

# REDEFINING THE NFB'S RELATIONSHIP WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

A THREE-YEAR PLAN  
(2017-2020)

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**NFB INDIGENOUS ADVISORY**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK OUR ADVISORY MEMBERS FOR THEIR COMMITMENT TO WORKING WITH US THROUGHOUT THIS PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION, AND ALL THE INDIGENOUS FILMMAKERS AND PARTNERS, PAST AND PRESENT, WHO HAVE WORKED AT AND WITH THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA (NFB) OVER THE YEARS.**

We would also like to acknowledge our enormous debt to the first generation of Indigenous filmmakers at the NFB, first and foremost Alanis Obomsawin. Alanis joined the NFB in 1967 and fought against an often hostile environment to create an unparalleled body of work that has fundamentally recast understandings of Indigenous realities and relationships with settler society. The struggles of



Alanis and others to claim a space for Indigenous voices within the NFB, on Canadian screens and within the broader Canadian production industry constitute the foundations for the commitments we are making today.

**Claude Joli-Coeur**  
Government Film Commissioner and NFB Chairperson

# BACKGROUND

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**FOUNDED IN 1939, THE NFB IS A PUBLIC PRODUCER OF DOCUMENTARY, ANIMATION, INTERACTIVE/IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES AND, AT TIMES IN OUR HISTORY, WORKS OF FICTION.**

The NFB has been producing works about Indigenous lives and experiences since the early 1940s. Our full collection of works by and/or about Indigenous peoples currently totals just over 650 titles. While many of these films have helped to build understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians, others helped to shape and perpetuate racist and colonial perceptions of Indigenous peoples. Shared with Canadians on television, in festivals, in community screenings and in schools across Canada, including Indian Residential Schools, these films contributed to a system of mis-education with devastating social impacts that have been well documented in the work of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).



In 1968, during a period of growing awareness about the vital importance of broadening the diversity of voices behind the camera, the NFB established the “Indian Film Crew,” a production crew of Indigenous film trainees. As noted by Gil Cardinal, “this marked the beginning of Aboriginal films being made by Aboriginal people at the NFB (and most likely in the rest of Canada).”<sup>1</sup>

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1 Gil Cardinal, *The Aboriginal Voice: The National Film Board and Aboriginal Filmmaking Through the Years* (2009).

The first film produced by this new production unit was *The Ballad of Crowfoot* (Willie Dunn, 1968). Gradually, the NFB began to build a body of work looking at Canada and the world through Indigenous eyes.

Since the late 1960s, the NFB has produced approximately 280 works by First Nations, Métis and Inuit directors, including 49 films (and counting) by legendary documentarian Alanis Obomsawin. These films have been produced both through our regular programming process and through a range of initiatives, including the Indian Film Crew (1968–1970); the Indian Film Training Program (1971–1973); Studio One (an Indigenous film studio based out of Edmonton from 1991–1996); the Aboriginal Film Program (a specific programming stream for Indigenous filmmakers that ran from 1996–2008); as well as initiatives aimed at regionally specific capacity building like *First Stories* and *Second Stories* (Prairies, 2005–2006), *Stories from Our Land* (Nunavut, 2010–2012) and *Coastal Labrador* (2017–2019). In Quebec, the NFB has launched a number of initiatives aimed at French-speaking Indigenous

filmmakers: the Cinéastes autochtones program (1995–2001); the Tremplin Nikanik competition (2012) in partnership with APTN; and, in cooperation with the OBORO artist-run centre and Wapikoni Mobile, *Déranger* (2016), an intensive creative lab aimed at young and established multidisciplinary artists from Inuit and First Nations communities. The NFB's ever-growing collection of work reflecting the perspectives, lives and experiences of Canada's Indigenous peoples is shared with Canadians through a range of distribution channels (NFB.ca, other online channels such as Netflix, YouTube and iTunes, television, festivals, community screenings, public libraries, etc.) and is widely used in Canadian schools and universities. At present, the NFB has more than 20 projects with Indigenous creators underway across our production studios.



# ON THE PATH TO RECONCILIATION

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## IN 2015, THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION ISSUED ITS FINAL REPORT AND 94 CALLS TO ACTION.

Offering meticulous documentation of the devastating impacts of Canada's Aboriginal policies and Indian Residential Schools in particular, the Commission has called for a new era in relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. In its final report, the Commission underlined the critical role of culture in expanding our understanding of ourselves and our history, exposing truths, and laying the groundwork for reconciliation: "Creative expression can play a vital role in this national reconciliation, providing alternative voices, vehicles, and venues for expressing historical truths and present hopes."<sup>2</sup>

It also highlighted the key role of public-memory institutions like the NFB in the shaping and sharing of national collective memory—in reframing our "understanding of who we are and what has come before."<sup>3</sup>

As a public producer and distributor of documentary, animation and immersive/interactive works with a mandate to reflect Canada/Canadian perspectives to Canadians and the rest of the world, the NFB is committed to a process of

reconciliation, including implementing TRC recommendations that can be applied to our organization, entering into a new relationship with Indigenous creators, partners and audiences, and responding to systemic inequities and barriers to access that the Indigenous community has long identified in the current production ecosystem, most recently in the Canadian Media Fund (CMF)-led research and multi-stakeholder engagement process *A Path Forward: Supporting and Developing the Indigenous Screen-based Media Industry in Canada*.

As we move forward, we take our inspiration from the careful and critical work of the TRC: "Reconciliation must inspire Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to transform Canadian society so that our children and grandchildren can live together in dignity, peace, and prosperity on these lands we now share."<sup>4</sup>

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2 The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (2015), 329.

3 Ibid., 318.

4 Ibid., 7.

# THE ROAD FORWARD

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## AS A STARTING POINT, THE NFB IS IMPLEMENTING A THREE-YEAR PLAN BASED ON COMMITMENTS TO:

transform the face and institutional culture of the NFB; play a leadership role in the industry through the changes we are making; entrench representational equity for First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban Indigenous creators; adopt Indigenous-led protocols for working with Indigenous content and subjects; make our collection of Indigenous works more accessible; proactively connect this work to Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences; and nurture this collection for generations to come.

The NFB recognizes that institutional cultural change is a process that will most likely take more than three years. This plan is a structured starting point to a much longer journey and a long-term institutional commitment.

The NFB commits to sharing this strategy and key priorities publically—making the processes and changes transparent.

Creating institutional change is a long-term and non-linear task that requires a clear vision and well-defined, coherent strategies. To facilitate the change process and create momentum, we will base ourselves on three key stages:

1. creating a climate for change;
2. engaging and enabling stakeholders; and
3. embedding and sustaining change.

We recognize that responsibility for operational implementation lies at all levels: overarching plans and enabling actions at the leadership level, as well as within our cross-country network of production studios and at all levels of the organization. A phased approach to implementation, driven by the priorities identified in discussions with our Indigenous Advisory group, as well as establishing performance measurements, will be the next step in operationalizing these commitments.

# THREE-YEAR PLAN: PURPOSE AND PRINCIPLES

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## PURPOSE

As Canada's public producer and distributor of stories that reflect Canada and Canadian perspectives to Canadian and global audiences, we are committed to implementing strategic and concrete actions that will respond to the work and recommendations of the TRC and the concerns of Indigenous creators, and contribute to a positive legacy for generations to come.



## OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES

We will ensure full engagement with the Indigenous documentary and animation communities and relevant Indigenous experts (education, copyright, archives, etc.) in (re)shaping the conditions/priorities of Indigenous production and distribution at the NFB.

We will work and share with other partners in the industry to ensure what we are creating is sustainable.

We recognize that institutional transformation is a long-term process.

We recognize that all change starts at a personal level: the willingness to take time, to listen, to acknowledge, to be open, to engage, to learn and to act.

We strive to “do no harm” through our change process. This means having appropriate support structures in place for those dealing with trauma rooted in personal/family experience or stemming from the broader sociopolitical context.



# NFB TRANSFORMATION

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## THREE-YEAR GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

### TRANSFORM NFB INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE

The NFB has approximately 400 full-time employees, only two of whom self-identify as Indigenous. We recognize that for our organizational culture to change, the face of our organization needs to change so that it more accurately represents the overall Canadian population.

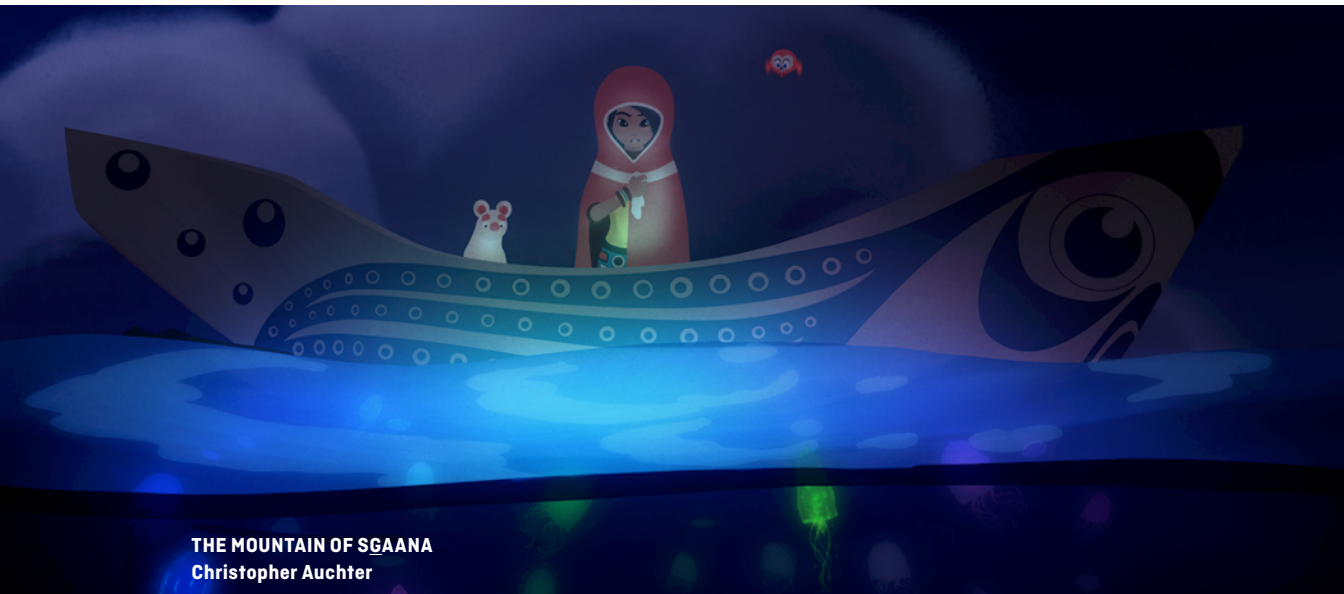
We also recognize that the majority of NFB employees (like the majority of non-Indigenous Canadians) currently have at best only a partial and fragmented understanding of Indigenous realities and history.

As is noted in the summary of the TRC's final report, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, "this lack of historical knowledge has serious consequences for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, and for Canada as a whole. In government circles, it makes for poor public policy decisions. In the public realm, it reinforces racist attitudes and fuels civic distrust between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians."<sup>5</sup> We recognize the need to proactively provide opportunities for NFB staff to expand their personal understanding and knowledge in this area in order to create the conditions for real and sustained transformation of our organizational culture.

5 Ibid., 8.

# ACTIONS

<b>1</b>	We commit to achieving representational parity in the workforce by 2025—at all levels of the organization, including management, the Board of Trustees, executive producers and producers. Based on current Canadian demographics, to achieve this level of representation, 4 percent of the NFB population, or 16 employees, would need to identify as Indigenous.
<b>2</b>	Over the next 12 months, we will develop and implement a strategic hiring plan based on best practices for onboarding, retention and developing Indigenous employees.
<b>3</b>	We will implement a leadership/institutional commitment to Cultural Safety and Humility.
<b>4</b>	We will provide mandatory cultural-competency training for all staff that includes Indigenous history, intercultural competency, human rights, conflict resolution and anti-racism.
<b>5</b>	We will encourage and facilitate personal commitments by NFB staff towards deepening their individual and collective education in these areas.



THE MOUNTAIN OF SGAANA  
Christopher Auchter

## PROVIDE INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP

As a public producer of work that reflects Canada and Canadian perspectives, and as a public-memory institution that is the custodian of a significant film archive, we believe the NFB can and should provide leadership through: the adoption of screen

protocols for working with Indigenous subjects, people and content; changes in our organizational culture; and promoting the sharing and alignment of initiatives and best practices across the industry.

## ACTIONS

6	<p>We commit to the advancement of industry-wide protocols for working with Indigenous subjects, people and content by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i. Supporting the imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival research initiative to develop proposed screen protocols for the Canadian industry;</li><li>ii. Developing and adopting (in tandem with the imagineNATIVE process) internal NFB protocols for the production and distribution of documentary, animation and interactive/immersive works.</li></ul>
7	<p>We will contribute to the creation of a sustainable ecosystem for Indigenous-led production by sharing our own process as well as working in concert with key industry organizations, including the new Indigenous Screen Office that was announced on June 12, 2017, to identify shared goals and best practices, and align activities to ensure the greatest possible impact.</p>

## ENSURE REPRESENTATIONAL EQUITY AND DIVERSIFY INDIGENOUS PRODUCTION

NFB production studios currently work with emerging, mid-career and established First Nations, Métis and Inuit directors on a broad range of documentary, animation and more experimental immersive and interactive works. While we do work with creators right across the country, there are significant opportunities for us to adapt the ways in which we work, in order to further diversify the range of creators we work with and respond to gaps that the Indigenous community has identified in the current production ecosystem—in the 2013 imagineNATIVE-commissioned report *Indigenous Feature Film Production in Canada: A National and International Perspective* (written by Kerry Swanson and Danis Goulet and financed by Telefilm

and the OMDC); in the 2013 report *The Aboriginal Screen-based Production Sector in Review: Trends, Success Stories and the Way Forward*, prepared by Communications MDR for APTN, the CMF, the NFB, the Bell Broadcast and New Media Fund, Telefilm Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts, and the NSI; and, most recently, during the CMF-led research and engagement process aimed at supporting and developing Indigenous screen-based media in Canada, *A Path Forward: Supporting and Developing the Indigenous Screen-based Media Industry in Canada* (Marcia Nickerson, 2016).



## ACTIONS

<b>8</b>	We commit to ensuring that Indigenous-led production at the NFB represents a minimum of 15 percent of our overall production spending.
<b>9</b>	We will diversify opportunities (at appropriate budget levels) for established, mid-career and emerging Indigenous artists.
<b>10</b>	We will develop more opportunities for independent Indigenous artists to experiment with new immersive technologies.
<b>11</b>	We will develop collective experiences for artists (group residencies, talent labs, incubators) that build creative community, opportunity and profile.
<b>12</b>	We will create “hands-on” mentorship opportunities for Indigenous producers and directors.
<b>13</b>	We will explore ways to identify and develop “aspirational” talents—people who show an aptitude for filmmaking but are not on a formal path to becoming a filmmaker.
<b>14</b>	We will invest in training positions within individual productions to build Indigenous craft capacity (cinematographers, sound, editors, etc.) across the country.
<b>15</b>	We will engage with more Indigenous creators in non-urban areas, with an initial focus on outreach in the Northwest Territories, Labrador, BC and Yukon.
<b>16</b>	We will work with Indigenous stakeholders to develop internal production protocols and guidelines for working with Indigenous people, subjects and themes.
<b>17</b>	We will plan and budget for Indigenous language versioning of all new Indigenous-led works (when appropriate).

## MAKE NFB WORKS DIRECTED BY INDIGENOUS ARTISTS (NEW AND COLLECTION) MORE ACCESSIBLE TO AUDIENCES

As is noted in the TRC final report summary, “so much of the story of Aboriginal peoples, as seen through their own eyes, is still missing from Canadian history.”<sup>6</sup> As the custodian of a rich and ever-growing collection of audiovisual

works by Indigenous filmmakers, the NFB recognizes the vital importance of ensuring this collection is appropriately curated, catalogued, contextualized and made available to audiences in a range of contexts.

### ACTION

**18**

We commit to the development of Distribution, Communications and Marketing protocols and guidelines for Indigenous works.



6 Ibid. 287.

## A. EDUCATION

The TRC concluded in its final report summary that “Much of the current state of troubled relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians is attributable to educational institutions and what they have taught, or failed to teach, over many generations. Despite that history, or, perhaps more correctly, because of its potential, the Commission believes that education is also the key to reconciliation. Educating Canadians for reconciliation involves not only schools and post-secondary institutions, but also dialogue forums and

public history institutions such as museums and archives. Education must remedy the gaps in historical knowledge that perpetuate ignorance and racism.”<sup>7</sup>

With its rich collection of work and deep relationships with school boards, schools, students and teachers, the NFB is in a privileged position to contribute to the urgent need for Indigenous-themed educational resources for all learners, including professionals and public servants across the country.

### ACTIONS

<b>19</b>	We will invest in the development of curriculum materials geared toward all learners, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, which will include films, resource guides, 45-minute lessons, and 20–40-hour learning experiences. This action will include concerted outreach in Quebec and in French-speaking communities in other parts of Canada to assist in building French-language curriculum on Indigenous subject matter.
<b>20</b>	We will work with Indigenous subject-matter experts to coordinate and inform the development of Indigenous-themed resources for education, and to ensure the inclusion of a variety of regional perspectives for each Indigenous resource.
<b>21</b>	We will translate specific educational resources into relevant Indigenous languages and regional dialects (when appropriate).
<b>22</b>	We will explore ways and seek partnership opportunities to extend the reach of our educational content and resources into rural and northern communities that experience challenges with regard to Internet speed and bandwidth.
<b>23</b>	We will work with partner organizations in order to outreach to new audiences.

7 Ibid., 285.

## B. AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

From the early days of rural projectionists who travelled by automobile, bus, train, plane, boat, bicycle and horseback to bring NFB films to communities right across the country, the NFB has long been recognized as an innovator in non-commercial outreach strategies for the distribution of its films.

Film helps to shape our understanding of ourselves. As the TRC observed in their final report summary, “Creative expression can play a vital role in...national reconciliation, providing alternative voices, vehicles, and venues for expressing historical truths and present hopes.”<sup>8</sup>

Responding to the TRC call to use media to promote understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians, in spring

2016 the NFB began to better structure its knowledge of its collection of works by Indigenous filmmakers.

This work formed the basis for *Aabiziingwashi (Wide Awake)*, a cross-country tour of free screenings of films from our Indigenous collection. The tour officially launched on May 5, 2017, in partnership with TIFF Bell Lightbox, APTN, and imagineNATIVE, and with the participation of community organizations across the country.

Moving forward, we commit to the following actions to ensure the greater reach and impact of this ever-growing collection.

## ACTIONS

<p><b>24</b></p>	<p>We will further develop community-based audience-engagement strategies for connecting new and collection works to Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences, placing emphasis on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; deepening links to the governmental and institutional sectors—police forces, health care workers, civil servants, legal professionals, etc.;</li> <li>&gt; reaching out to galleries and cultural centres, especially Indigenous ones, and presenting work there;</li> <li>&gt; public screenings via partners in communities large and small.</li> </ul>
<p><b>25</b></p>	<p>We will develop, cultivate and maintain long-term relationships with Indigenous communities in order to develop recurrent projects (special screenings, programs, etc.).</p>
<p><b>26</b></p>	<p>With partners, we will develop and evaluate alternative strategies to deliver NFB content to rural and northern communities.</p>

8 Ibid., 329.



## C. COLLECTION

The summary of the final TRC report cites George Erasmus on the importance of public archives: “Those who become the keepers of the archives become stewards of human stories and relationships, of what has been an endowment to what will be.”<sup>9</sup>

As the custodian of a significant archive of films and audiovisual experiences that reflect Indigenous lives and experiences

from the early 1940s to the present, the NFB has a special obligation to preserve, curate and contextualize this collection. At the moment, this collection is not well curated or contextualized for audiences. Only a small percentage of these films is currently available in Indigenous languages. Increasing the accessibility of this collection will be a key area of focus for us over the next three years.

### ACTIONS

<b>27</b>	We will contextualize, catalogue and reference the NFB’s Indigenous collection and individual films [e.g., rewriting descriptors to today’s standards, providing director biographies, identifying filmmakers by nation and community; providing context; decolonizing classification norms, etc.].
<b>28</b>	We will make the NFB’s Indigenous collection easily accessible and searchable.
<b>29</b>	We will version key works from the NFB’s Indigenous collection into Indigenous languages and in certain cases into French.
<b>30</b>	We will clear rights for titles not currently available and make them available on NFB.ca and other platforms.
<b>31</b>	We will digitize titles not currently available in HD or 2K.
<b>32</b>	We will develop a protocol and guidelines for making a greater quantity of NFB Indigenous archives available on NFB.ca/archives and find affordable ways of making this material more accessible for Indigenous media creators. At the same time, we will work with Indigenous experts to create clear protocols for access to and reuse of these archival images.
<b>33</b>	We will work with academic partners and Indigenous experts to provide broader context around the NFB’s Indigenous collection.

9 Ibid., 315.

# NFB INDIGENOUS ADVISORY

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The goals and actions outlined in this document have been defined and shaped in partnership with an Indigenous advisory group with expertise in production, distribution, community engagement, broadcasting, education, curation, archives, Indigenous copyright, and public policy.

## CURRENT MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY GROUP:

### **ALANIS OBOMSAWIN**

PRODUCER-DIRECTOR &  
CULTURAL ATTACHÉ, NFB

### **TASHA HUBBARD**

FILMMAKER & UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR

### **ELLE-MÁIJÁ TAILFEATHERS**

FILMMAKER

### **LISA JACKSON**

FILMMAKER

### **JASON RYLE**

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR,  
IMAGINATIVE FILM + MEDIA ARTS FESTIVAL

### **MONIKA ILLE**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PROGRAMMING, APTN

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OTTAWA-CARLETON SCHOOL BOARD

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### **CAMILLE CALLISON**

LIBRARIAN, ARCHIVIST AND ANTHROPOLOGIST

### **HEATHER IGLOLIORTE**

PROFESSOR OF ABORIGINAL HISTORY &  
ARTS CURATOR

The core group of advisors will meet on an annual basis over the next three years to discuss progress and confirm ongoing priorities. In addition, the NFB will engage other organizations and experts in smaller working-group discussions on key areas such as education, production, archives, and treatment of the collection. Advisors will assist in identifying the appropriate experts and other filmmakers to ensure a representative approach (e.g., across the Nations, across the generations, and across the disciplines). This process will count on broad participation by NFB staff across all divisions.

# NOTES

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