new Australian talents are writers and directors from Indigenous communities, whose unique life experiences are rarely seen portrayed on the big screen from the inside out.⁵⁹

How the Indigenous Department Works

I wouldn't be here without the Indigenous Film Unit. There would be no Samson and Delilah. There would be no Indigenous industry.

- Warwick Thornton, Writer/Director, *Samson and Delilah* (Camera d'Or Winner, Cannes 2009)

The Indigenous Department is a unit within Screen Australia, currently headed by Erica Glynn. The Indigenous Department manages its own budget and designs its own programs, but also has access to the resources of the larger institution it sits within, such as marketing and communications.

The Indigenous Department provides what it refers to as “stepping stone” programs that involve practical professional development coupled with production funding. The Indigenous Department fosters relationships with filmmakers it has worked with who have reached a level in their career where they are equipped to make a larger budget feature film through one of Screen Australia's mainstream programs. Screen Australia and the Indigenous Department also support documentary and television content, however, for the purpose of this research we focus on initiatives directly or indirectly associated with dramatic feature film production. The Indigenous Department's key programs to date offer training and development combined with significant production funding and an attached broadcaster.

i.) Drama Initiative: The Short Black Program

The first initiative created by the Indigenous Department is a model still used today, in different iterations. The Short Black Programme is a drama initiative that results in the completed production of six to eight short films, with approximate budgets of \$100,000 to \$150,000 each.⁶⁰ The program involves carefully mentored and monitored development of a short film project, including practical workshops. Speaking about the value that these workshops have had to his career, Warwick Thornton, director of the Camera d'Or-winning film *Samson and Delilah*, states:

Every single one of those workshops pretty much has an outcome. So you choose a workshop and the outcome is that 10 films will come out of it. You go and learn how to make a film and the money is there to make a film. This is really empowering and makes you work harder. You want to make the film and you know the money is there.



Samson and Delilah, Warwick Thornton, Director



Mystery Road, Ivan Sen, Director

Through these short filmmaking initiatives, Warwick Thornton made four short films before making *Samson and Delilah*, Ivan Sen (*Mystery Road*) made three short films, and Wayne Blair (*The Sapphires*) made three short films. Blair states: “I made a five-minute film and I really loved the whole process – really opened my eyes to what one could do.”⁶¹ In addition, internationally recognized Indigenous filmmakers such as Rachel Perkins, Catriona McKenzie, Darren Dale and Beck Cole have all made work through this program. With early support from the Indigenous Department, this wave of Indigenous feature filmmakers has gone on to be amongst Australia’s leading filmmakers.

The production of short films has been a key focus of the Indigenous Department with the goal to develop the careers of Indigenous filmmakers over the long-term, and with the recognition that short films develop feature filmmaking talent. Before the creation of the feature film initiative, the Indigenous Department had completed over ten special initiatives since 1996, commissioning over 60 short and medium-length films. The model used for the Indigenous Department’s drama initiative was later used in Australia to develop the National Indigenous Documentary Fund.

Of 1,354 short films produced by Screen Australia from 2007 to 2012, 63 (4.6%) were written/directed and/or produced by an Indigenous filmmaker.

ii.) The Long Black Feature Program

After building success through short film support over decades, the Indigenous Department is now turning its attention more to feature film production. The Long Black Program is a strategic initiative aimed at providing opportunities to bring stories authored and crafted by Indigenous filmmakers to the big screen. The director and writer or director/writer must be Indigenous, and funding of up to \$1 million per project is available. This project is designed for dramatic features only and is aimed at allowing filmmakers who have demonstrated talent in short filmmaking to make the leap to feature films. While it is a production fund, the program is designed as a development initiative, which marks a clear strategy of practical, hands-on training as the essential step for filmmakers making their first feature film. As Erica Glynn stated, “there is proof that our people learn from hands-on training. That hands-on is the first point.”

The Indigenous Department plays an important role in “brokering” relationships between Indigenous filmmakers and the larger Screen Australia institution, and with national broadcasters SBS and ABC. There is a crucial relationship with broadcasters, who contribute funding and broadcast almost all of the works produced through the Branch.

Annual Indigenous feature film production represents a small percentage of Screen Australia's annual output. However, the international attention and domestic box office success of films like *Samson and Delilah* and *The Sapphires* are demonstrating that long-term investment pays off. Screen Australia has supported a larger percentage of Indigenous feature films from 2008-2012, with a notable increase in the last year. When compared with Telefilm, Screen Australia has supported nine Indigenous feature films over five years, representing 2.9% of the films made, whereas Telefilm has supported five Indigenous feature films over the same five-year period, representing 1.6% of the films made.

SCREEN AUSTRALIA: PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS FEATURE FILMS SUPPORTED⁶²

Year	Number of Feature Films Completed (Drama)	Number of Indigenous Feature Films Completed (Drama)	% of Indigenous Film
2008	69	1	1.4%
2009	72	3	4.1%
2010	71	1	1.4%
2011	57	2	3.5%
2012	37	3	8.1%
TOTALS	306	10	3.2%

Funding from the Indigenous Department for feature film production and development during the five-year period of 2008 to 2012 represented a total investment of \$3,964,650.

SCREEN AUSTRALIA: PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS FEATURE FILMS SUPPORTED⁶²

Year	Development Investment	Production Investment
2007	\$93,000	\$1,250,000
2008	\$87,000	\$905,000
2009	\$38,000	\$648,650
2010	\$45,000	\$400,000
2011	\$53,000	\$445,000
TOTAL	\$316,000	\$3,648,650

Over the same five-year period, the Indigenous Department also spent \$2,295,250 on short film development and production and \$1,430,548 on workshops, travel grants and internships for Indigenous filmmakers.⁶³ Additional funding through Screen Australia's mainstream programs could not be captured for this report so in fact, the funding of Indigenous feature films may be higher.

Additional Indigenous Initiatives at Screen Australia

In addition to development and production initiatives, the Indigenous Department works in partnership with Screen Australia to create leading initiatives aimed at advancing audiences and support for Indigenous-made content. They are committed to promoting the work they have undertaken and their successes to date. Key initiatives include:

- **The Exchange:** a current initiative calling on published Indigenous novelists of narrative fiction to submit ideas for short film development.
- **The Black List:** a comprehensive list of film and TV projects with Indigenous Australians in key creative roles.
- **Pathways & Protocols:** a groundbreaking filmmaker's guide to working with Indigenous people, culture and concepts.
- **Dreaming in Motion** – an illustrated full-colour publication and e-book celebrating Australia's Indigenous filmmakers (2007).
- **Black Screen:** promotes cultural awareness and Indigenous screen culture with a year-round travelling program of films, and a DVD library available to schools, programs and events.

The strategy for supporting a vibrant Indigenous film ecology through Screen Australia and the Indigenous Department has been strategic and long-term. The work of three decades is now beginning to pay dividends as awards, recognition and box office success indicate that the future of Australian cinema goes hand-in-hand with Indigenous cinema.



Investment Comparison: Telefilm Canada and Screen Australia

TELEFILM CANADA AND SCREEN AUSTRALIA COMPARISON INDIGENOUS FEATURE FILM FUNDING - DRAMA DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCTION 2007/08 - 2011/12

Year	Telefilm Development Investment*	Telefilm Production Investment**	Screen Australia Indigenous Dept. Development Investment***	Screen Australia Indigenous Dept. Production Investment†
2007/08	\$116,504	\$650,000	\$93,000	\$1,250,000
2008/09	\$323,850	\$200,000	\$87,000	\$905,000
2009/10	\$543,760	\$645,000	\$38,000	\$648,650
2010/11	\$445,387	\$500,000	\$45,000	\$400,000
2011/12	\$238,436	\$0	\$53,000	\$445,000
TOTALS	\$1,667,937	\$1,995,000	\$316,000	\$3,648,650

*In the above table, Telefilm's spending of \$1.6 million on development was significantly boosted by FASP, the first targeted program for Aboriginal filmmakers at Telefilm. FASP ran from 2008/2009 – 2011/2012 and increased development spending on Aboriginal projects at Telefilm by 146.8% over four years.

**Of the five Aboriginal feature films funded for production at Telefilm, two were funded through Telefilm's low-budget program and three were funded through the Canada Feature Film Fund for a total of almost \$2 million.

***The Screen Australia data comes from the Indigenous Department only, as the researchers could not verify all Indigenous-made projects within the main programs at Screen Australia. Therefore, this number does not capture funding to Indigenous filmmakers from the main development program at Screen Australia, so the numbers may in fact be higher.

†Again, the production numbers only reflect Screen Australia's targeted investment through the Indigenous Department for a total of three feature films funded. Also, the Indigenous Department supports feature films with an average budget of \$1 million. Therefore, the recent wave of higher-budget Indigenous feature films funded through the main programs such as Wayne Blair's *The Sapphires* (Cannes, TIFF), Rachel Perkin's *Bran Nue Dae* (Sundance, TIFF), Catriona McKenzie's *Satellite Boy* (Special Mention, Berlinale Generation Kplus international jury, TIFF), Ivan Sen's *Mystery Road* (Opening Night Film, Sydney Film Festival, TIFF) are not included in this chart. For example, with a budget of \$8-10 million, *The Sapphires* would have been made through the main Screen Australia funding programs. Therefore, it is worth noting that Screen Australia's production investment over this period is much higher than reflected and would actually be at least \$11 million with Wayne Blair's film included alone.

Screen Australia has made a significant production investment in Indigenous feature films over the past five years, with Indigenous filmmakers supported through both the Indigenous Department's lower-budget feature program and through the main funding programs. However, in order to access production funding, filmmakers must be ready to make the leap. Screen Australia's recent production support comes after years of strategic investment in the careers of Indigenous filmmakers and short film production since 1993. The initiatives of the Indigenous Department have functioned as a key stepping-stone for feature filmmakers, and have included the following factors:

- Dedicated Indigenous-run department within the agency that scouts, builds and tracks the careers of filmmakers
- Long-term funding strategy that includes initiatives to address all levels of career development including short film production and feature script development
- Initiatives that provide hands-on training combined with substantial project financing and a guaranteed broadcaster

As Sandra Levy, Chief Executive of the Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS) writes:

The development of Australian Indigenous screen practice has not been an overnight success. It is the culmination of decades of groundwork by countless individuals and a range of organisations, with various state funding bodies, government film agencies, Indigenous media associations, the ABC and SBS and training institutions such as AFTRS all playing a role. This support is unprecedented anywhere else in the world and we, the audience, are all the better for it.⁶⁴

NEW ZEALAND FILM COMMISSION

New Zealand's Indigenous population makes up a larger percentage of the total population than in Canada or Australia. According to 2012 census data, the Maori people comprised 673,500, or 15% of New Zealand's total population of 4.4 million.⁶⁵ Indigenous people from the Pacific Islands add another 7% to New Zealand's Indigenous population.

New Zealand differs from Australia and Canada in terms of its colonial relationship. Unlike Canada and Australia, a reserve system was never established in New Zealand. Maori rights were enshrined in the 1840 Waitangi Treaty, creating a more equal dynamic between the British and Maori citizens that had fewer limits on individual and cultural sovereignty.⁶⁶

While noting the marked differences in historical and demographic contexts, it is relevant to analyze the approach taken by the New Zealand Film Commission to the development and production of Maori films. The New Zealand Film Commission's budget is significantly smaller than in Canada and Australia, posting an annual budgeted income of \$19.536 million for the last completed fiscal year (2012). This is approximately 17.6% of the budgets of Telefilm and Screen Australia.

The New Zealand Film Commission does not have an Indigenous Branch within the institution that is specifically focused on Indigenous films. Instead, they take an integrated approach to supporting Indigenous talent across the board, and through targeted initiatives. Maori staff at the Commission may or may not work on Maori projects and non-Maori staff may also develop projects with Indigenous filmmakers, leading to a spirit of collaboration across the Commission. As the former Chief Executive Graeme Mason states:

Support for Maori film is in the founding principles of the Film Commission. It is almost enshrined as a concept. It is a guiding principle and a priority. We report on it every year.

The result of this integrated ethos is that Indigenous cinema is a fundamental component of the New Zealand Film Commission’s output. This and other factors, such as the big budget *Lord of the Rings* productions and a thriving Maori Television, industry have led to the development of a vibrant and skilled Indigenous film sector – one that has built enough capacity to write, direct, produce, crew and cast entire feature films.⁶⁷

From 2009 to 2013, 5 of 27 feature films produced by the Commission included films written, directed and/or produced by an Indigenous person, representing 18.5 % of the feature film output of the Commission. While the total number of dramatic feature films produced in New Zealand annually is much smaller than of Canada or Australia, the representation of Indigenous filmmakers in nationally funded cinema far exceeds either country and is more closely aligned with the Indigenous population (22%).

**NEW ZEALAND FILM COMMISSION:
PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS FEATURE FILMS SUPPORTED**

Year	Number of Feature Films Completed (Drama)	Number of Indigenous Feature Films Completed (Drama)	% of Indigenous Film
2009	5	2	40%
2010	6	0	0%
2011	7	1	14%
2012	5	1	20%
2013	4	1	25%
TOTALS	27	5	18.5%

Indigenous Film Development and the Creation of Te Paepae Ataata

The New Zealand Film Commission has two targeted funds for Indigenous development and production:

1. Maori Script Development Initiative: \$200,000 annually
2. Maori Short Film Initiative: \$200,000 annually

In addition to this, Indigenous filmmakers frequently access the mainstream development programs, with approximately 30% of the total mainstream spend going to Indigenous filmmakers per year.⁶⁸

As in Australia, there is recognition for the role short films play as a stepping-stone to feature film development, particularly in regards to building capacity within the Indigenous film sector.

The New Zealand Film Commission's mainstream short film programs Fresh Shorts and Premiere Shorts fund up to six shorts at \$10-\$30k and up to eight at \$90k per year. These shorts are selected and produced by three executive producer teams, one of which is usually a Maori team. Four of the six films in competition from New Zealand at Cannes in 2012 were created through these programs and had an Indigenous focus.

TE PAEPAE ATAATA

I see no contradiction at all in making stories which have cultural authenticity and stories that can turn a profit.

- Tainui Stephens, Broadcaster, Producer, New Zealand Film Commission Board Member, 2001-2010

The Commission also supports the recently developed Te Paepae Ataata (meaning Speaker's Bench), an autonomous charitable trust created specifically to support culturally-specific Maori cinema. The New Zealand Film Commission is the main funder of Te Paepae Ataata (Te Paepae) through a devolved fund that represents 20% of the Commission's total annual development spend.

Te Paepae's current focus is to support Maori writers in the development of feature film scripts, and they are active in seeking out first features. Once the scripts are ready for production, Te Paepae takes them directly to the Commission, serving as a broker to the relationship in a similar way to Australia's Indigenous Department.

Tainui Stephens, a broadcaster and producer who is one of the founding members of Te Paepae, states that the purpose of the organization is to bring a Maori sensibility, or way of doing things, into the industry. Because of the growing strength of Maori language, education and Maori TV, Stephens states that, "young people have grown up thinking 'there is a place for me in this industry.'⁶⁹ Te Paepae represents a bridge to those who have not worked with the Commission previously, or who find barriers to accessing the institutional environment.

Te Paepae’s approach is to complement the programs offered by the Film Commission with a focus on reaching new young filmmakers, working within communities, building relationships with tribes, and creating new methods for funding, marketing and distributing Indigenous films. As Stephens says, “There is a big question about the future of cinema full stop. People are interested in hearing new ideas. One of the interesting things that I’ve learned about going to market and putting these ideas out there is that distributors and sales agents are really intrigued [by] our ideas for exhibition and distribution at a community level.”

SUNDANCE INSTITUTE’S NATIVE AMERICAN AND INDIGENOUS PROGRAM

A lot of work that these filmmakers have done have really travelled the world. They’ve played at the Venice Film Festival, the Cannes Film Festival or the Berlinale in Germany. So a lot of these films have transcended just being “Native” films.

- N. Bird Runningwater, Director, Native American and Indigenous Program, Sundance Institute

As a part of the original vision of founder Robert Redford, the Sundance Institute has involved Native American filmmakers since the institute’s inception in 1981. In 1992, the Sundance Institute supported its first Native American screenplay in the Institute’s screenwriters’ lab. In 1994, a Native Forum program at the Sundance Film Festival was formally established and the institute hired a Native director to run it.

Since its founding in 1981, the Sundance Institute has supported nearly 300 Indigenous artists through creative labs, grants, mentorships, public programs and through the platform of the Sundance Film Festival. Some notable projects supported by the Sundance labs include Taika Waititi’s (Maori) *Boy*, the highest-grossing New Zealand film of all time, Sterlin Harjo’s (Seminole, Creek) Independent Spirit-nominated film *Four Sheets to the Wind*, which garnered Canadian actor Tamara Podemski a Special Jury Prize for acting at Sundance in 2007 (the first for any Canadian actor), and *On the Ice*, directed by Andrew Okpeaha Maclean (Inupiat), which was shot in Alaska with an all-Indigenous cast. The film premiered at Sundance in 2011, won two awards in Berlin, and was released in the US to critical acclaim from film critic Roger Ebert and the *Village Voice*.



Boy, Taika Waititi, Director

Through its program and initiatives, the Native American and Indigenous Program has greatly contributed to the evolution of the international Indigenous film circle. Currently the Native program oversees the Native Lab Fellowship, programs Indigenous panels, events and networking opportunities during the Sundance Film Festival, advocates for the inclusion of Indigenous film in the festival, and scouts worldwide for Indigenous projects that can be supported through the Institute’s various programs. Generally, the institute supports 6-8 Indigenous projects per year.



Four Sheets to the Wind, Sterlin Harjo, Director

The Native American and Indigenous Program at the institute is a crucial point of entry into Sundance and into the independent film world. The Native Program plays an essential role in reaching out and discovering new talent. In this capacity, the team establishes and maintains connections with as many Indigenous communities, cultures and regions as possible. Like Erica Glynn’s role at Screen Australia, Bird Runningwater also acts as a “broker” for relationships between the institute and Indigenous filmmakers: “having a Native presence within the Institute furthers our goals of being connected to communities and also allows for more advocacy for Native projects and artists during our selection processes. Often times Native artists and other underrepresented artists don’t apply to mainstream programs, so the presence of Sundance’s Native American and Indigenous Program is a symbol of being welcome and appreciated.”

The Native program runs the annual NativeLab Fellowship, an early-stage development program that aims to strengthen projects before they advance into other development programs. The primary purpose of the NativeLab Fellowship is to support writing and the fellowship occurs in two stages. The first stage is an intensive five-day workshop where the fellows receive feedback on their projects from creative advisors. The second stage of the Native Lab Fellowship brings the fellows together at the festival, and provides them with the opportunity to see the work at the festival, and network with the broader industry.

For the past five years, the NativeLab Fellowship has taken place on the Mescalero Apache Reservation in southern New Mexico. As a part of the five-day intensive workshop, fellows participate in cultural events and engage with cultural museums, thus integrating traditional practices and family into the structure of the lab. The intent behind hosting the labs on Native American land and within an Indigenous community context is to create a safe and nurturing environment for the artists participating.

The NativeLab Fellowship also recognizes that Indigenous artists are often challenged to over-explain the context and cultural specificities of their work, especially to non-Indigenous mentors and advisors. To that end, the program always ensures that 50% of the creative advisors are Indigenous (for the non-Indigenous advisors the program tends to select people of diverse ethnicities or sexual orientation). Bird Runningwater states: “By doing so, the cultural context is ever present and need not be explained, and it also provides a safe space where artists can challenge their own thinking and delve deeper into the creative work they are doing on their stories.”

Barriers and Opportunities

As noted earlier, interviews and a focus group were conducted to determine the specific barriers and opportunities to feature film production that exist for Aboriginal writers, directors and producers in Canada. Responses were analyzed for frequently occurring themes and the following results represent the trends across the surveyed individuals' responses.

Barriers such as access to financing and industry networks may be described as barriers for any filmmaker, not just Aboriginal. However, within each barrier cited, the consultants focused on what seemed to be particular challenges for Aboriginal filmmakers. As a result of both the gap in Aboriginal feature film production, and the momentum of growth in the Aboriginal screen-based sector, a number of opportunities also emerged through the research and interview process and are identified in this section.

INTRODUCTION

The historical legacy of colonization has created many socio-economic challenges for Aboriginal communities. This context is important to note as it means that many Aboriginal communities and youth are already at a disadvantage when it comes to film production. With so many challenges facing Aboriginal communities, it can be difficult to promote film as a viable career option when many are still struggling to get their fundamental needs met. Also, with so few Aboriginal feature films being released into the marketplace and reaching Aboriginal communities, there is still a lack of visible "success stories" to inspire a new generation of filmmakers.

For many Aboriginal filmmakers, there is a strong link between their passion for filmmaking and their own cultural and linguistic expression as Aboriginal peoples in Canada. In Canada, historical laws have led to the systematic repression of traditional storytelling and cultural practices. In the case of film, there is also a history of misrepresentation and mis-use of Aboriginal stories.

For the majority of the filmmakers interviewed, the telling of Aboriginal stories on screen is about much more than creating unique cultural product – it is connected to cultural expression and revitalization and changing the portrayal of Aboriginal people on screen that has been perpetuated throughout cinema history. Therefore, for many Aboriginal filmmakers, their stories and filmmaking processes are linked to their rights and identities as Indigenous people. In this context, questions around story rights and ownership can be complex for Aboriginal filmmakers to navigate. Overall, many filmmakers repeatedly reported that often industry funding and support structures and some industry-standard practices seemed at odds with their values and right to cultural expression.

The barriers described in this section are a result of the interviews and a focus group with Aboriginal filmmakers. This section represents an analysis of the common themes that emerged from the process.

BARRIERS TO ABORIGINAL FEATURE FILM PRODUCTION

1. Systemic barriers and cultural misconceptions

The unique historical relationship between the Government of Canada and the original inhabitants has affected Aboriginal activism and contributes to the racist attitudes and exclusionary practices that pervade all levels of cultural institutions to this day.

- Lee-Ann Martin, Curator of Contemporary Canadian Art, Museum of Civilization⁷⁰

Even at a young age, I knew I had to move behind the camera. I didn't just feel invisible in the world, I felt invisible in the industry I chose to be a part of.

- Jennifer Podemski, Producer/Actor, *Empire of Dirt*⁷¹

There remain few, if any, Aboriginal people represented in the film industry at large, within funding agencies, broadcasting networks, distribution companies, festivals and other film-related organizations. The under representation of Aboriginal people within the industry means that Aboriginal filmmakers must often navigate a “culture gap” when it comes to their work. Aboriginal writers, directors and producers alike cited a lack of cultural understanding of Aboriginal content, process and stories as a barrier to working within the larger industry to develop and produce content. This challenge was manifest within the industry in the relationships between filmmakers and funders, distributors, story editors, broadcasters, potential producing partners, trainers and mentors.

Filmmakers reported being challenged by pre-existing beliefs or perceptions within the industry of what defines an Aboriginal film or content. Some felt as though Aboriginal film was being thought of as a genre. In some cases, expectations about the characteristics of the “genre” were subtle and in some cases came in the form of direct feedback. One producer reported that a funder referred to Aboriginal film as a genre and stated, “we’re caricatures, we’re not people with important things to say and inspirational stories to share and a perspective that’s worth being heard.”

Pre-conceptions about what defines an Aboriginal film affected the feedback received on scripts. Some filmmakers reported that they had received the critique that their content was too niche and specific, and in other cases, not specifically “Indian” enough. As a result of existing stereotypes, filmmakers often felt a need to over-explain the cultural context of their work. A writer/director reported being asked by a broadcaster to remove the original Aboriginal language from a film in order to make it more accessible to mainstream audiences. Another producer recounted that during the many years of development of a feature film, stakeholders urged her to make the film more recognizably Indian in a way that was not authentic to the story or the characters. She said, “We really worked to discover a balance between a cultural storyline, a cultural slant that was meaningful and respectful and full of integrity, but also balancing that with a universal storyline that appealed to the world. And that was really challenging....so it was a big struggle to follow our gut. That is why it took so long (for the film to get made).”

Writers, directors and producers also expressed coming up against industry misconceptions that Aboriginal content will not succeed in the marketplace. In some cases, this misconception was overt, and in others may be unknowingly perpetuated. As a result, filmmakers reported being asked to repeatedly conform to non-Aboriginal preconceptions about what is commercially viable. Aboriginal filmmakers cited that what they considered to be unique and authentic seemed to be at odds with industry preconceptions of what will sell.

2. Access to Industry Partners and Networks

The culture gap was also a hurdle for Aboriginal writers, directors and producers who expressed difficulty in finding project partners. Producing partners were cited as a particular challenge. Writers and directors reported a lack of access to established producers and other industry partners outside of their networks. For Aboriginal filmmakers outside of city centres, networking was particularly challenging.

In addition to overcoming any gaps in cultural understanding with potential partners that may exist, industry standard production agreements needed to access funding and training opportunities were reported to be at odds with the approach to how Aboriginal filmmakers wish to develop their work. In particular, the requirement for writer/directors (and producers working in partnership) to sign away their intellectual property rights in order to access funding is a challenge.

Given the history of misrepresentation of Aboriginal people on screen and mis-use of Aboriginal stories, many filmmakers feel strongly about their rights to own their own stories, and are therefore reluctant to sign away the rights to their stories. In many cases, funding bodies, training institutions and industry standard production agreements require it. In some cases, Aboriginal filmmakers expressed that their reluctance to give their stories away could be misunderstood, therefore hampering the potential working relationships before they even begin.

Some writer and directors expressed a desire to work with Aboriginal producers, as a solution to the challenges of overcoming the barrier of lack of cultural understanding with potential producing partners. However, with very few Aboriginal producers able to access development and production funding, writers and directors felt that their options were limited. There was a need identified for more training and development initiatives geared towards Aboriginal producers.

Aboriginal producers also expressed a desire to work with Aboriginal directors and identified that it can be challenging to bring a new director on to a project that has no previous experience directing a feature film. As there are still very few Aboriginal directors in Canada that have experience directing a feature film, it can make a project a harder sell for producers to attach a director with limited experience. Overall, Aboriginal filmmakers wanted to see higher numbers of Aboriginal writers, directors and producers working in the industry.

As a result of the challenges with partnerships identified, many Aboriginal filmmakers counter this by wearing several hats when it comes to production, making the process very challenging. Although all of the filmmakers we interviewed may have a particular focus on writing and directing or producing, all of them had worked in all three capacities as some point in their careers. Writer/directors reported producing their own work and producers reported writing and directing their own work. In some cases, filmmakers also distributed their own work.

3. Access to Financing

Access to project financing can be a challenge for any filmmaker, however, there were specific barriers for Aboriginal filmmakers identified. Many cited access to the Canada Feature Film Fund (CFFF) at Telefilm as a key barrier, and reported that the loss of the targeted funding program FASP as a stepping-stone to the CFFF had made it more difficult to get a feature film funded.

To access the CFFF under Telefilm's new development guidelines, production companies must have produced a feature film that was theatrically released in Canada in the last five years. Aboriginal production companies have accessed development funding in the past, however, there are very few Aboriginal producers in Canada who currently fit this eligibility criteria, so most Aboriginal production companies cannot directly access development funds from Telefilm. To access development funding, Aboriginal production companies must partner with a production company that has made a feature film that was theatrically released in Canada within the last five years. Aboriginal producers cited the new criteria as a challenge to accessing development funds.

The requirement to enter into partnerships with more experienced production companies pose challenges to Aboriginal production companies. In addition to the culture gap mentioned previously, some filmmakers felt as though the requirement to partner with a senior production company set up an unequal dynamic, where their creative control and ownership of the project may not be protected. Some filmmakers were reluctant to partner with a more senior producer as a way to access funding and instead expressed a desire to enter into strong, equal partnerships where the rights to their stories were preserved. Others were eager to partner but expressed that access to more established producers outside of their networks was a challenge.

Some producers identified the development and/or training cycle as a challenge to getting work into production. Although many training, development and pilot programs offered by funders and training institutions were valued by filmmakers, many filmmakers still found it very challenging to access funds for production, and wanted to see more training programs that resulted in the outcome of a produced work.

In some cases, a lack of capacity was identified by producers when it came to complex navigation of industry funding, including trigger financing, getting a distributor on board and casting. In the case of Aboriginal stories with an Aboriginal cast, some producers lamented the lack of a star system within the Aboriginal community, which makes it challenging to attract financing. Other filmmakers found it difficult to make the transition from either television or short film production.

Television producers that had received funding from the Canada Media Fund's targeted Aboriginal fund, found it difficult to make the transition to film without the support of a similar targeted fund. In some cases, television producers had years of experience of receiving funding from the CMF but could not access development funding through Telefilm for their feature film slate without a senior production company partner. After years of experience, the requirement to partner was cited as a challenge.

In addition, some filmmakers who had received support for years through the Canada Council for the Arts also found it difficult to make the leap from the Council model of funding to the industry model. When filmmakers access development funds through the Canada Council for the Arts, for example, Canada Council guidelines are not compatible with the industry model of financing. The Canada Council requires that filmmakers retain creative control and the rights to their projects, however, it is control and rights that must be signed away within the industry model in order to access funding from other sources. When it comes to production, the cap of \$60,000 was considered to be too low to finance feature film production. Also, filmmakers receiving Canada Council funding struggle to trigger additional financing, as they would then be required to sign agreements that affect creative control and project rights, which are in opposition to the requirements set out by the Council.

Producers also mentioned that the cost of filming in remote and northern regions is much higher and Aboriginal producers are more likely to be developing projects set on reserve or in northern Aboriginal communities. Some pointed to the Canada Council and other provincial arts councils that have been proactive in recognizing this barrier, creating additional funding specifically to address the cost disparity for those making work in the north.

4. Access to Distribution

Personally, I am interested in more Native films. I think it's a shame we don't have more of them...I imagine there is a wealth of stories there to be told.

- Hussain Amarshi, Founder and President, Mongrel Media

Distribution is a notable challenge for all feature filmmakers currently working in Canada. However, there are additional barriers in terms of distribution for Aboriginal filmmakers, and this was cited by many participants of the focus group and the one-on-one interviews. Due to a profound lack of infrastructure on reserves and in remote Aboriginal communities, it is difficult to fully and accurately track box office numbers for films that are distributed to audiences in these regions. Even when they are tracked, they are not considered “box office” if they do not take place within a cinema. Many filmmakers self-distribute their films and the attendance and reception of their work to communities is not factored into the success equation.

The current criteria that measure a film's box office track record are a barrier for Aboriginal filmmakers, who are working within a relatively untested market for Aboriginal feature films. Many interview participants stated that the absence of a box office track record in Canada made it difficult for them to make their case about the commercial viability of their projects.

With so few distributors in Canada that can trigger financing, access to distribution is a key challenge in the sector and there is a need to examine and develop more opportunities within distribution for Aboriginal feature films. Many writers, directors and producers wanted a chance to compete in the marketplace but expressed that within the current distribution framework, misconceptions still exist that Aboriginal content is difficult to sell. The challenge that remains is developing a delivery portal for content that is sustainable and tracking systems that can reflect audience numbers in Aboriginal communities.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCREASING ABORIGINAL FEATURE FILM PRODUCTION IN CANADA

The authors of this report see the following opportunities as potential areas that could be explored to increasing Aboriginal film production in Canada. These areas for further discussion and collaboration between filmmakers, funders and other industry sectors are based on information gathered from the filmmaker focus group, one-on-one interviews, and research on international models that have demonstrated success.

SHORT-TERM OPPORTUNITIES

1. Consider on-going short film production initiatives

Although filmmakers may access short film funding through the Canada Council, an ongoing short film production initiative targeted to filmmakers who may be on the cusp of making the leap into feature film will increase the numbers of filmmakers ready to advance into feature film production.

2. Explore models for an Aboriginal feature film development lab

Script development is essential to feature film production and the goal of this initiative could be to support filmmakers with screenwriting during this important stage of filmmaking. A development lab focused on screenwriting support could be run through any number of existing training institutions, however, it is important that an intensive lab such as this be Indigenous-managed and involve Indigenous mentors.

3. Explore the feasibility of an Aboriginal feature film production fund

Targeted funds towards Aboriginal production have boosted the Indigenous film sector in Canada and beyond. The Canada Media Fund's targeted Aboriginal television fund has played a key role in the vitality of the Aboriginal television sector in Canada, the most robust sector of the Aboriginal screen-based media industry. Targeted funding at the Canada Council for the Arts, and internationally at Screen Australia, have also made a significant impact. An Aboriginal feature film production fund could be feasible if funders and industry partners aligned resources. A low or micro-budget feature film program such as the Indigenous Department's Feature Initiative at Screen Australia is one example of a model.

4. Discuss setting targets to increase Aboriginal representation within funding agencies, broadcasting agencies, distributors and training institutions

An increase in Aboriginal representation within organizations and institutions in the screen-based sector would address a number of challenges and create a crucial bridge between institutions and communities by boosting outreach efforts and talent scouting. Aboriginal representation also creates an environment where filmmakers feel as though an Aboriginal cultural context will be understood and it also promotes cultural understanding within the larger institution. It also addresses systemic barriers that have led to the exclusion and low levels of participation of Aboriginal people in our society's key institutions and media.

5. Consider revising systems/definitions to better track and measure the sector

Without a clear definition of Aboriginal film, many institutions cannot effectively track films made by Aboriginal writers, directors and producers. An optional declaration on application forms could be highly effective in tracking Aboriginal films. Also, further discussion of what defines an Aboriginal production within feature film funding systems is needed. For example, the Canada Media Fund defines an Aboriginal production as a production company in which a self-declared Aboriginal person owns 51% of the production company and copyright in the eligible project. This criteria enables Aboriginal producers to enter into strong, equal partnerships where their intellectual property rights are protected. There are also opportunities to track screenings in communities and on reserves, as well as emerging markets outside Canada for Aboriginal films. In addition, current eligibility criteria for feature film funding could be revisited to enable Aboriginal filmmakers and existing experienced production companies to transition into feature filmmaking from either short or television production.

6. Consider a producer match-making initiative

There is room to explore ways in which Aboriginal filmmakers could pitch their work to interested producers, expand their industry network, and access collaborative opportunities and mentoring.

LONG-TERM OPPORTUNITIES

7. Consider a producer-training initiative for Aboriginal producers

More Aboriginal producers are needed to create a robust and thriving talent pool for the sector. It is worth discussing whether training programs exclusive to producers would be beneficial with specific talent development aimed at creating skills for Aboriginal people in this key role. Business development training was identified as a key barrier for Aboriginal filmmakers, who often take on the role of producer without adequate training because they are unable to find like-minded producing partners for their films.

8. Examine the success of dedicated Aboriginal film offices in other jurisdictions

The Indigenous Film Department is a singular model of success for Indigenous filmmaking in the world. The careers nurtured at the Department are defining the landscape of Australian cinema, as well as moving on to produce ground-breaking television series. In New Zealand, Te Pae Pae Ataata is just starting the work of fostering emerging talent and connecting with communities to create new distribution platforms. These models could be explored to create new opportunities in Canada.

9. Research new distribution models that would increase audiences and create niche markets for Aboriginal film

While distribution remains a key barrier for all filmmakers in Canada, new opportunities may be found in the realm of digital distribution, an area still in development. Digital distribution models may be moving towards niche audiences for packaging content, with the idea that global audiences will drive demand for niche and targeted programming. If this proves to be the case, Indigenous films will have the potential to reach a global niche market of Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences seeking this content. The interconnectivity of global online Indigenous communities offers a potential niche market for content distribution.

CONCLUSION

The past decade has seen an incredible rise in the Aboriginal screen-based sector in Canada. Aboriginal media makers have been winning top awards in Canada for their work and gaining international recognition on the festival circuit at leading festivals around the world. Funding agencies, training institutions, and a vibrant network of Aboriginal film festivals in Canada have contributed to the success of the sector. However, a scan of sector reveals a gap — there are still very few dramatic feature films being produced each year by Aboriginal writers, directors and producers, particularly when compared to other countries with similar histories and contemporary realities.

Internationally in Australia and New Zealand, a long-term investment and strategy by public funding agencies aimed at the Indigenous production sector has led to an Indigenous film renaissance within both countries. This strategy has proliferated an entire generation of Indigenous filmmakers who have put Australia and New Zealand on the map by winning awards in recent years at Cannes, Berlin and Sundance, as well as garnering domestic box office success.

Within Canada, interviews with Aboriginal writers, directors, producers and key industry stakeholders reveal that there are still barriers to feature film production, including a lack of access to financing, industry perceptions that Aboriginal feature films will not succeed within the marketplace, a lack of cultural understanding, and a lack of access to networks and distribution.

Strategic initiatives such as an Aboriginal short film production fund, an Aboriginal feature film development lab, and targeted Aboriginal feature film funding programs within public funding agencies are needed to boost the sector within Canada. Aboriginal representation within public agencies and cultural institutions has also been identified as a priority, as well as the establishment of Aboriginal film offices within public agencies across the media sector as a long-term goal.

The rise of the sector within Canada and the astonishing critical and box office reception of international Indigenous feature films demonstrates a huge potential for Canadian Aboriginal feature films to succeed on the festival circuit and within the marketplace. With key strategic initiatives and investment in place to boost the sector, Canada will create a new legacy of inclusion and solidify its place as a leader in original Indigenous content that will shape our cultural landscape for years to come.

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ADDENDUM: Interview List

Canadian Interviews and Filmmaker Focus Group Participants

- 1 Hussain Amarshi, President and Founder, Mongrel Media
- 2 Jeff Barnaby (Mi'kmaq), Filmmaker, Montreal, QC
- 3 Jeff Bear (Maliseet), Urban Rez Productions, Vancouver, BC
- 4 Shane Belcourt (Métis), Filmmaker, Toronto, ON
- 5 Carolle Brabant, Executive Director, Telefilm Canada
- 6 Dr. Shirley Cheechoo (Cree), Filmmaker, Founding Artistic and Executive Director, Weengushk Film Institute, M'Chigeeng First Nation, ON
- 7 Norman Cohn, Producer and Co-Founder, Isuma Productions, Montreal, QC
- 8 Marie Clements (Métis/Dene), Filmmaker, Vancouver, BC
- 9 John Galway, English-Language Program President, Astral's Harold Greenberg Fund
- 10 John Gill, CEO, National Screen Institute
- 11 Barbara Hager (Cree/Métis), Aarrow Productions and Founder, Alliance of Aboriginal Media Producers, Victoria, BC
- 12 Tasha Hubbard (Nehiyaw/Nakawe), Filmmaker, Assistant Professor, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, SK
- 13 Melissa Kajpust, Director, Programming, National Screen Institute
- 14 Lisa Jackson (Anishnaabe), Genie Award-winning Filmmaker, Vancouver, BC
- 15 Adam Garnet Jones (Cree/Metis), Filmmaker, Toronto, ON
- 16 Michelle Latimer (Métis), Filmmaker, Toronto, ON
- 17 Kathleen Meek, Manager, Original Programming, The Movie Network
- 18 Charlotte Mickie, Executive Vice President, International Sales and Acquisitions, Entertainment One Films International

- 19 Laura Milliken (Ojibway), Big Soul Productions, Toronto, ON
- 20 Shelley Niro (Mohawk), Filmmaker, Six Nations, ON
- 21 Darlene Naponse (Ojibway), Pine Needle Blanket Productions, Whitefish Lake First Nation, ON
- 22 Jennifer Podemski (Anishnaabe), Producer/Actor, Six Nations, ON
- 23 Michel Pradier, Director, Project Financing, Telefilm Canada
- 24 Jeremy Torrie (Ojibway), Producer/Writer/Director, Winnipeg, MB
- 25 Jesse Wente (Ojibway), Head of Film Programmes, TIFF Bell Lightbox

International Industry and Filmmaker Interviews

- 1 Sally Riley, Head of Australian Broadcasting Corporation's (ABC TV) Indigenous Department
- 2 Erica Glynn, Head, Indigenous Department, Screen Australia
- 3 Graeme Mason, Chief Executive Officer, Screen Australia (Former Chief Executive, New Zealand Film Commission)
- 4 Tainui Stephens, Producer/Writer/Director, Board Member, New Zealand Film Commission (2001-2010), Founding Member, Te Paepae Ataata
- 5 Lisa Chatfield, Manager, Short Film Fund, New Zealand Film Commission
- 6 N. Bird Runningwater, Director, Native American and Indigenous Program, Sundance Institute, Los Angeles, CA
- 7 Matthijs Wouter Knol, Programme Manager, Berlinale Talent Campus, Berlin
- 8 Taika Waititi, Writer/Director (*Boy*), New Zealand
- 9 Warwick Thornton, Writer/Director (*Samson and Delilah*), Alice Springs, Australia
- 10 Kath Shelper, Scarlett Pictures (*Samson and Delilah*), Australia
- 11 Andrew Okpeaha Maclean, Writer/Director (*On the Ice*), New York, USA

