

# being seen

Directives for creating inclusive and  
authentic content

## **Underrepresented Communities Toolkit**

# Table of CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Questions & Answers	3
Glossary	5
Tips for Underrepresented Communities	6
Additional Resources/Other Suggestions	8
Appendix 'A' Authenticity Guide	9
Appendix 'B' Demographic Data	10
Appendix 'D' Infographics	11
Sponsors	12

# Introduction

## Underrepresented Communities Toolkit

This Toolkit is intended to help members of underrepresented communities use the Directives contained in the Being Seen suite of reports to help them navigate the systemic barriers of the Canadian screen industries. Frequently audiences for Being Seen panels and workshops were made up of members of underrepresented communities who saw the reports as validation of their experiences and asked how the reports could help them navigate their careers. This toolkit is based on feedback received and provides context, guidance, handy references and addresses commonly asked questions. For more information, please refer to the reports themselves.

## Statement of Principles

It is important to understand where Being Seen is coming from to fully understand what it is trying to accomplish.

### No right or wrong answers

Screen content is a creative medium. Authenticity is subjective. Therefore there is no right or wrong answer in the search for authenticity. Each project, each creative team, each audience will have different concerns, standards or goals. Being Seen encourages self-reflection, discussion and evolution and not a proscriptive list of do's and don't's.

### Where Being Seen applies

*Being Seen* applies to all screen media including film, television and interactive digital media. It applies to scripted and unscripted content. The degree that the search for authenticity plays a role can vary depending on genre and story but at no time should it not be a consideration.

### Identity

Identity can be evolving, and for some fluid. Aspects of identity are not always visible. Self-identification is key, provided that should there be concerns, identity can be confirmed.

### **Intersectionality**

No one is just one identity. Intersectionality means that different aspects of a person's identity can be at play at different times or all at the same time. When one identity is addressed, other identities may still be actively oppressed. A checkbox approach to identity undermines seeing a person as their whole selves.

### **Systemic Barriers**

Systemic barriers do not target one or two communities but multiple communities as they were created to favour straight, white, able-bodied people. There are other elements of privilege as well, not dealt with by *Being Seen* such as gender, socio-economic status, citizenship and religion. Communities need to work together to break down these systemic barriers so that Canadians have equal opportunity to fulfill their creative dreams and audiences see themselves in the screen content created in Canada.

### **Change**

The ultimate goal of *Being Seen* is to create positive change that will result in a more diverse talent pool and better screen content.

# Questions & ANSWERS

- Q** I'm often asked by the company I work for to comment on story ideas or scripts or scenes not as part of my job, but because I am the only one of my identity in the office. I'm not being paid for it and I do not feel that I can speak for my whole community. How can I avoid that?
- A** Share pages 22 - 27 of the [Core Themes Report](#) of *Being Seen* where there is extensive discussion of consultation and the importance of qualified consultants and situations where producers should consider hiring screenwriters rather than consultants. If you go ahead with the review, point out that you are one person and can only share your perspective.
- Q** I suspect that I've been hired to demonstrate diversity, but all the decisions are still being made by the mainstream (white/straight/able-bodied) managers, and I'm being asked to work just the same as they do, with no opportunity to reflect my identity in my work. Can *Being Seen* help?
- A** This is a challenging situation. Consider sharing page 37 of the [Core Themes Report](#) where there is a discussion about the importance of representation throughout the industry to create safe spaces where creators can be understood and want to bring their authentic stories. Performative hires do happen but they miss the point of the value of diversity to authenticity and the value of different voices to better and more successful storytelling.
- Q** I raised concerns with the creative on a project and its lack of authenticity. I was told that nothing was going to change and that if I had a problem with it, I could remove myself from the project. I don't want to get fired but I want them to learn that this is not ok. What can I do?
- A** As a first step, provide the decision makers with all the Directives of the [Core Themes Report](#) but particularly pages 24 and 25 which deal with consultants. You could run a lunch and learn on the issue or bring in trainers if you do not want to pinpoint a particular person who needs to learn. You may wish to talk to Human Resources to see if there is an internal process for submitting a complaint. If your company is large enough to have an Employee Resource Group (a group of employees of a particular identity such as Black or South Asian who meet to support each other and advocate for each other) they could assist with strategies specific to the situation and people involved as well as providing emotional support. Not all problems can be fixed however. If the decision maker is not willing to learn, and you cannot work around them, you may need to consider moving to a workplace where your perspective will be heard and you will be respected.

**Q I feel like every time that I pitch a project I have to explain my identity and how it relates to the project. I get tired of having to explain myself. It feels like I have to defend my existence. Can *Being Seen* help?**

**A** Until more executives at the gatekeepers do the necessary work to educate themselves on cultural differences, or more underrepresented talent are hired at the gatekeepers, those identity explanations will unfortunately have to continue to be part of pitches. However, *Being Seen*'s community reports ([Black Communities](#), [People of Colour Communities](#), [2SLGBTQIA+ Communities](#) and [People with Disabilities Communities](#)) can be used as shorthand. Send in quotes or the full reports to support your pitch. For example, if you are an Autistic woman of colour, page 7 of the *People with Disabilities* community report can be included to support a story focused on an Asian Autistic woman and the community's frustration with stories about white Autistic men.

**Q When I pitch my project, potential buyers do not understand the community, the characters or the storylines. Can *Being Seen* help?**

**A** This is another situation where you may wish to include the relevant *Being Seen* community report with your pitch. Potential buyers will at the very least be able to identify why the usual tropes and stereotypes that they may be expecting are not included but your story may also address some of the requests for more complex stories and characters that the community requested in the research.

**Q I have a project in development and I want to build a creative team that is reflective of the communities in the story. However, it seems like everyone from the right communities is busy working. What can I do?**

**A** This is a frequent problem because the experienced pool of underrepresented talent is just not big enough. Before engaging someone from outside the communities in the story, consider bringing in someone with less experience but with mentorship such as a showrunner or executive producer with the necessary experience to support less experienced talent. Another option is engaging a consultant if the consultant is brought on early enough to be able to inform development rather than attempt to fix mistakes.

**Q I work in a support position (e.g., union, talent agency, law firm) in the screen industries so not directly engaged in the creation, commissioning or funding of content. Can Being Seen apply to my work?**

**A** Yes. It is important that we all incorporate the principles of Being Seen in our every day work so that we are collaborating to break down systemic barriers. Reading the reports might inspire you to create opportunities to train, to educate and to support that will help to build the talent pool and create more authentic and inclusive content.

## Glossary

Many people in the industry have asked for a glossary or vocabulary list that would help them understand what are the right terms to use and what each one means. This is a challenging problem because terms are evolving and at times divisive. Many organizations have definitions that they have worked hard to develop, yet as there are no industry standards they differ from the definitions that others have developed. People are also looking for advice on what is ok to say in informal situations. Our attempted solution is to present a live document that can be updated and will provide context. The [Being Seen Glossary](#) provides guidance on usage as well as in some contexts definitions of terms. Readers can provide other perspectives and suggest other terms to be included through the submission form included in the document.

# Tips for **UNDERREPRESENTED COMMUNITIES**

The following tips for members of Underrepresented Communities were generated by focus group consultations with underrepresented producers and creators.

- 1** Be an advocate for yourself and those who will follow behind you to create the industry that you want to work in. Use the *Being Seen* reports as evidence that you are not alone in feeling or thinking how you do and to bypass having the same conversation over and over again.
- 2** Share Being Seen or at least the standalone Directives and Toolkits with gatekeepers, producers, associations, emerging talent, students (i.e. everyone). They can be a tool to reduce the need to explain yourself and your perspective over and over again. They can also be used to chip away at systemic barriers.
- 3** If you are a producer, create the safe, respectful, inclusive production company and production set that you want to have. Be bold and try different ways of producing and managing because the old ways have built in systemic biases. For example, flexible work hours and shorter shoot days support People with Disabilities as well as those with families. Meet with other like-minded producers to share ideas and strategies and to provide support. If you are not a producer but you are in a management position, consider how these principles can be adapted to your business to work more inclusively.
- 4** Engage with other members of your community to build your own network if you struggle to break into the existing networks of professionals. Find mentors within your community but also outside your community.
- 5** Even as a member of an underrepresented community, you still need to review your work for authenticity and ensure that you have built a representative creative team. Consider intersectionality and sub-communities and how they relate to the content. Go through the guide in Appendix 'A'.
- 6** Advocate for anti-racism, anti-harassment, anti-oppression training in your organization and not just when required by broadcasters.



- 7 If you are an emerging content creator, you will most likely have to work with a more experienced producer to give gatekeepers confidence that the production will be well managed. This is common. There are many different potential business models for working with another production company (e.g., they own the project and hire you to write, co-producing, you produce and they executive produce). Consider the direction you want your career to go in. Do you want to be a showrunner or build a production company? Consider what you are getting from the relationship and ensure that it is balanced. For example, if you are selling all your rights are you getting appropriate credits, fees and ongoing profit participation? See a lawyer but also talk to other creatives who have been in similar positions. Increasingly funders are looking at this relationship to ensure that underrepresented talent are not being taken advantage of by more experienced production companies so an unfair deal can impact a project's ability to be financed.
- 8 Work with those who are hiring and/or casting to extend their networks so that they can see new people. Educate them on where they can find more underrepresented talent (e.g., community theatre, training programs, social media channels). They have to do the work too to break down their traditional ways of hiring, but you can help them.
- 9 Recognize when a situation has gone beyond systemic bias to discrimination and/or harassment. First pursue internal pathways to resolution (e.g., Supervisor, Human Resources) or external industry pathways (e.g., union or professional association) and if still not resolved you may want to reach out to the applicable provincial or federal human rights commission. The federal Human Rights Commission applies for those who work for federally regulated organizations like broadcasters and some funding agencies. A human rights commission will work to mediate a situation and only if that is not successful then hold a hearing.
- 10 Get involved in organizations that are trying to break down systemic barriers, such as the [Black Screen Office](#), [Disability Screen Office](#), [BIPOC TV and Film](#), [Reelworld Screen Institute](#) and others. These organizations rely on input from the communities that they support to know what is going on in the industry and what is needed to push for change. You may not be able to change your organization from where you sit but we are stronger together.

# Additional **RESOURCES**

Through consultations the participants asked for a number of resources which would either make using the Directives easier or would make implementing authenticity protocols easier. Some of these resources were created and can be found in the Appendices. They include:

1. Glossary (see above)
2. Develop a guide of items to consider that can provide guidance on steps to take. See Appendix 'A'.
3. Demographic Data. See Appendix 'B'.
4. Infographics to communicate the messages of Being Seen briefly and visually. See Appendix 'C'.

# Appendix 'A' - AUTHENTICITY GUIDE

## *Being Seen* Authenticity Guide for Producers

The following questions are reminders of what to do and ask yourself to signify whether a project is authentic. The guide will lead to further reflection and work to ensure authenticity of the content.

- Have you read *Being Seen* and [\*ImagineNative On-Screen Protocols and Pathways?\*](#)
- Have you reviewed the *Being Seen Considerations for Community Engagement Plans?*
- Can you explain your connection to the community(ies) portrayed in the story or explain your plan to ensure authenticity of the story?
- Do you have a plan to ensure diversity within your creative team?
- Do you have a plan to ensure diversity within your production team?
- Have you budgeted money and scheduled time for cultural consultation or community engagement?
- Have you discussed strategies for authentic casting with your director and casting director?
- Have you budgeted for interns or job shadowing to help build the diversity of the talent pool?
- Will you be implementing anti-racism, anti-harassment, anti-oppression training for your production team? Will you be tracking who on your team has previously taken such training?
- Do you have contingency plans should any of your diversity or authenticity plans not be successful? For example, if you cannot find a screenwriter from a specific community, what is your plan to ensure authenticity?
- Have you planned for reflection and possible reporting on the success of your diversity or authenticity plans?

# Appendix 'B' - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Fill out the following form as a way to inform your creative team about the specific location that is the setting for your story and as a tool to support your creative when pitching broadcasters and applying for funding.

Project Name

Location (is it a specific city or region? If it is an unnamed city or region, what location most resembles it):

Percentage of the population based on [Statistics Canada](#) using their ethnocultural categories (link is to 2021 census tables):

Indigenous:  %

Latin American:  %

South Asian:  %

Southeast Asian:  %

Chinese:  %

West Asian:  %

Black:  %

Korean:  %

Filipino:  %

Japanese:  %

Arab:  %

Other factors related to the Project (e.g., age, income, language at home, immigration status, place of birth for recent immigrants, religion):

Note that Statistics Canada collects limited demographics on the [2SLGBTQIA+](#) communities and the [Persons with Disabilities](#) communities.

Share information on the audience behaviour of your racialized demographic based on [Being Counted: Canadian Race Based Audience Survey](#):

# Appendix 'C' - INFOGRAPHICS



## Accents

Not all Black and People of Colour have accents. Accents should be normalized and not used to signal character traits. If you're going to have a character with an accent, get it right.



## Who Can Tell A Story?

There is no one answer to this question. Whether you are from the community or outside, make sure you have done the work to ensure authenticity.



## Avoiding Black Stereotypes

Understand the complexity of the Black communities including ethnic or cultural origin, intersectional identities, socio-economic status and location within Canada.



## Avoiding Asian Stereotypes

Understand the complexity of the Asian communities including ethnic or cultural origin, intersectional identities, socio-economic status and location within Canada. Be sensitive to the stereotypes that reinforce the hypersexualization of Asian women and desexualization of Asian men.



## Avoiding 2SLGBTQIA+ Stereotypes

Avoid stereotypes unless you're subverting them or adding complexity to the character or story. Review content with an eye to unconsciously promoting stereotypes.



## Avoiding Disabilities Stereotypes

Understand that there are visible and invisible disabilities and a wide range of experience and characteristics within each disability.



## Parents of Child Performers

Being familiar with the Directives can help parents and guardians become better advocates for child performers.



## Working with Consultants

In some situations authenticity can be ensured by engaging a cultural consultant. However, sometimes that is not enough.



## Why Authenticity?

Authenticity isn't just a feel good thing we should do because we are good citizens who care about our communities. There is an economic imperative behind authenticity.

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