

A dark studio setting with silhouettes of two people and various lighting equipment. The scene is dimly lit, with the primary light source being the equipment itself, creating a moody atmosphere. The silhouettes of two people are prominent in the center, one standing near a cart with a laptop and another standing slightly to the right. The background is a plain, light-colored wall, and the ceiling is visible with its grid structure and some lighting fixtures.

# INCLUSIVITY IN CANADA'S SCREEN MEDIA SECTOR

HOW SOCIAL  
CAPITAL IS THE  
MISSING LINK

POV

## Acknowledgements

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We are greatly appreciative of the participants who took the time to respond to the online survey and participate in the qualitative interviews.

This research was conducted in partnership with:



All procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the ethical standards of the Seneca Research Ethics board and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants involved in this study.

# Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Overview</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Project Aims.....	9
Research Approach.....	9
Research Context & Limitations.....	9
<b>Social Capital in Canada’s Screen sector</b> .....	<b>12</b>
Why is social capital important? How is it used? .....	12
What makes a good network?.....	14
Who has access to ‘good’ networks?.....	16
Why do differences in network composition matter? .....	20
How does social capital influence network mobility & sector access? .....	21
<b>Recommendations</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>40</b>
<b>Appendix</b> .....	<b>41</b>
Study Demographics.....	41
Programs & Funds Reviewed.....	45

## Executive Summary

In 2019, POV conducted research that brought to life some of the ways social capital works to shape sector access for historically underrepresented and equity-deserving professionals (POV, 2019). This study contributed to a growing body of research that revealed how sector models relying on informal, reputationally driven recruitment processes disproportionately limit the participation and advancement of certain creatives, often according to ascriptive<sup>1</sup> characteristics (e.g., gender, ethnicity, disability) (see McDonald, 2011; Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2012; Lutter, 2015; Verhoeven et al., 2020).

This study explores how social capital operates in Canada’s screen media sector, with a focus on the relationships between the *kinds of social capital* valued in the sector, how this kind of social capital is built or acquired, and by whom; how it is leveraged, and how the dominance of a single (white) culture within the sector, contributes to differential experiences of access among equity-deserving creatives (see Thakore, Moore & Embrick, 2020; Dunn et al., 2021; Knight, 2022).

### Key Findings

- **Social capital** is a form of mobility that involves **being connected to and having status** with the **right people** in a way that **provides reliable access to critical resources and opportunities**.
- Social capital both **directly provides access to resources** (e.g., close relationships and referrals) and **mediates access to resources** (e.g., credibility, experience, ways of working). It is **essential** for building **trust**, getting **jobs**, career **advancement**, accessing creatives and **decision-makers**, and establishing creative **credibility**.
- **Culture and identity shape network composition**. Equity-deserving professionals spend more effort, more time, and need more ‘proof’ to build trust and benefit from sector relationships.
- **Relational practices of sector members around identity embed cultural scripts into sector-shaping processes** (e.g., definitions of creative credibility and ‘talent’). The predominance of white, cis professionals (often men) throughout the sector has embedded white cultural scripts into the sector’s understanding of social capital, and gives white, cis creatives inherent access to the currency most needed to access sector resources and opportunities.
- Many sector ‘rules’ are set according to **white social norms**. Even though these social norms are unconnected to the nature of the work, they seem to be **treated as synonymous with professionalism, and used as proxies for creative competence and credibility**.
- **Unwritten ‘rules’ also apply to what makes quality storytelling**. Black and People of Colour professionals are often required to **reconstruct projects to centre white narratives / ways of storytelling**.
- **Strategies for increasing social capital are premised on the experiences of white cis men**, but these strategies are **not equally available to all creatives or received in the same ways** when coming from creatives of different identities.

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<sup>1</sup>Ascription occurs people are placed in positions in a stratification system because of qualities beyond their control (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, disability, age, religion, socioeconomic status).

- **Development programs**, networking events, and other interventions **do not confer the social capital** expected.
- **Programs reproduce systemic exclusions** and introduce new lines of inquiry about who supports programs and **how to create ecosystems that equitably connect** the sector with diverse, representative talent.
- Hierarchical dynamics within some **mentoring relationships enact a form of gatekeeping** by promoting definitions of quality that reflect **white norms and standards**. These put **equity-deserving creatives** in constant pursuit of credibility against criteria that **do not reflect their experiences** or support **authentic storytelling**.
- Whiteness and cisness communicate immediate value in a variety of sector spaces, **and this inherent value offers a strong foundation upon which to build further capital**.
- Equity-deserving creatives **must work to be seen by the sector** by first gaining access to be *present* in sector spaces, and then by performing the relational labour required to be **recognized as credible creatives within those spaces**. This includes being recognized for their talent **beyond their identity** (i.e., rather than being viewed as a token of 'diversity').
- It is **not only the people in decision-making roles that govern access**, but the **embedded notions of quality** and talent that are **tied to whiteness and cisness** that require **equity-deserving creatives to consistently and repeatedly 'prove'** they 'deserve' to be attributed the value that is more automatically assigned to white cis creatives in sector spaces.
- Conflated relationships between whiteness, creative credibility/talent, and social capital require many equity-deserving creatives to choose between authentic representation and sector access. **A reliable way for many equity-deserving participants to gain social capital and increase sector access was to *make their authentic selves less visible***.
- **Commodifying 'diversity'** has become a way for some white cis creatives and organizations to **acquire social and economic benefits**.

## Why does this matter?

Despite various commitments, programs, and other initiatives initiated by sector gatekeepers that have attempted to improve workforce equity for equity-deserving creatives, on-going research suggests progress has been disappointingly limited. While a variety of factors contribute to the continued perpetuation of exclusionary practices, the relative ineffectiveness of well-intended interventions presents a pressing need to better understand the features and functioning of social capital as the primary currency of Canada's screen media sector.

## Project Aims

The purpose of this project is to dive deeply into the relational practices that characterize Canada's Screen Media sector to:

1. Define sector-specific social capital,
2. Identify methods of building social capital; and,
3. Identify actions to support building/transforming existent capital into sector-relevant social/cultural capital.







## Overview

*Social capital is a resource that exists through our relationships; the groups we are part of, and the organizations that shape us. The degree to which we trust and are trusted in this network of relationships constitutes our social capital.*

Canada's screen sector has enjoyed significant economic and creative development over the last number of years. Alongside this growth, we have seen increasing interest and investments in sector research that has brought new insights into the sector's structure (e.g., Nordicity, 2021b), composition (e.g., WIV, 2020) and functioning (e.g., DGC, 2018; POV, 2019; DeRosa & Burgess, 2020; I.M.P.A.C.T., 2021; Knight, 2022). An important contribution of this work has been to substantiate long held, but until now anecdotal, narratives about how the sector 'works': how is it accessed and navigated, by whom, and under what conditions.

The insularity of screen media sectors is well-documented (e.g., POV, 2019; Nordicity, 2021a; Knight, 2022). Project-based funding, development, production, and employment practices are managed through deep networks of personal and professional relationships (POV, 2019; Knight, 2022). In this environment, relationships and reputations are the central currencies alongside talent and creative credibility, making social capital essential to accessing jobs, funding, and other resources, and for structuring the overall market.

The highly competitive, precarious nature of creative work is often used to rationalize this sector model by claiming to ensure the quality and reliability of talent crewing a project (thus protecting the quality of the production).

These practices, however, lead to closed, concentrated networks of working creatives who control the lion's share of sector resources (funding, creative opportunities, jobs, etc.).

Over time, this can give rise to a singular industrial culture in which the norms and practices of the dominant group become synonymous with the definitions of quality used to regulate sector access (Verhoeven et al., 2020).

In 2019, POV conducted research that brought to life some of the ways social capital works to shape sector access for historically underrepresented and equity-deserving professionals (POV, 2019). This study contributed to a growing body of research that reveals how sector models relying on informal, reputationally driven recruitment processes disproportionately limit the participation and advancement of certain creatives, often according to ascriptive<sup>2</sup> characteristics (e.g., gender, ethnicity, disability) (McDonald, 2011; Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2012; Lutter, 2015; Verhoeven et al., 2020).

This study explores how social capital operates in Canada's screen media sector, with a focus on the relationships between the *kinds of social capital* valued in the sector, how this kind of social capital is built or acquired, and by whom; how it is leveraged, and how the dominance of a single (white) culture within the sector, contributes to differential experiences of access among equity-deserving creatives (see Thakore, Moore & Embrick, 2020; Dunn et al., 2021; Knight, 2022).

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3. Identify actions to support building/transforming existent capital into sector-relevant social/cultural capital.

## Research Approach

The research began with a review of the current sector landscape, including existing social capital research.

This context was followed by two complementary phases: (1) An Online Sector Survey, and (2) Qualitative interviews and focus groups.

A total of 325 participants responded to the online survey and 56 participated in the follow up interviews.

## Sector Survey

The study employed established social research survey methods to collect input from sector professionals across roles, and at every career stage to share their understanding, perspectives, and experiences of social capital in the sector.

The survey was distributed through direct email to POV's extensive professional, participant, and alumni networks, by sector organizations and partner associations to their memberships by email and newsletter, by some educational institutions by list-serv email, film festivals, and community programs; and by posting in popular Facebook groups that act as job resources for the sector.

## Qualitative Interviews & Focus Groups

Sector interviews made it possible to cover a range of topics beyond what possible to cover in surveys, providing depth and context to the survey-based data. These interviews were opportunities to explore findings and themes from the survey data – to examine the 'why' and 'how' behind the perspectives shared. Interview participants were drawn from participants who volunteered for follow up during the sector survey, key contacts of POV and the research team, and sector professionals referred to by study participants.

## Research Context & Limitations

### Legacy of distrust

Although the Canadian Screen Media sector has recently started to collect identity information, this practice has not been in place long enough to establish an accurate baseline, nor to build trust regarding how these data are used. Many equity-deserving participants are reluctant to self-identify due to long histories of oppression and discrimination, and concerns about the protection of identity and privacy.

Without a benchmark, it is difficult to ascertain the representativeness of the study's sample population beyond Canada's Census (which uses different categories to describe sector and employment than are used by the sector at large).

Additionally, the oppressive experiences that have made it unsafe for equity-deserving professionals to self-identify are equally likely to discourage participation in these early research efforts (due to historic lack of trust).

### Participant representation

The sample population of this study reflects an overrepresentation on three demographic variables:

**Location.** Participants in this study reported working predominantly in Ontario which is due in part to Toronto's popularity for film and television production and the location of the sponsoring organization (POV).

**Language.** This study was conducted primarily in English, and therefore represents the experiences of the Anglophone community within Canada's Screen Media sector. Research dedicated to understanding the experiences of Francophone creators, conducted exclusively in French, is encouraged to reflect the sector dynamics in Québec.

**Gender.** Most respondents identified as female (62.6%), which is an overrepresentation according to broader industry data.

### Reporting

Participants included members from a wide range of communities, reflecting a broad set of identities. The scope of this research, combined with the current workforce composition of Canada's screen sector, means that not all communities had

sufficient participation to be differentiated in this reporting while maintaining anonymity.

This research explored social capital at the sector-level, with the aim of gathering preliminary insights about the role of social capital in the sector. At this level, participants' responses tended to cluster according to equity positionality. To show the magnitude of this discrepancy (i.e., between equity-deserving creatives and non-equity seeking creatives), this research segments the data according to participants' identification as members of communities that have experienced marginalization.

When differences reported by participants with specific identities and intersectionalities were statistically significant, the experiences of these participants are presented separately in the report.

Similarities in the experiences reported by Black, People of Colour, Indigenous, 2SLGBTIQ+ and People with disabilities in this study, does not suggest these experiences are 'the same' across all settings.

It is expected that these communities, and the intersectional identities within these communities have experiences related to sector access and the use of social capital that call for dedicated recruitment and exploration that goes beyond the scope of this research.

This work would build upon these preliminary findings to support the development of specific interventions that meet the needs of each community.





## Social Capital in Canada’s Screen sector

Canada’s Screen Media sector follows a project-based model of film and television funding, development, production, and employment. Teams and crews are assembled, disassembled, and reassembled according to the needs of each project, with recruitment occurring primarily through personal networks of creatives known to producers through previous experiences or recommendations. This use of networks is viewed as a reliable means of crewing projects – often on short notice – in a way that ensures the creative and technical credibility of those hired.

In a sector environment in which scarcity narratives prevail (i.e., there is ‘never enough’ funding; one mistake can cost a career), and in which personal power is predicated on reputational risk, the importance of working with teams of creatives that others know and trust cannot be underestimated. This also makes social capital a key feature of the labour market (POV, 2019; Knight, 2022).

Participants in this study defined sector social capital as:

*A form of mobility that involves being connected to and having status with the right people in a way that provides reliable access to critical resources and opportunities.*

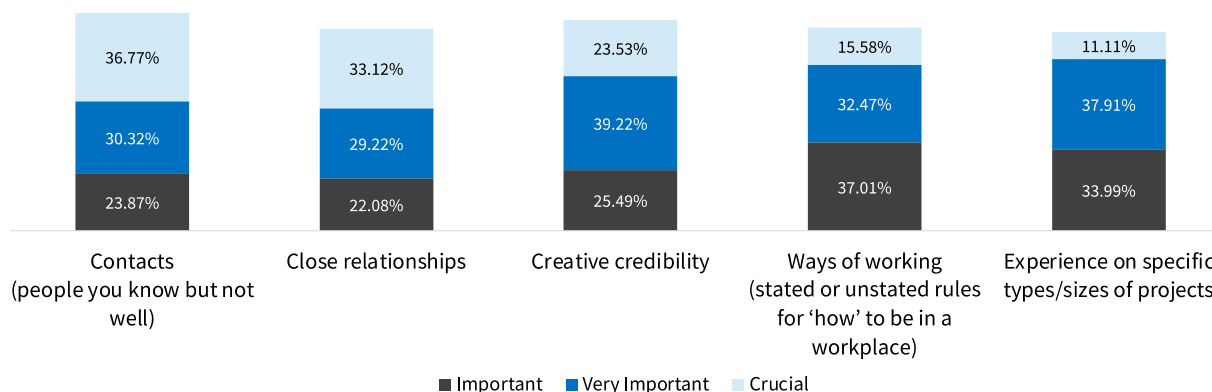
And reported that when someone has high levels of social capital in the sector, they:



### Why is social capital important? How is it used?

Participants were asked to rank, by level of importance, several factors previously identified as necessary for gaining and maintaining access to sector resources (e.g., people, jobs, funding).

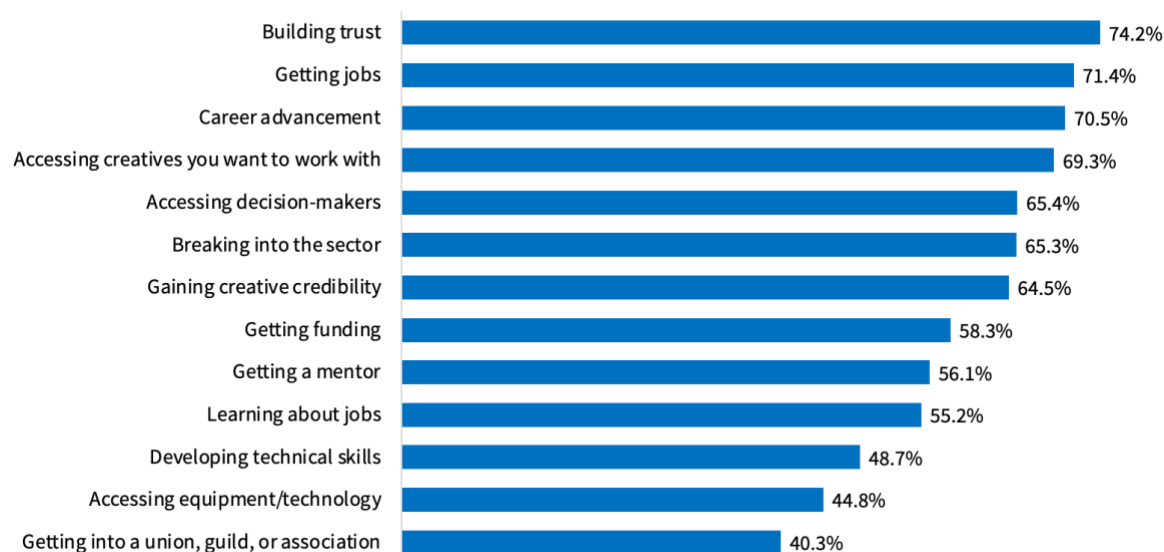
The top five factors included:



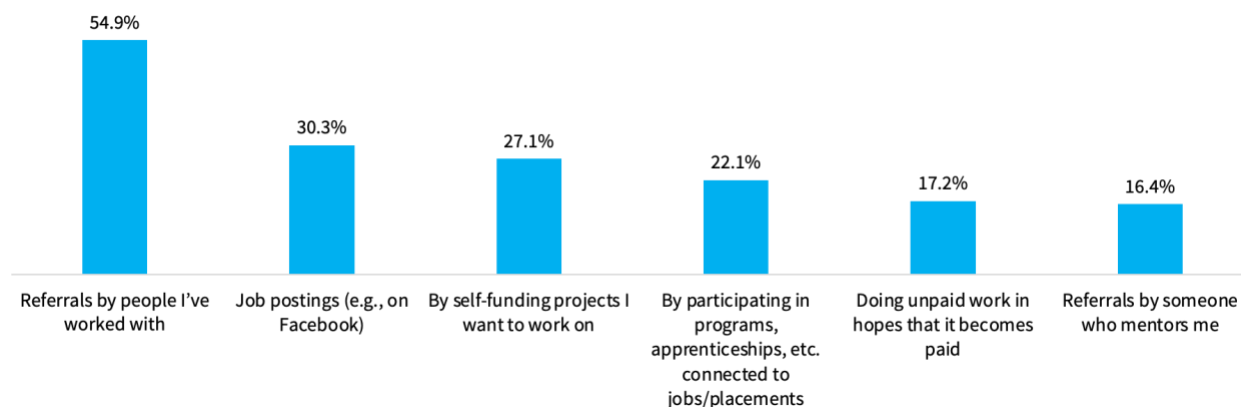


Two of the top five (contacts and close relationships) are **direct examples of social capital**, while the **remaining three** (creative credibility, experience, ways of working) are **mediated by social capital** (i.e., social capital provides access to projects, credibility is conferred by others, and ways of working are communicated through relationships).

Indeed, participants clarified these dependencies when asked to identify **types of access for which social capital is absolutely critical**, including building trust (74.2%), getting jobs (71.4%), overall career advancement (70.5%), accessing creatives (69.3%) and decision-makers (65.4%), and establishing creative credibility (64.5%).



The use of relationships and one’s personal/professional networks were also central to how participants continue find work across all career stages.



Overall, 91% of participants reported that *being connected to, and having status with, the right people was important or crucial (make or break) for success*, while *having close relationships with the right people was*

deemed *important or crucial (make or break)* by 84.4% of participants. In other words, **having a good network really matters.**

## What makes a good network?

Three aspects determined the **amount of social capital contained in a person's sector network**: the *size* of the network (the *number* of people you are connected to), the *composition* of the network (*who* you are connected to), and the *quality* of that network (what the people in the network can give you further access to).

Additionally, good networks are bound by three types of social ties:

**Bonding ties** which represent close connections to people with *similar social characteristics* (e.g., similar age, gender, ethnicity).

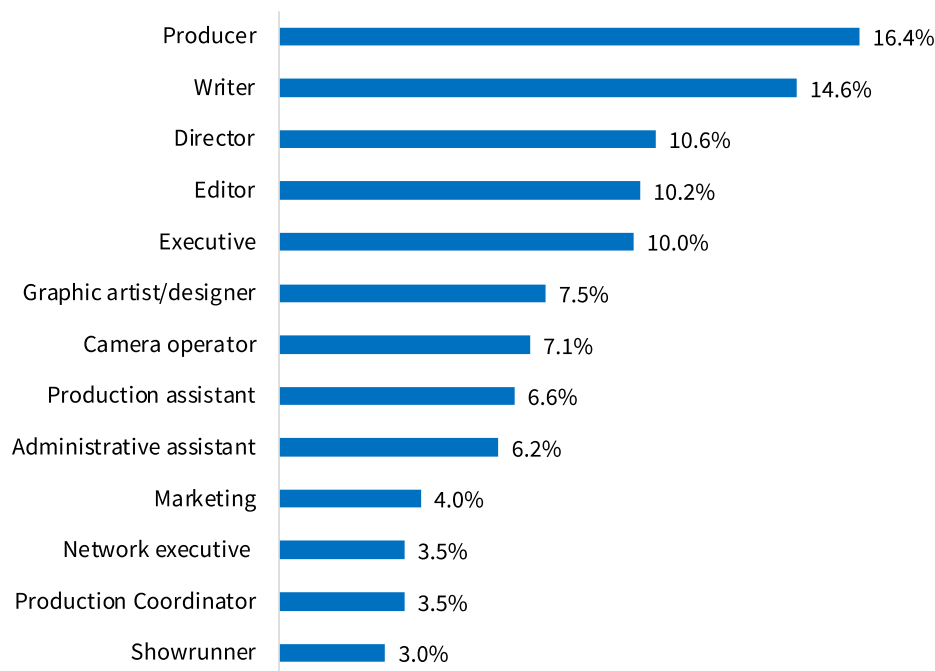
**Bridging ties** which refer to close connections to people with *different social characteristics* (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity).

**Linking ties** which are close connections who hold *different hierarchical positions* and are connected to different networks of people.

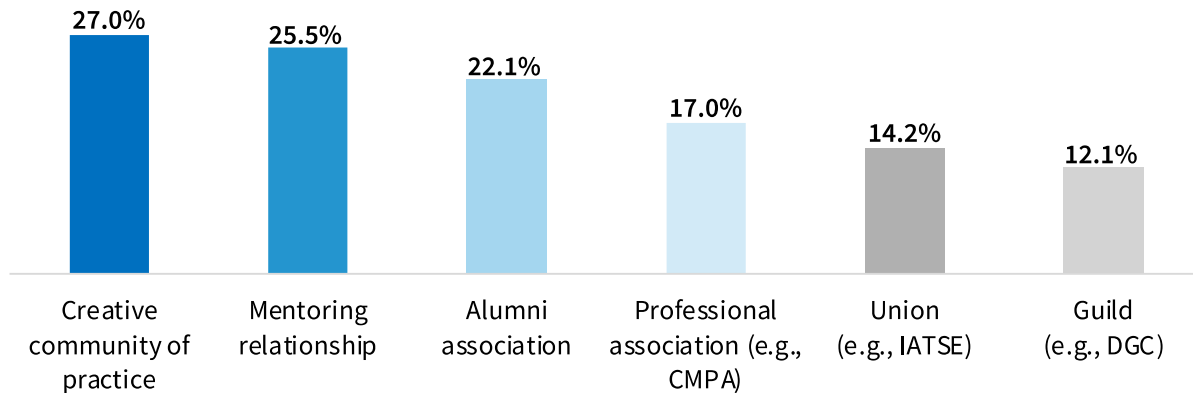
### Network Composition

To examine network **composition**, participants were asked about the roles they currently occupy, the size of projects they work on, the groups they belong to (e.g., unions, guilds, alumni associations), and the people they tend to work with most often.

#### Roles Occupied



### Group Memberships

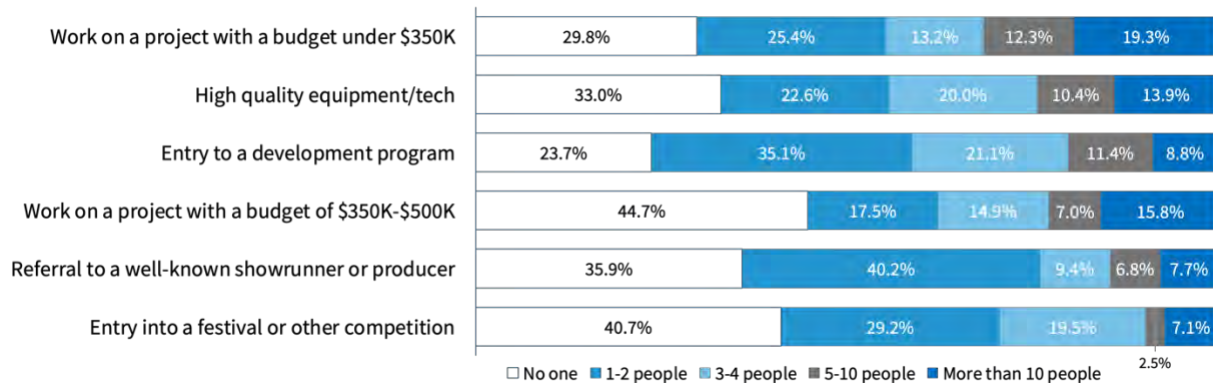


Overall, participants reported most often working with *people they have worked with before and know socially* (32.8%) – bonding ties - and *people they have worked with before and do not know socially* (23.8%) – bridging ties.

### Network Quality

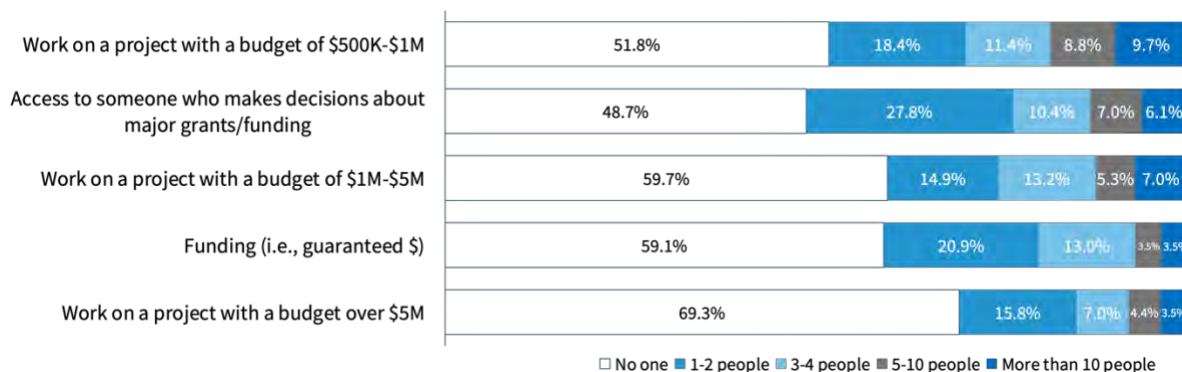
To explore network **quality**, participants were asked to report on the number of people who could give them access to a series of important resources *within the next week*, such as work on a project of various budget sizes, referrals to influential decision-makers, funding, access to high quality equipment, and entry into a development program.

*How many people do you personally know who could and would give you access to the following opportunities?*



As might be expected, the number of people who could provide participants with **reliable access to resources** decreased as the value of the resource increased (e.g., as the project budget increased).

*How many people do you personally know who could and would give you access to the following opportunities?*



### Who has access to ‘good’ networks?

Traditional social capital research often takes a social network analysis approach to examining the potential ‘value’ contained within a network. This involves tracing the connection points between major players and seeing who they are connected to in the sector (e.g., identifying a main actor, identifying who occupies key creative roles across several of their projects, and tracking who those individuals tend to work with). While this provides important insights about the ways power and resources cluster around individual or small groups of creatives, it offers limited clarity about *how the relational practices of those individuals influence network composition* and go on to dictate potential resource access.

Understanding these relational practices is important because, particularly in project-based industries, the **centrality of networks in dictating market structure can have the knock-on effect of ingraining particular kinds of capital into sector-shaping processes** (e.g., social norms of relationship-building, definitions of creative credibility or ‘talent’) that can become exclusionary (Lutter, 2015; Verhoeven et al., 2020). Networks that tend to concentrate around **shared identities can give rise to a dominant culture** over the long-term.



*Social capital is very much connected to your reputation and your performance at work.*

*You’re only as good as your last gig.*

This leads to the **established scripts and understandings of that culture becoming synonymous with social capital** in the sector and means that creatives who are part of dominant culture automatically have the currency required to access resources, people, and opportunities in the sector - even *before* factoring in talent – while those who do not share this culture do not (Lutter, 2015).

Given the continued dominance of white cis creatives in decision-making roles in Canada’s Screen Media sector, it was important to understand whether and how these factors play into the distribution of ‘good’ networks.



Accordingly, three guiding questions were used to explore the distribution of ‘good’ networks in this study:

- What roles, sizes of projects and decision-making authority do participants have?
- Who do participants tend to be in relationship with?
- What do participants have access to through their networks of relationships?

Tracking the distribution of power and resources among individual participants (i.e., roles occupied, project sizes, etc.) **defines who has resources.**

Identifying who participants tend to be in relationship with clarifies **where resources are concentrated** (individual creatives with resources who are connected created a concentration of those resources).

And asking participants about what they can access through their networks defines the **wealth of their network.**

Several variables were applied during this analysis, including career stage, years in the sector, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and disability, with a focus on intersectionality. However, these analyses produced only one delineation that consistently returned significantly distinct findings<sup>3</sup>:

- Participants who self-identified as members of a group that has experienced marginalization / is considered ‘equity-deserving’ in the sector (i.e., identified as Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, People with disability, 2SLGBTQIA+, gender marginalized).
- Participants who reported that they did *not* consider themselves members of a group that has experienced systemic marginalization. Notably, 96.3% of these participants identified as white; 92.9 % identified as heterosexual; 48.4% identified as cis-men and 49.5% as cis-women.

Given this distribution of identities and the prevalence of whiteness and cisness in the sector, for the purposes of this report the following comparisons anchor the presentation of findings:

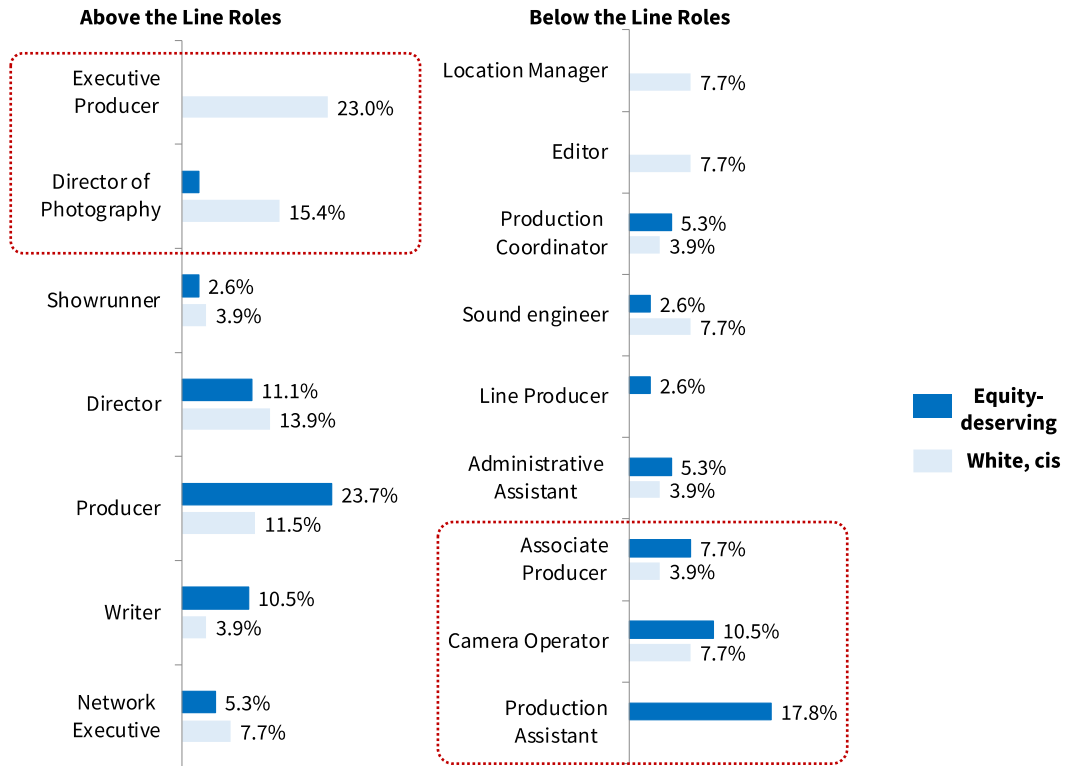
- Participants who self-identify as **equity-deserving creatives**, which includes creatives who are Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, People with disability, and /or 2SLGBTQIA+.
- **White, cis participants**

Significant differences that emerged *within* each of these groups are presented when they occur (e.g., specific experiences for creatives with certain intersectional identities among equity-deserving creatives; gender-based differences among white cis participants). In the absence of measurable differences, these overall groupings are used to demonstrate and detail differential experiences of social capital and access in the sector.

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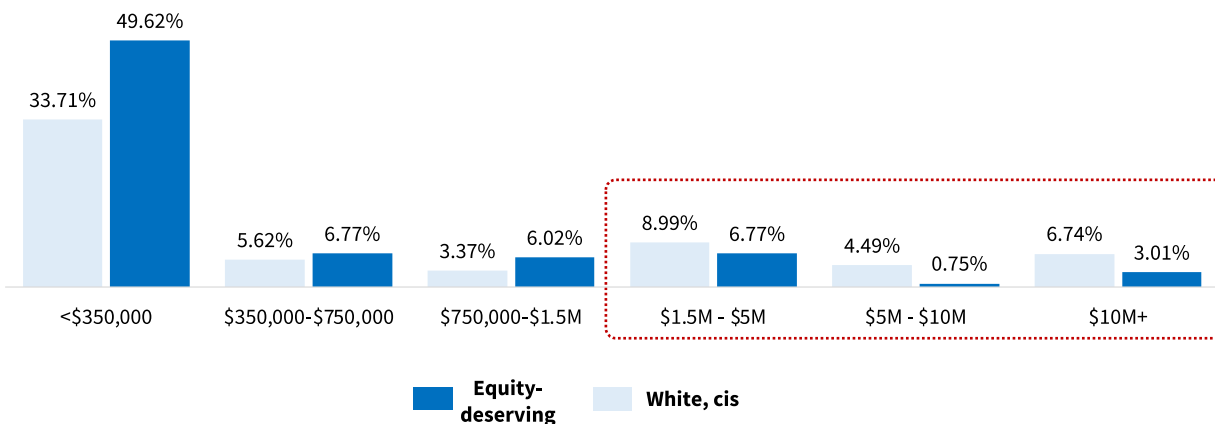
<sup>3</sup> The fact that there are two main groupings is incidental. The analyses explored multiple groups and groupings, without any expectation of the number or distribution that would emerge. The most overt and reliable distinctions occurred between equity-deserving and white cis participants, without significant differences within them. When such differences do emerge, they are presented separately in this report.

### Roles Occupied



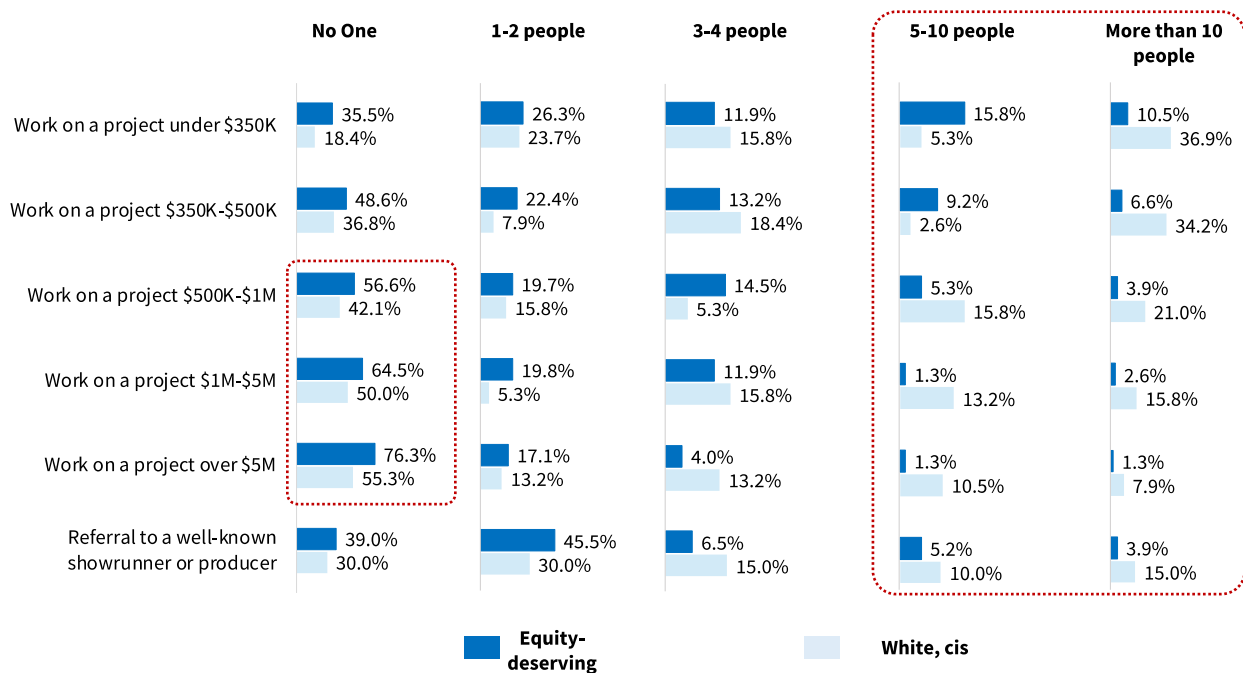
Overall, white cis participants occupied the most key creative roles, tended to work on higher-budget projects, and reported the most resource access. Together, these findings suggest white cis participants in this study had the highest quality networks.

### Average Project Budget Size



In contrast, proportionally fewer equity-deserving participants reported occupying key creative or decision-making roles, working on higher-budget projects, and considering this, reported predictably lower overall levels of resource access, especially to higher-value resources (e.g., higher budget projects).

*How many people do you personally know who could and would give you access to the following opportunities?*



Interestingly, this pattern held, independently of factors that might be expected to increase resource access / network quality – such as later career phases or more years in the sector:

- White cis creatives with more experience in the sector had more access to larger budget projects, to important decision makers, and to funding. This was true not only in terms of more white cis participants having *reliable* access to these resources, but also in terms of the *number of connections who could provide this access*. That is, **white participants reported having direct access to more resources through more people in their networks.**

This study included dedicated outreach to organizations supporting People with disabilities, recognizing that the experiences of Creatives with disabilities are often underreported or indeed not included in sector research.

Most participants who identified as People with disabilities in this study reported having what they called ‘invisible’ disabilities (e.g., mental health, learning differences).

## Why do differences in network composition matter?

Qualitative interviews revealed that while many equity-deserving creatives possessed networks of strong relationships and enjoyed high levels of social capital *within their creative communities* (i.e., trust, creative credibility, etc.) these networks seemed to be concentrated outside of what many referred to as the sector's 'inner circle'.

This concentration was visible according to whom equity-deserving participants tended to work with (people they know very well and with whom they share similar identities – 39.3%). In other words, **equity-deserving creatives tended to have strong connections to people who share important characteristics/identities (bonding ties) and close but fewer connections to creatives with different characteristics/identities (bridging ties)**. Significantly, these participants reported even fewer connections to creatives who occupy different hierarchical levels within the sector (linking ties).

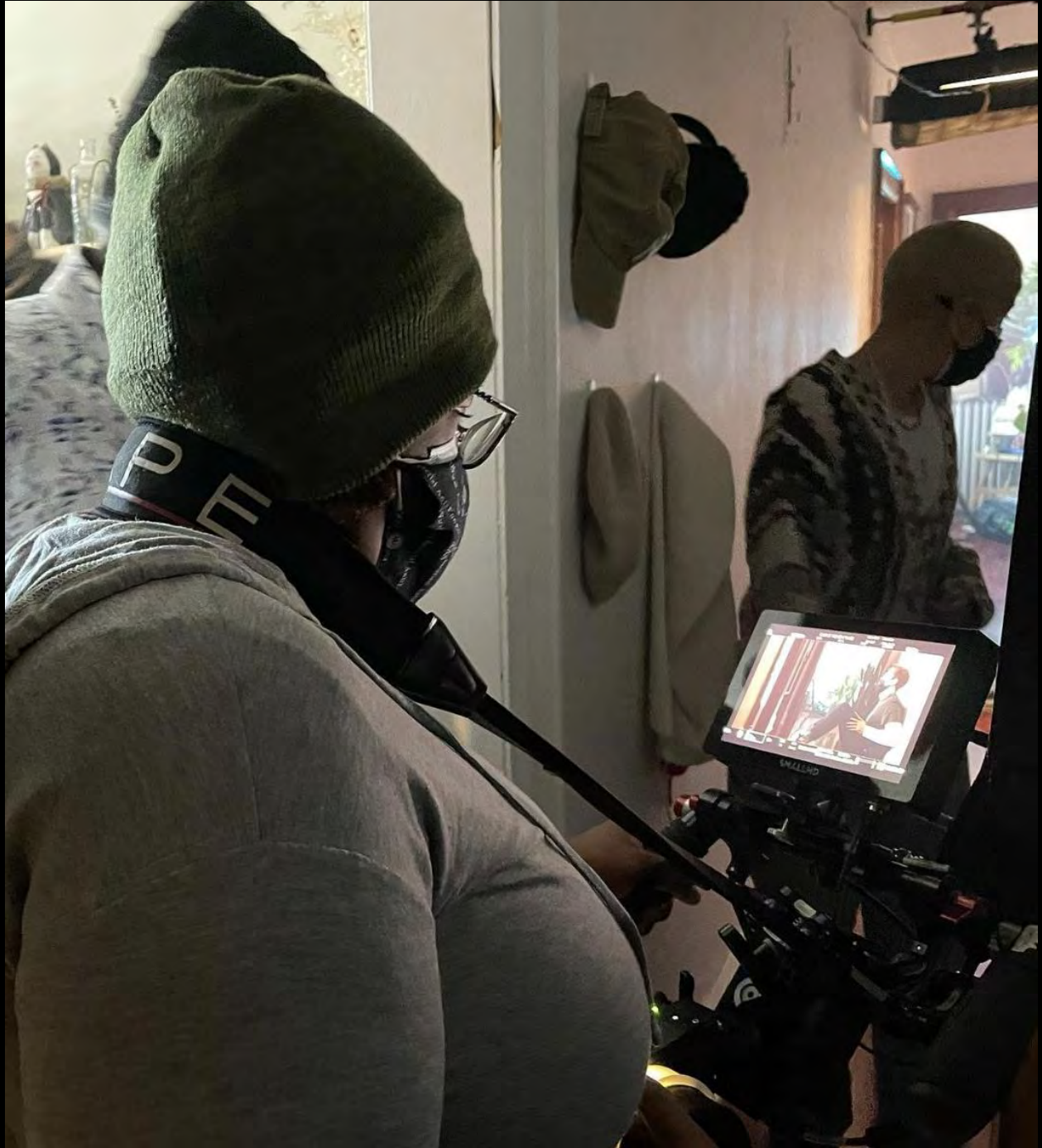
The gap in **bridging and linking ties** for equity-deserving creatives is important because these are the connections that **most enrich network quality**.

This is not a failure on the part of equity-deserving creatives to foster relationships with well-connected peers. The **predominance of white cis men occupying decision-making roles** throughout the sector **means that white creatives (especially men)** are most likely to have bonding ties (connections based on shared identities/characteristics) *who also occupy different levels of resources access/hierarchical positions* in the sector.

Meanwhile, for **equity-deserving creatives, gaining this level of access requires two steps: (1) foster connections with creatives who do not share identities/characteristics, and (2) build those relationships with people occupying different levels of roles in the sector.**

This was illustrated in participants' reporting. White creatives (especially cis-men) reported networks with a greater range of relationship types - looser connections with greater diversity *in roles occupied* but *shared identities*. While equity-deserving creatives reported closer relationships comprised of creatives with similar identities/characteristics.





## How does social capital influence network mobility & sector access?

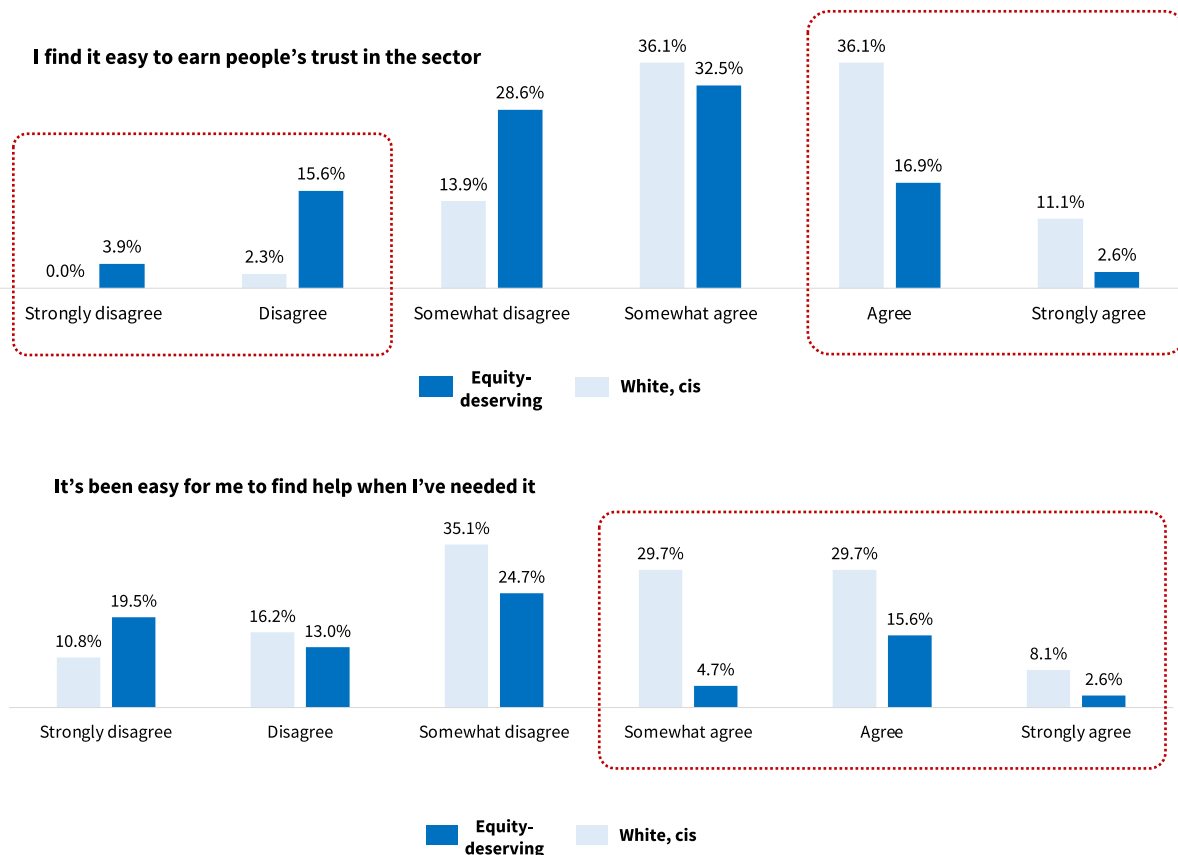
### Culture shapes network composition

The experience of relationship-building and accumulating sector social capital for all participants depended significantly on the ability to **ask for and receive referrals, to gain recommendations from creatives with more capital, and to have more powerful creatives vouch for a person’s trustworthiness and creative credibility**. This insight is not new; however, *how and with whom* participants fostered these specific relationships differed predictably according to identity.

White cis creatives, especially men, acknowledged that while they might have long-standing relationships, many of these were **initiated through relatively brief connections** - an introduction, meeting at an event, a referral. Working together tended to strengthen these relationships, but it was important to recognize that **contact alone conferred considerable value in relationship-building**.

This was reinforced by the ‘ease’ they described experiencing asking for and receiving referrals, emphasizing that they often **only needed to be introduced, or to work with someone a few times** before feeling comfortable asking for a referral. Indeed, white participants commonly reported **asking for referrals from people they did not know well** or had only worked with a few times (55.8%). Here, the opinions of trustworthy peers conferred significant credibility such that many participants were **willing to work with and even vouch for creatives they had not worked with if they had been referred by trustworthy peers** (40.9%).

Given these ways of navigating, it makes sense that white creatives reported having networks of **loosely held but trusting** relationships with others who occupy a variety of roles and affiliations, and *with similar identities*. These participants did not need to build close relationships to achieve trust.



When asked about the basis for this trustworthiness, participants described using **social capital as a proxy for creative credibility**. That is, having the right people ‘vouch’ for you could matter more than *directly* demonstrating creative credibility and trustworthiness to each new contact (which was not possible without working together) – especially when crewing high stakes projects on short-notice. What was perhaps most interesting was how quickly participants’ recognition of this fact - that referrals/social capital are frequently used as proxies for direct observation of skill - was taken for granted. In fact, the synonymy of referrals (social capital) and creative credibility seemed sufficient to **uphold the dominant sector narrative that people get ahead according to talent** (that it is a meritocracy).

This practice differed when referring to creatives with whom participants did not share important identity characteristics. White cis participants explained that, **because they were less likely to have mutual contacts or to have received referrals** about these peers, they relied on *directly observed* creative credibility or talent (i.e., from working together) and the relationship built as a result of working together. Without this direct experience of credibility, **participants felt they could not reasonably ‘take the risk’ by crewing a project or, indeed, offering recommendations.**

### *The labour of relationship building*

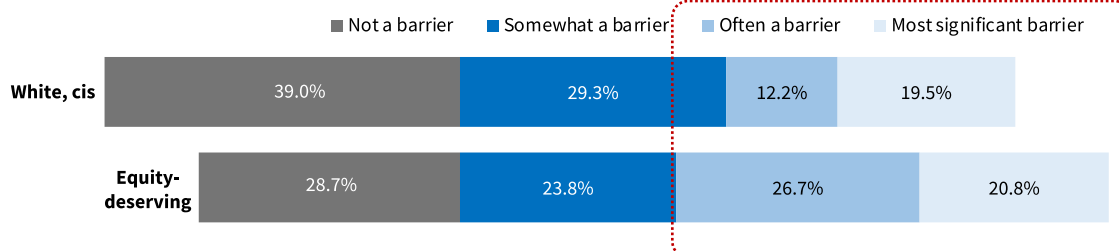
**Equity-deserving creatives**, in contrast, frequently described **playing the ‘long-game’ with relationships**: slowly building and nurturing relationships, often through cold calls, social media, and networking events.

These participants built most of their relationships **without having shared connections with other sector members**. Consequently, these participants described being strategic and careful about how they nurtured these; to be persistent (a highly valued quality in the sector) without ‘overdoing it’. This included knowing **how to build rapport, when and how to progress toward asking for advice, earning the right to ask for time, and ultimately to seek referrals or discuss work opportunities.**

Indeed, the survey revealed that **equity-deserving creatives spent more time overall attending networking events and placing themselves in situations where they might meet other creatives** - particularly those who are more established, and/or more closely connected to the sector’s ‘inner circle’.

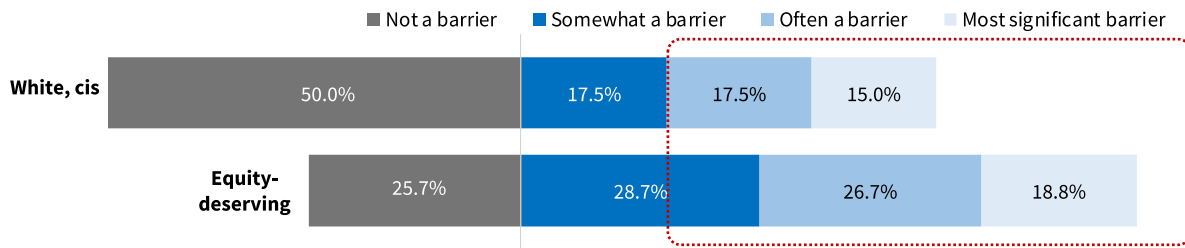
Across networking scenarios, equity-deserving creatives reported having to work harder to help other creatives feel like they ‘know’ them (71.3%), and felt they needed to keep ‘proving’ themselves even with more experience/credentials (74.2%) and even as their networks expanded. Consequently, equity-deserving creatives reported seeking and gaining referrals primarily from creatives they **knew well and had worked with often**. Notably, **this was true regardless of career stage or number of years in the sector.**

#### **I have to work harder for people to feel like they ‘know’ me**



In other words, for equity-deserving participants it seemed to take more effort, more time, and more ‘proof’ to build trust *and benefit from* sector relationships.

**I have to keep ‘proving’ myself even when I have more experience/credentials than others**



For relationships with creatives with whom they share important aspects of their identity (ethnicity, gender, disability), equity-deserving participants described a **baseline level of trust built upon commonalities that included similar identities**. This immediate sense of familiarity (and therefore trustworthiness) was strengthened by their **common experiences of navigating a white, cis-dominated sector**, and introduced a higher level of intimacy, vulnerability and closeness to these relationships than described by white creatives.

In summary, while it was important for all participants to build and maintain sector relationships, there were clear differences in the **ease with which this relationship-building** seemed to take place, the **strength of the relationship relative to the labour involved** (e.g., how much effort was required to build enough of a relationship to give/get a referral), and the **proximity** of these relationships to the sector’s inner circle.

Consequently, equity-deserving creatives seemed to **spend more time trying to strategically build direct relationships with white, cis creatives** to establish credibility and gain social capital that can lead to future opportunities. Meanwhile, white creatives are more likely to have this access already built-in to their networks.

‘Whiteness’ seems to carry immediate sector value, beyond creative credibility. Equity-deserving creatives must invest more in relationships to ‘make up for’ the missing shared cultural capital to establish a baseline for network access.

**Strategies for increasing social capital are premised on the experiences of white cis men**

Advice about how to navigate the sector usually focuses on networking, and strategies for building key relationships.

“Go to networking events, ask for coffee meetings, be ready to pitch yourself because everything in this industry is based on who you know.”

“Making it in the industry means self-advocating. You are your own currency, so you have to put yourself out there. Take risks. Advocate for yourself.”

“Show that you want to learn, ask questions, ask to shadow people, use the time you have on set to show that you want to learn and be there.”

“Be a hard worker, show them you want to be there and do things to help them remember you.”



This advice, delivered with the best of intentions, seems to reflect the experiences of white, cis creatives most closely. While it is true that relationships are at the foundation of sector access, these strategies are not equally available to all creatives. **Nor are these strategies received in the same way coming from creatives of different identities.**

‘Fitting in’ was an undercurrent across all interviews and open-ended survey questions when participants sought to explain how social capital operates in the sector. Different people could take the same steps, could follow the same strategies to build relationships and gain network access, but with predictably different outcomes. For many, this came down to whether they ‘fit in’.

In the survey, ‘fitting in’ was explored as needing to know the ‘unwritten rules’ about how to work in the sector.

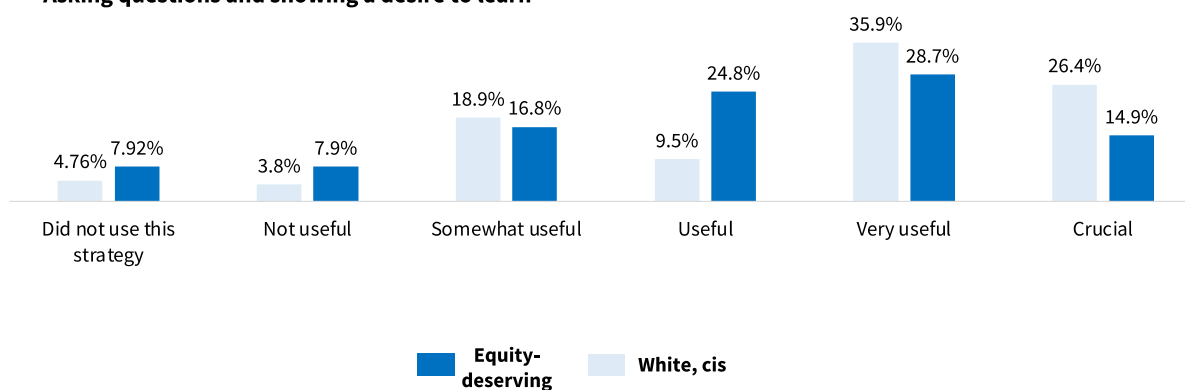
- Participants detailed how these ‘rules’ are often set according to **white social norms. Even though these social norms are unconnected to the nature of the work, they seem to be treated as synonymous with professionalism, and used as proxies for creative competence.** Indeed, white participants, even those who did not possess personal networks in the sector, generally described having the cultural capital to ‘fit’ into most sector spaces. They described knowing how to connect with other creatives and navigate white-dominated spaces.

Meanwhile, **knowing how to ‘play into the culture of white men’** was a common strategy described by equity-deserving participants.

### *Showing a desire to learn*

A recurring recommendation was to ‘show passion and commitment’ and build social capital by ‘showing a desire to learn’ at every career stage. For creatives earlier in their careers, this meant taking advantage of time on set or with more experienced creatives to shadow and ask questions. For creatives with more experience, a desire to learn was signaled by seeking out mentorship and being receptive to feedback.

#### **Asking questions and showing a desire to learn**



Some important distinctions emerged, however, when it came to *who* was showing a desire to learn and *how*: **White creatives reported a general receptiveness toward other creatives who might ask them questions and recounted their own efforts to learn being well-received.**

However, the general impression that the sector is receptive to learning was not shared among all participants. **Many equity-deserving participants described scenarios in which their desire to learn (e.g., by asking questions) was misinterpreted as laziness or lack of industriousness; while others were simply told to learn by ‘shadowing silently’.**

Some of the white cis participants interviewed who acted as mentors or ‘experts’ involved in development programs echoed these examples, expressing **frustration at the lack of initiative-taking, autonomy, and technical skill level they inferred by these behaviours.**

For mid-career and established creatives, participants emphasized the importance of being receptive to feedback and noted this lack of receptiveness (clarified as either overt resistance or not implementing the feedback received) as an obstacle they often observed. Implicit in this recommendation was a **reinforcement of the hierarchical dynamic** between more/less experienced creatives, and the **assumption that feedback is always valid** and should be implemented as directed. This also seemed connected to findings presented earlier: that there are **unwritten ‘rules’ about what makes quality storytelling, and that those rules must be followed** to receive support.

These findings were particularly important given the experiences shared by Black and People of Colour participants who described **frequently receiving feedback that involved reconstructing projects to centre white narratives and/or characters.** When this feedback was questioned, the more senior creatives received it as a lack of openness to learning.

- These experiences point to the ways **white norms seem to be embedded in definitions of quality and creativity.** This kind of feedback denies the creative credibility of Black, Indigenous and People of Colour creatives, and substantiates the misappropriation of cultural narratives.
- Moreover, since ‘showing a desire to learn’ is integral to building social capital, this method of gaining sector social capital **pressures Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour creatives to surrender narrative sovereignty to ‘make it’** in a white-dominated sector.

By having white culture intertwined with the sector’s social capital, and accepting social capital as synonymous with creative credibility, the idea that white stories and ways of storytelling are the most welcome is reinforced.

Under these circumstances, **Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, and other equity-deserving creatives are systematically excluded from participating in the full expression of their identities.** They are essentially being asked to choose between themselves and a career in the sector.

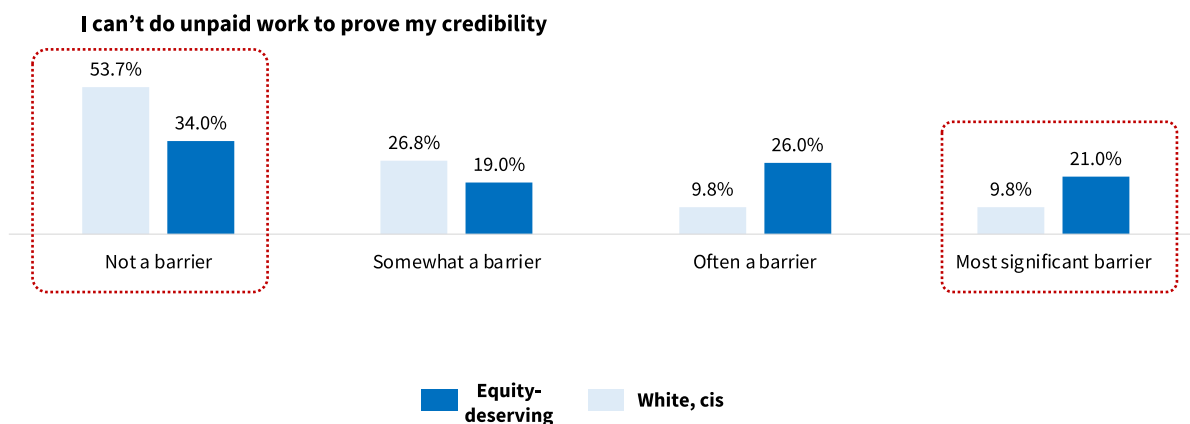
### *‘Willingness’ to do unpaid work*

The role of unpaid work is another trending topic in the sector, especially as awareness of the barriers to performing unpaid work has increased (POV, 2019). This study explored unpaid work as a means of demonstrating passion and commitment – a route to building social capital.

The necessity of unpaid work received varied feedback from survey respondents. White creatives tended to rate unpaid work as a necessary condition to gaining further access (49.5%), while equity-deserving creatives acknowledged the importance of unpaid work (33.7%) but did not rate it as high compared to other keys to success (e.g., taking training/development courses, 63%; making a point to work with people who have different backgrounds/identities than they do, 52%).

Interview participants explained that **unpaid work can be interpreted as a sign of passion and desire for the work** – a willingness to ‘do whatever it takes’ to get something made. Interestingly, while white participants acknowledged the possibility of financial barriers to performing unpaid work (though none of the white interviewees reported this as a significant barrier they experienced, themselves), **equity-deserving creatives identified the inability to perform unpaid work as a major barrier to relationship-building.**

Considering these findings, it was unsurprising to discover that equity-deserving creatives were also less likely to report *doing* unpaid work (because it was not feasible).



The legitimacy of being ‘unable’ to perform unpaid work was questioned by some participants. While few confirmed having direct financial support from family, many detailed that performing unpaid work was a ‘struggle’ but they ‘made it happen’. These participants seemed to project their experience of ‘difficulty’ onto creatives for whom performing unpaid work *was not feasible* – that is, **they interpreted it as a problem of willingness rather than legitimate unfeasibility.**

Given the currency that ‘doing unpaid work’ carries when it comes to building social capital, the inability to perform unpaid work seems to have two-fold implications: it means that **equity-deserving creatives who cannot perform unpaid work lose an important source of social capital**, and the narrative that not doing unpaid work is a matter of unwillingness (not unfeasibility) can contribute to the **loss of previously acquired social capital.**

### Contacts vs connections

The ways **social capital is shared and transmitted** featured prominently across interviews and survey responses. In most cases, sharing social capital involves **acting as a bridge or broker** between sector members by putting people into contact, giving referrals, making introductions, vouching for someone’s work, or getting someone a job.

Different approaches to sharing social capital required different levels of investment:

- Acting as a **bridge** between sector members, such as putting people into contact/making introductions, or giving referrals, makes a connection between people who might not otherwise be linked and **leaves the relationship-building up to them.**
- When acting as a **broker** between sector members, which includes vouching for someone or getting someone a job, the broker is making a connection between people **and facilitating the relationship** by infusing their social capital into that connection. **Brokering relationships implicates the person making the connection more directly**, often for longer, and is **more consequential** (e.g., reputational implications are higher if you get someone a job and they perform poorly, versus if you make an introduction, and it doesn’t work out).

Bridging seems to work between creatives with shared identities and characterizes the way most white participants described navigating the sector. Similarly, when asked about *what they do to leverage their social capital to help others*, white creatives focused on *giving referrals* (37.3%) and *making Introductions* (34.7%) – activities that rely more on the existing capital of the person being helped to transform a new contact into tangible opportunities.

Brokering seems necessary to build connection between creatives from different creative communities and/or who do not share key identity characteristics. This was most visible in the ways equity-deserving participants *most often* described using their earned sector social capital to support others, which included *getting someone a job* (65.7%), and *vouching for someone* (68.1%).

Networking events, programs, mentorships, and other interventions that focus on building contacts, therefore, privilege white creatives.

Equity-deserving participants more consistently reported activities that would confer their social capital to the person they were supporting beyond the initial contact, while white cis creatives deferred to actions that promoted contact (not connection).

These differences are important given that white cis creatives continue to occupy most decision-making and senior roles in the sector: **building contacts helps white creatives but building connections best supports equity-deserving creatives.**



## Development programs, networking events, and other interventions do not confer the social capital expected

Several industry-supported development programs, networking events, and mentorships have emerged over the last several years to create more equitable pathways to industry access and advancement.

Participants were asked about their participation in these programs, and their reliance on these interventions to help build social capital (credibility, relationships, network expansion).

- Participants at the mid-career and established phases reported the lowest levels of participation, particularly in development programs (mid-career 22.6%; established, 12.6%). This seemed to be because (1) most programs focus on emerging professionals, and (2) these programs were unavailable when they were breaking in and emerging.
- Emerging creatives reported higher levels of participation in development programs overall (54.5%), and generally reported viewing these programs as critical conduits to social capital more consistently (45.5%). This is somewhat expected given the prevalence of programs focused on emerging professionals (versus creatives in the mid-to-later stages of their careers).
- Of the emerging participants, Black (54.1%) and People of Colour (68.9%) participants reported the highest rates of participation in these programs. These participants also reported *relying on this participation* as a strategy for gaining sector social capital (Black emerging creatives 39.7% and emerging People of Colour creatives 60.3%)

Follow up interviews provided insight into this discrepancy:

- Programs tend to be staffed by predominantly white, cis creatives, and were often comprised of mostly white, cis participants. Participants explained the difficulty, and harms, of navigating such overtly white-dominated spaces:



*Being part of white centred festivals is what makes you ‘qualified’*

*I’ve stopped applying. It’s a lot of tokenizing and checklists instead of meaningful change.*



The experiences shared during the interviews prompted a further look into mentors and experts supporting the 20 major development funds and programs<sup>4</sup> identified by survey participants.

- Four (20%) of the programs examined included information about the mentors/experts supporting the program. Other programs offered general statements about the sector professionals supporting the program (e.g., “experienced producers”) but did not indicate who would occupy these supportive roles.

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<sup>4</sup> See appendix for list of programs and funds included in the analysis.



- 54 sector professionals were identified from the list of mentors/experts made public, with the following demographics<sup>5</sup>:
  - 16.7% identified as People of Colour, 9.3% identified as Black, 1.9% identified as Indigenous, and 75.9% identified as white.
  - 57.4% identified as cis-women, 42.6% identified as cis-men.
    - 67.7% of the cis-women mentors identified as white women.
    - 16.1% identified as Black women
    - 12.9% identified as Women of Colour
  - No mentors/experts identified as non-binary, transgender, or other marginalized gender identities.

**Given the program mentors/experts are the primary sector contacts with whom participants build relationships (in the context of these programs), this study went one step further to consider the creatives with whom they work.** This seemed especially relevant since many programs have started to incorporate commitments about diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Although program participants do not necessarily expect to work with their mentor(s) post-program (indeed, some programs explicitly state *not* to inquire about work opportunities), the composition of mentor's project teams might provide some insight into (1) the networks of professionals they might provide further access to, and (2) the diversity of the teams they work with.

- 40 projects were analyzed, with the following composition across key creative roles (director, producer, screenwriter, showrunner, cinematographer):
  - 86.6% White; 13.4% People of Colour, 2.4% Indigenous
  - 30.5% identified as Women (88% identified as white women)
  - 6.1% identified as Queer

Across these project teams, trends similar to those identified by Women in View's On Screen Report (2021, 2019) were observed: projects led by women, People of Colour, and 2SLGBTQIA+ creatives tended to have more diverse representation in key creative roles compared to projects led by white cis men.

Although the composition of project teams cannot offer conclusive insights regarding the potential for development programs to confer social capital, it does **introduce new line of inquiry about who supports these programs and how to create an ecosystem that successfully connects the sector with diverse, representative talent.**

Furthering this investigation into the overall structure of development programs as a conduit of social capital, the **program structure for 140 development programs and funds were also examined, and the following trends were identified:**

- Programs tend to follow the model of creating **opportunities for contact** – brief periods of time spent engaging with multiple industry professionals. While this seems to work when shared identities can provide a basis for connection, more quality time is required to establish a relationship between mentors/instructors and participants of different identities.
- Most programs **do not include mentorship** (either structured or unstructured) or extended placements that would enable strong relationship-building, and equity-deserving participants tend to require a

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<sup>5</sup> Mentor demographics were obtained through an examination of media and other secondary sources in which the individual self-disclosed their identity (i.e., the information was from the person themselves, not someone else). If this information could not be obtained, they were not included in that aspect of the analysis.

stronger relationship to ask for and receive referrals, recommendations, and introductions from white creatives.

- Accelerator programs that build specific skills (e.g., screenwriting) are modelled on white-centric ways of storytelling and definitions of quality. Consequently, participants who differ from these definitions of quality reported receiving feedback to suggest they are *less talented* or *less capable* than their white peers (which can call into question their belonging in the program, give the impression they require more development before being recommended after the program, etc.). Moreover, there is **personal betrayal in having to disavow cultural ways of storytelling and narratives based on their lived experience, based on the (false) idea that they are inherently ‘lower quality’**.

In these programs, participants **spend the most time with other participants**, and therefore have the most opportunity to **build stronger relationships with program peers**. The survey revealed that **most white cis creatives surveyed reported not being connected to these programs** – particularly those who identified as being more established in the sector, and as having more regular and reliable access to significant resources (people, funding, projects).

This means that study participants who are most connected to resources / have the most social capital are least affiliated with the programs that equity-deserving creatives rely on to gain access to well-connected, influential people in the sector. The more ‘equitable’ pathways to sector access, therefore, may not be the optimal route to accessing social capital - the primary resource required for sector success.

*This interpretation seems to be reinforced by the fact that white creatives (who report having more access to social capital overall, and more varied pathways to access) do not rely on these programs as a primary means of building social capital - even if they participate in them.*

### **Programs reproduce systemic exclusions**

Participants also identified program structure as a limitation to their potential as an equitable pathway to social capital:

- Programs requiring referrals from members of the internal selection committee or program staff, which means participants *must already be connected* to the program (know the ‘right’ people) to qualify for it.
- Several programs reference other sector programs as criteria for entry (i.e., must participate in one program to access another).
- There is a gap between training and production/working in the industry driven by the relatively brief duration of the programs, and the superficiality of the relationships built, which cannot overcome the existing momentum of established working relationships (i.e., continuing to work with people you have worked with versus taking a chance on someone new).

These conditions reinforce systemic exclusions and maintain a narrow definition of ‘quality’ talent that privileges the experiences most common to white cis creatives.



*When a white guy f\*\*\*s up, nobody is like ‘white guys aren’t talented’ or ‘this is why don’t work with white men’. But that is something they say if a BIPOC person missteps. If I make a mistake, I might be messing up the opportunity for the next POC this producer considers working with.*



### *The costs and benefits of specialized programs*

Programs designed for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour creatives; women-identifying creatives, and for members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community have been essential to creating new pathways of access. While most of this work has also focused on emerging creatives (very few programs exist to support mid- and established professionals – which would disrupt the white, cis dominance of decision-making roles), these programs play an important role in fostering work environments that are supportive to and accelerate the development of equity-deserving creatives.

A foundational aspect of these programs involves having representative mentors, facilitators, instructors, and other experts staffing the program. This has the two-fold benefit of creating an authentic, supportive working/learning environment *and* connecting program participants with more senior creatives (with more expanded networks, resource access, etc.).

This also **places heightened pressures and expectations on the Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour professionals who lead these programs to be the access point** between the communities of creatives they support and the sector. Adding to this challenge is that these mid-to-senior level professionals are *also* still navigating a white, cis-dominated sector themselves, and remain subject to the social, cultural, and creative barriers therein. In this way, **the social capital of established Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour creatives is stretched thin** – using it to broker access for other equity-deserving creatives, while also leveraging it to progress their own work and careers. And, given it seems to take *more* social capital (deeper relationships, more creative credibility, more resources) to *be seen* and *supported* by white creatives, the demands on Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour creatives who have ‘made it’ are incredibly high.

The fact that established white, cis professionals also use their social capital to support other creatives **does not compare to the demands on Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour professionals**.

First, the sector is dominated by white cis (mostly men) creatives, which means the labour of mentoring and supporting emerging and mid-career creatives is much more distributed. Moreover, the investment required on the part of these creatives to share their social capital is significantly less; previously discussed findings highlighted that **while white, cis creatives tended to support others by giving referrals and making introductions, equity-deserving professionals go several steps further by vouching for others’ work and getting people jobs**.

Finally, the risks to white cis professionals are far less than the social and professional risks confronted by equity-deserving professionals, who are often inappropriately assigned responsibility for ‘everyone like them’ when it comes to talent and work quality. That is, white cis professionals can use their social capital to make recommendations with some fallout if the recommendation falls through. But the consequences of such a scenario seem much more significant for equity-deserving professionals for whom sub-par performances or experiences **threaten to define the calibre of talent of entire groups of people**.

### **Mentorship is essential but complicated**

Across all participant groups, mentorship emerged as an essential strategy for sector navigation, and one of the most reliable ways to build or share social capital.

### *Who is in mentoring relationships?*

87.6% of participants reported either currently being part of a mentoring relationship (43.8%) or actively seeking a mentor or mentee (43.8%).

- Equity-deserving creatives reported occupying both roles in relatively equal numbers (25.6% mentors, 20.5% mentees), while white cis creatives overwhelmingly reported being mentors more than being mentees (30.2% mentors vs 9.3% mentees).
- 18.6% of participants overall reported currently being a mentor *and* having a mentor.

Among participants who *were not currently in mentoring relationships*, 30.6% stated they were actively **looking for a mentor** and 13.2% reported **wanting to be a mentor**.

A further pattern emerged within the group of participants not currently in mentoring relationships:

- 68.3% of equity-deserving professionals not currently in mentorship relationships *were looking for a mentor* and 19.2% **wanted to be a mentor**.
- 28.4% of white cis professionals not currently in mentorship relationships *were looking for a mentor*, and 39.7% *wanted to be a mentor*.

**Mid-career professionals were the most involved in mentorship** overall (88.9%) as mentors (66.7%) or mentees (22.2%). While among participants who are *not* currently in a mentoring relationship, **emerging professionals were most likely to report wanting to be** (55.1%).

### *What are the benefits?*

Mentorship scenarios in which the mentor and the mentee had access to *different relationships*, mentors had more access to *resources* and more *sector and senior experience* were prioritized (instead of, for example, peer mentorship).

- Mentors reported the *benefits of being a mentor* were the sense they were *helping make the sector better by developing strong talent* (48.4%), *by sharing the access they have* (46.9%), *by supporting other creatives 'like me'* (42.2%) and *adding to self-worth because they are helping/paying it forward* (40.6%).
- Mentees reported *gaining emotional support/encouragement* (40%), *access to sector knowledge* (38.46%) and *how to navigate the sector* (36%), *having someone vouch for them/their credibility* (38.5%), and *access to people/relationships outside of their sector network* (35.6%).

### *How do creatives get involved in mentoring relationships?*

Most participants reported meeting their mentors *as part of a development program* (46.3%) or *directly on the job* (22.4%), however, this varied significantly by identity.

- White cis creatives tended to meet their mentors *directly on the job* (36%), while equity-deserving creatives tended to rely more often on development programs (56.1%) to make these connections. Only 14.6% of equity-deserving creatives reported meeting their mentors or mentees on the job or through an introduction.
- Additionally, equity-deserving creatives reported reaching out to their mentor without having a shared contact to bridge the relationship (7.3%) while white creatives respondents did not report this as a strategy at all (0%).

### *Mentor-mentee pairings*

Most mentors/mentees reported having a shared ethnic identity and gender/gender experience (36.15% for both).

- Additionally white cis creatives reported already knowing many of the same people as their mentor/mentee (26.7%) and having sharing/similar interests outside the sector (26.7%).

Taken together, these findings suggest a possible dynamic in which white cis creatives view themselves as **mentors (not mentees)**. On the surface, this might seem hard to avoid given most senior/decision-making roles are occupied by white cis men, and there are fewer equity-deserving professionals in senior/decision-making roles to provide mentorship. However, this scenario also poses a **hierarchical dynamic in which white cis men are the authority** on creative credibility and have the power to **enact another layer of gatekeeping** by promoting definitions of quality that reflect **white norms and standards**.

Some of the follow-up interviews spoke to this potential dynamic:

- Equity-deserving creatives interviewed *who have white cis mentors* reported having to ‘prove’ themselves repeatedly *to their* mentors, and of having their **credibility and capabilities challenged** (beyond what they considered normal feedback/constructive criticism) more often. These participants also described being required to **adopt their mentor’s criteria for creative, storytelling, and narrative quality**.
- All the white cis women interviewed who currently have mentors reported being mentored by white cis men. These participants all identified as mid-career professionals and reported frequently needing to validate their capabilities even as they gained experience.

While for some, it seems that relationships can successfully confer social capital by virtue of the depth and quality of the relationship fostered between mentor and mentee, **the hierarchical dynamics and the reinforcement of white-centric definitions of creative quality that can define these relationships makes it more likely that equity-deserving creatives will face similar barriers to access *within their mentoring relationship* as they do in the sector at large** in terms of receiving creative credibility and the right to ‘earn’ social capital.

### **Social capital requires being seen**

Social capital is created, conferred, and *acknowledged* through relationship. While this seems self-evident, the taken-for-granted advice about how to network and build relationships **assumes that everyone is recognized** as (at least potential) creative talent in the sector context.

**The dominance of a cultural narrative (whiteness), however, seems to limit equitable visibility and recognition of talent.**

- Participants’ stories and sector navigational strategies revealed the ways whiteness and cisness convey immediate value in the sector; white cis creatives are ‘seen’ by default in most sector spaces. For white cis creatives, building social capital begins from a place of being recognized as potential talent and creative credibility. **In other words, whiteness and cisness have value in all sector spaces, and this inherent value offers a strong foundation upon which to build further capital.**
- Equity-deserving creatives **must work to be seen by the sector**. These identities do not seem to have the inherent value that white, cis creatives assume in sector space. The work to be seen is two-fold: first, equity-deserving creatives must gain access to be physically present (i.e., getting into programs, etc.) in spaces that they are not necessarily ‘expected’, and then by performing the relational labour required to be **recognized as credible creatives within those spaces**. In some situations, there is yet another step to



be recognized for their creative talent **beyond their identity** (i.e., rather than being viewed as a symbol of ‘diversity’).

In this way, it is not only the actual people in decision-making roles that govern access, but the embedded notions of quality and talent that are tied to whiteness and cisness that require equity-deserving creatives to consistently and repeatedly ‘prove’ they ‘deserve’ to be attributed the value that is more automatically assigned to white cis creatives in sector spaces.

Understanding this dynamic seems to offer insight into why programs, mentorships, and other interventions inadequately support equity-deserving creatives in building and increasing sector social capital: **value is tied to identity, and participation in these programs is not sufficient to change the sector’s perception of the value assigned to different identities.**

The implicit and systemic nature of these assumptions also clarifies why interventions that centre accountability on participants are not only inadequate but potentially harmful: by focusing on what *individual creatives* must do to be seen and granted sector value, these creatives are in a **perpetual cycle of ‘seeking’ and ‘proving’ themselves against standards that are not actually representative of the job, and over which they do not have control.**

### *Building social capital comes into conflict with personal sovereignty*

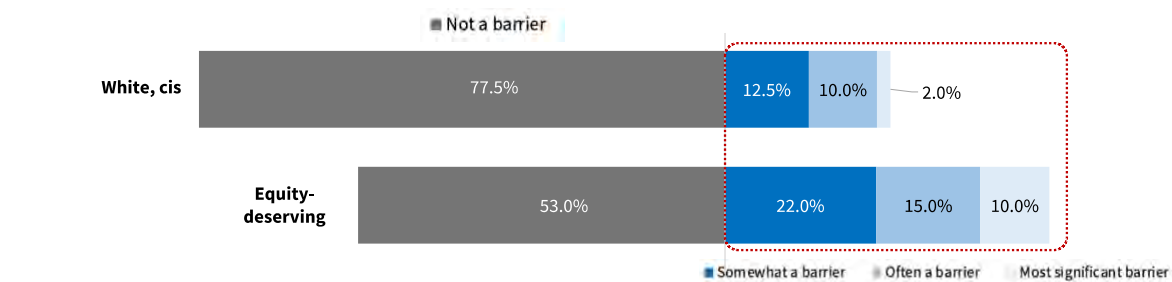
The conflated relationships between whiteness, creative credibility/talent, and social capital require many equity-deserving creatives to choose between authentic representation and sector access. Nearly all equity-deserving participants, and particularly Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour creatives, shared examples of having to “whitewash” themselves, their stories, and their approaches to storytelling to be seen and to gain credibility in the sector.

Perhaps most disturbingly, many of these experiences occurred in development and accelerators framed to increase sector access for creatives who are underrepresented.

Other examples included having to “code switch”<sup>6</sup>; to change one’s ways of speaking, dressing, or behaving to fit the sector’s unspoken rules to be more visible and agreeable to white cis (especially men) decision-makers.

These choices are not innocuous, and indeed, for **many did not feel like choices.**

Almost 50% of equity-deserving creatives reported that workplaces are harmful/unsafe places for them, and that it has a negative impact on the relationships they can build in the sector. This compares to just 22.5% of white cis creatives who reported the same.



<sup>6</sup> Code-switching refers to the practice of interacting in different ways according to the social context. While most people interact differently in different settings (e.g., workplace vs home), structural inequalities have institutionalized white cultural norms as legitimate. This creates incentive for minoritized individuals to improve their prospects by adapting their language and behaviours to the sector’s dominant culture (code-switch) (Waring, 2018).

The most reliable way for many equity-deserving participants to gain social capital and increase sector access – to be seen - at all career stages, therefore, was to *make their authentic selves less visible*.

### White creatives and organizations commodify ‘diversity’

While for equity-deserving creatives, their ‘diverse’ identities can be experienced as a sector barrier, the increased focus on diversity and inclusion has simultaneously assigned a certain value to ‘diversity’.

White cis participants occupying decision-making roles shared feeling pressure to “do diversity”, or more explicitly, to “not be racist”. Many interview participants acknowledged that “diversity is the right thing to do” and reported trying to work with people outside their networks, especially through mentorships, which gave them a sense of “paying it forward” (32.8%). These participants remarked on various rewards (or penalties – formal or informal) that are becoming increasingly prevalent (e.g., diversity riders; funding for projects that include for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour creatives; gender parity policies).

Motivation for white cis creatives to diversify their networks was also implicated in these interviews. Since equity-deserving creatives tended to have less access to the sector ‘inner circle’, **the value of these relationships to white creatives was often articulated as being “for diversity”**. Interestingly, none of the white participants referenced creative outputs as an anticipated benefit of network diversity, which might contribute to network diversity being treated as optional (i.e., when things are busy, they default to creatives they’re used to working with).

While these interventions make necessary contributions to system change, **‘diversity’ also seems to have become a way for white cis creatives and organizations to acquire social and economic benefits** (for an examination of racial capitalism and the commodification of diversity, see Leong, 2021).

This orientation commodifies the identities of equity-deserving creatives while at the same time, reinforcing an uneven power dynamic in which white creatives risk being perceived as having more value to offer equity-deserving creatives than vice versa.

Equity-deserving participants detailed the **superficiality of many diversity commitments** in the sector and noted the considerable benefits that white cis decision-makers and organizations experience by aligning themselves with diversity, equity, and inclusion language and ideas (but not necessarily sustainable actions).

The most serious examples included the stories of white cis creatives self-identifying differently to gain access to funds and opportunities created specifically for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour creatives. These situations remove access from the creatives for whom these opportunities were created. They also inflict a kind of violence in which **the very identities that make sector spaces unsafe for equity-deserving participants become a form of social capital for white cis creatives**.

Across these situations, the value of equity-deserving identities continues to be defined and measured according to their value to (how they benefit) white cis people and organizations.



# Recommendations

## Refocus accountability on stakeholders with the most power / social capital

- There is an **urgent need to consider creative and sustainable accountability measures that emphasize the responsibility of influential stakeholders** (stakeholders with the greatest ability to impact long-term change with immediate effects).
- This includes taking a **longitudinal approach to accountability**: rewarding proliferating social capital (i.e., evidence of using one's access to facilitate sustainable access for others), modelling changes to workforce composition (i.e., working with increasingly diverse and equitable crews, having more equity-deserving creatives in decision-making roles, creating a pipeline for equity-deserving talent, supporting long-term development programs).
- **Implicate stakeholders in the sustainability of these changes** (e.g., looking at the extent to which previous commitments have been fulfilled as a major criterion in accessing funding and other sector resources/benefits).
- **Examine who is supporting development programs** (as judges, mentors, instructors, etc.) according to their **working practices alongside their creative credibility**. Prioritize populating development programs, panels, and other interventions with creatives who are likely to amplify others' social capital (i.e., how might someone who works only with other creatives 'like them' impact their effectiveness as connectors and supporters of equity-deserving participants?).

## Open networks by creating bridges

- Social capital and social network research clarify that **generating relationships between 'key players' and equity-deserving professionals is the most successful approach to equity**. This means not just 'adding people to the mix' (i.e., adding more people without structural supports), but developing strategies and activities that **build connections between well-resourced creatives (the 'inner circle') and members of adjacent creative communities at all career levels**.
  - *The aim is to revise the relational networks that underpin the formation of project teams (crews, etc.), in a way that recognizes and platforms the benefits to all (i.e., disrupting the notion that well-resourced creatives are 'providing benefits' to others but that others are not also contributing important value).*
- Work with equity-deserving creatives and organizations to **create new kinds of spaces that promote networking** and relationship-building that are **not premised on white culture** and social norms.
  - Centre the perspectives, experiences, needs, and priorities of equity-deserving creatives when creating these opportunities.
- Diversify decision makers by introducing workforce frameworks and other interventions that will reduce the burden on equity-deserving creatives currently in those roles to be the conduit to the sector.

## Prioritize sustainability in program and policy design

- **Provide structure to mentorships, internships, and other placements based on shared outcomes** (shared between the participant and the mentor/employer).
- Make development programs, placements, mentorships, etc. long enough to build relationships – go beyond 'contacts' and create **opportunities for diverse creatives to work alongside** one another in different roles and capacities.
  - Create interventions for all career stages, especially mid-career creatives.

- Prioritize **work-study programs that shift the hierarchical dynamic of ‘knower’ and ‘trainee’, particularly for mid-career professionals**. This places accountability on the employer to value the expertise and skills that participants bring, while also elevating the caliber of development programs and the credibility of program participants.
- Create **wrap-around supports that extend beyond the development programs**, themselves, by encouraging employers to invest in participants’ **long-term development** (e.g., guaranteeing contract employment for participants, or direct referrals to tangible job opportunities), building **synergies between sector organizations** (e.g., connecting participants from mid-career development programs with entry-level programs from which to hire as they move into decision-making roles).

### Disrupt processes and practices that reinforce closed networks

- Examine and **revise application processes and criteria for development programs, mentorships, internships, and funding opportunities that reproduce closed sector networks**. Examples include programs that require completion of other programs (in the absence of specific, progressive technical skill development), privileging participants who have previously received funding or mentorship from a related program, requiring participants to already have established relationships to participate in programs intended to expand access (e.g., requiring participants to pre-identify a mentor for a mentorship program).

### Go beyond tracking numbers to look at quality & sustainability

- Numbers provide important, trackable information about sector changes over time, and at *a moment in time*. Quantitative metrics provide **little information about the quality of those changes, and evolutions in the sector culture that would make them sustainable**.
- Over the last two years several new funds and programs (some temporary, others permanent) that support equity-deserving creatives. There is also increased (and increasing) **pressure on employers to make commitments and take tangible action** to support a more diverse and equitable workforce. While in some cases this has accelerated access for some equity-deserving professionals, there is **limited information about the extent to which this access translates into real opportunities**.
  - For example: How many opportunities come from increased contacts? How many development deals make it into production? How have relationships changed for broadcasters and other major sector employers that have hired more equity-deserving staff? How much agency and control do the equity-deserving creatives who have moved into these organizations have to bring on new projects?
- The importance of these insights has become increasingly clear through research that links sector changes to organizational actions – such as the On Screen Report (WIVOS, 2021) that has revealed predictable relationships between key creative roles and team composition, and discrepancies between investments in development and production. More of this kind of work is required to **examine the quality of the changes being made, where they are having the desired effects (and why), and the limitations of those changes**.



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# APPENDIX

## Study Demographics

### Location

Ontario	86.1%
British Columbia	6.3%
Outside of Canada	3.2%
Quebec	1.6%
Manitoba	1.3%

### Age

18-24	30.0%
25-29	18.6%
30-34	15.5%
35-39	9.5%
40-45	5.7%
46-50	6.3%
51-55	5.4%
Over 55	7.6%
Prefer not to say	1.6%

### Gender

Woman	62.7%
Man	30.4%
Non-binary	2.9%
Transgender, non-binary	1.3%
Genderqueer	1.0%
Gender non-conforming	1.0%
Transgender	0.3%
Two-Spirit	0.3%
Demigender	0.3%

### Ethnicity

Black	15.2%
East Asian	11.1%
Indigenous	1.3%
Latinx	5.4%
Middle Eastern	3.2%
South Asian	20.6%
Southeast Asian	3.2%
White	37.7%
Mixed Ethnicity	7.0%
Prefer not to say	3.5%

### Sexual Orientation

Asexual	3.2%
Bisexual	11.5%
Gay	4.1%
Heterosexual (straight)	66.2%
Lesbian	1.6%
Pansexual	3.2%
Queer	6.7%
Prefer not to say	6.1%

### Persons with disability

Yes	11.1%
No	81.7%
Prefer not to say	7.3%

### Disability

Sensory impairment (vision or hearing)	9.1%
Mobility impairment	9.1%
Physical health condition	12.1%
Learning disability (e.g., ADHD, dyslexia)	63.6%
Mental health condition	51.5%
Prefer not to say	6.1%

### Do you identify as a person from a group that has been underrepresented or is equity-deserving in the screen media industry?

Yes	59.4%
No	33.2%
Not sure	4.4%
Prefer not to say	3.1%

**This can include (but is not limited to) identifying as: Black, Indigenous, Person of Colour, Person with disability, a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+**

### Stakeholder groups

Industry (working/established creative professional)	34.2%
Industry (emerging creative professional in an entry-level role)	23.3%
Community (some training/education, seeking entry-level role)	17.1%
Educational Institution	16.2%
Union	1.8%
Funder	1.8%
Government	1.3%

### Primary Job Category

Producer	15.9%	Network executive	3.5%
Writer (e.g., screenwriter)	14.6%	Administrative assistant	6.2%
Director	10.6%	Production coordinator	3.5%
Showrunner	0.9%	Animator	3.1%
Associate director	0.9%	Associate producer	2.2%
Editor	10.2%	Art director	2.2%
Graphic Artist/designer	7.5%	Sound engineer/sound mixer	1.8%
Camera operator	7.1%	Line producer	1.3%
Production assistant	6.6%	Set designer	1.3%
		Audio/video equipment technician	1.3%

**Industry sectors**

Film	36.4%
Television - scripted	29.4%
Digital media	29.0%
Documentary	18.4%
Commercial	18.0%
Advertising	14.5%
Television - factual	12.3%
Creative agency	11.4%
Interactive	7.5%
Lifestyle	7.0%
Funding	0.9%
Not applicable to my role	10.5%

**Average size of project budget  
(what you work with most often)**

<\$350,000	43.1%
\$350,000-\$750,000	6.3%
\$750,000-\$1.5M	4.9%
\$1.5M-\$5M	8.1%
\$5M-\$10M	2.2%
\$10M+	4.5%

**Years in the sector**

< 1 year	30.9%
1-3 years	19.3%
4-7 years	17.5%
8-12 years	6.3%
13-15 years	4.5%
> 15 years	21.5%



## Programs & Funds Reviewed

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Program/Fund</b>
Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television	Canadian Academy Executive Residency Program
B.L.A.C.K. Ball Festival	B.L.A.C.K. Ball Festival
Being Black in Canada	Being Black in Canada: Filmmaking program
Bell	Shaw Rocket Fund
Bell	Bell Fund's Short Form Digital Series Fiction
Bell	Bell Fund's Short Form Digital Series Non-Fiction
Bell	Bell Fund's Webdocs Development
BIPOC TV & Film	BIPOC TV & Film: HireBIPOC Job Board
BIPOC TV & Film	BIPOC TV & Film: BIPOC Children's TV Writing Bootcamp
BIPOC TV & Film	BIPOC TV & Film: Showrunner Training Bootcamp
BIPOC TV & Film	BIPOC TV & Film: REELWORK Filmmaking Initiative
Black Screen Office	Storyhive x BSO: Black Creators Edition
Black Screen Office	<i>BSO – DGC Black Women Directors Accelerator Program</i>
Black Space WPG	Black Space WPG: Project Heal
Black Space WPG	Black Space WPG: Afro Prairie Film Festival
Black Women Film!	Black Women Film! Leadership Program
Black Women Film!	Black Women Film! Elevate Masterclass Series
Black Women Film!	Black Women Film! Industry Directory
Black Women Film!	M/othering in the Industry
Bondit & ScreenCraft	Bondit & ScreenCraft Film Grant Fund
Bring it Black: Films by Black Artists in Canada	Bring it Black: Films by Black Artists in Canada
Calgary Society of Independent Filmmakers	CSIF Filmmaker Mentorship Program
Canada Council for the Arts	Professional Development for Artists
Canada Council for the Arts	Research and Creation
Canada Council for the Arts	Concept to Realization
Canada Council for the Arts	Artist-Driven Organizations
Canadian Independent Screen Fund (CISF)	Canadian Independent Screen Fund for BPOC Creators
Canadian Society of Cinematographers	The CSC Field of View Mentorship Program

Canadian Society of Cinematographers	CSC Intern Program
Canadian Society of Cinematographers	Workshops
CBC	The Absolutely Canadian Program
CFC	CFC Features
CFC	CFC: Bursary fund for Black Creators
CFC	CFC: Bursary fund for Underrepresented Creators
CFC	CFC features
CFC Media Lab	CFC Media Lab: Fifth Wave Connect
CineVic	SHORT CIRCUIT PACIFIC RIM FILM FESTIVAL, CineSpark, Telefilm Talent to Watch program, workshops/mentor programming
CMF	Pilot program for Racialized Communities
CMF	Corus-CMF "Page to Pitch" Program
CMF	CMF Development Program
CMF	DHX-CMF Kids & Family Development Program
CMF	CMF English POV Program
CMF	CMF Northern Incentive Program
CMF	CMF Diverse Languages Program
CMF	CMF Francophone Minority Program
CMPA	CMPA: International Co-production Accelerator Program - Feature Film Stream
CMPA	CMPA: International Co-production Accelerator Program - Drama Series Stream
CMPA	CMPA: STAR Producer Program
CMPA	CMPA: Mentorship Programs
CMPA	CMPA Mentorship Program for Diverse Producers
Collective Bunch	Collective Bunch: Membership-based community, workshops & seminars
Creative BC	REEL FOCUS BC's Equity + Emerging Development Program
Creative BC	Equity and Emerging Development Program
Creatives Empowered	Creatives Empowered: Online training for PA role
Creators of Colour Incubator	Creators of Colour Incubator
DGC	DGC: Black Creatives Spotlight Series
DGC	DGC Ontario Short Film Fund
Emmedia	Artist Support Open Access

Fabienne Colas Foundation (FCF)	Black Film Festivals
Film and Video Arts Society: Calgary	Workshops and Classes
FilmPEI	Film4Ward
FilmPEI	FilmPEI In-Kind Production Assistance Program
Game Theory Films	Black, Indigenous, People of Colour Filmmaker Initiative
Hot Docs	Cross currents + Netflix
Hot Docs	Doc Accelerator
Hot Docs	Doc Ignite
Hot Docs	CrossCurrents Canada Doc Fund
Hot Docs	Blue Ice Group Documentary Fund
Hot Docs	CrossCurrents Doc Funds
Hot Docs	Ted Rogers Fund
Hot Docs	Aboriginal Program: Development and Predevelopment
Hot Docs	Anglophone Minority Incentive
imagineNATIVE	INdigital Youth Collective
In focus Film School	Film Production Program (1 year)
Independent Filmmakers Co-operative of Ottawa	Youth program
ISO - Solidarity Fund	ISO Solidarity Fund: Fund to support other racialized communities
Kids Can Press	Kids Can Pree Talent Incubator: Black Write Edition
Langara College	Digital Film Production Full & Part time
Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto	Workshops
Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto	LIFT OUT LOUD
Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto	Production and Post-Production Support Grant
Mentor Works	Mentor Works Interactive Digital Media Fund
NFB	Filmmaker Assistance Program (FAP)
NFB	Francophone Creative Lab
NFB	Internship
NFB	REPÊCHAGE
NFB	National Film Board's Independent Filmmaker Assistance Program
NFB	Independent Production Fund's Web Drama Series Program
NFB	Cogeco TV Production Program

NOHFC	NOHFC's Film and Television Industry Project
NSI	NSI Series Incubator
NSI	NSI Business for Producers
NSI + CMF	EAVE On Demand Program
Ontario Art Council	Ontario Arts Council's Media Arts Projects
Ontario Creates	Ontario Creates Film Fund
OYA Media Group	OYA Emerging Filmmakers Program
OYA Media Group	OYA Scale Up Immersive
PEI screenwriters bootcamp	PEI screenwriters bootcamp
POV	POV Film: PA Program
POV	POV Film: Media Training Program
POV	POV Film: Envision lab
Producer Pledge	Pledge to commit \$\$ to Solidarity Fund (ISO)
Quebecor	Quebecor Fund
REEL Canada	Travelling film festival (films in schools, lesson plans, career workshops)
Reelworld Screen Institute	Level UP
Reelworld Screen Institute	Meridian Artists Agency Apprenticeship
Reelworld Screen Institute	Emerging 20 Program
Reelworld screen institute	Reelworld Black Entrepreneurs Program
Reelworld Screen Institute & Bell Media	Reelworld Producers Program
Rogers, Black Screen Office, CIS	Rogers/Black Screen Office Script Development Fund
STORYHIVE	Community Showcase
STORYHIVE	Open Call Funding
STORYHIVE	Storyhive Voices
STORYHIVE	STORYHIVE Summer Crew
Telefilm	Development Program Stream for Racialized Persons/Visible Minorities
Telefilm	Talent to Watch program
Telefilm	Theatrical documentary program
Telefilm	Telefilm Development Program
Telefilm	Telefilm Marketing Program
Telefilm	Telefilm Production Program
Telus	Telus Fund

The Black Academy	The Black Academy: Skills & Development Program
The Black Academy	The Black Academy: Write Your Legacy
TIFF	Filmmaker Lab
TIFF	TIFF–CBC Films Screenwriter Award
TIFF	Micki Moore Residency
TIFF	TIFF Rising Stars
TIFF	Talent Accelerator
Toronto Arts Council	Media Artists Program
Toronto Arts Foundation (Neighbourhood Arts Network)	Toronto Arts Foundation: Neighbourhood Arts Network - HIRE
Transgender Media Portal	BIPOC Trans Filmmakers
University of Toronto	University of Toronto: Black Creatives Series
Vancouver Film School	diploma and degree programs
Vancouver International Black Film Festival	Vancouver International Black Film Festival
WarnerMedia	Global Access Writers Program
WarnerMedia	WarnerMedia Access x Canadian Academy Writers Program
WarnerMedia & The Black List	Writer Pipeline Project
Whistler film festival	Doc Lab
Writer's Guild of Canada (WGC)	Script of the Month program
Writer's Guild of Canada (WGC)	Membership incentive