being
seen

CONSIDERATIONS FOR WRITING ENGAGEMENT PLANS

Development

BSO

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Considerations for Writing Engagement Plans - DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

Funders and broadcasters are asking producers of screen-based content (primarily film and television but could include interactive digital media) to provide a Community Engagement Plan (also referred to as a Diversity Plan or an Inclusion Plan) as part of the producer's application or as a subsequent deliverable. For development funding, producers are asked to deliver various documents (i.e. team description, producer's statement) that can act as a first step in the development of a comprehensive Community Engagement Plan for Production, and we are calling that first step a Community Engagement Plan for Development.

This is a positive step towards requiring producers to both consider and plan for authenticity of their content and for them to demonstrate that they have read, understood and plan to implement both the On-Screen Protocols and Pathways and Being Seen. However, there is no consistency of standards for what should be in a Community Engagement Plan for Development, how detailed it should be or when it should be provided.

The 'Being Seen' Collaborative Network, an ad hoc group of funders, broadcasters, producer associations and other affiliated organizations, has developed the following considerations to assist producers in the drafting of these various plans at the development stage, whether they are called a Community Engagement Plan or a Diversity and Inclusion Plan or similar document and to assist smaller funders and broadcasters who have not had the resources to develop their own Engagement Plan for Development process.

This document is a tool that can be provided to producers, with an addendum to request any additional information that an organization may need, such as self-identification data or hiring goals. It is intended to help producers to write these plans, whether they are called a Community Engagement Plan or a Diversity and Inclusion Plan. Organizations may wish to set a page limit or word count for each section or the entire document. They may wish to require producers to acknowledge that they have read the On-Screen Protocols and Pathways and Being Seen before completing the Community Engagement Plan for Development. As these considerations are not being provided directly by the funders and broadcasters, producers should visit the funders and broadcasters specific websites for exact criteria required.

This document will evolve based on community feedback and consultations as it is used by the industry. In time it is hoped that this process will become an organic part of the creation of any project as production teams work to create the best, most authentic, content possible.

Community Engagement Plan for Development

The purpose of a Community Engagement Plan for Development during the development phase is for producers to talk about their plan for their working process and demonstrate their intention for meaningful engagement with all areas of potential impact on their project. It is a way to demonstrate that they are aware of the issues of authentic representation, storytelling and how communities can be impacted by the creative choices of the creative and production team and that they have both started to implement the necessary engagement and planned the continued engagement through development and into production and post-production.

The extent that active engagement is required rather than planned for will depend on the stage of development (i.e., pre-development or development), the content of the project, the knowledge of the team, the communities being represented on-screen and the locations where the production is being shot or portrayed, but all projects are encouraged to complete a Community Engagement Plan for Development. This document outlines the considerations for a Community Engagement Plan for Development that are generally required as part of the development of a project. For production phases, please see the Considerations for Community Engagement Plan for Production. Note that each broadcaster or funder will identify which plan will be a requirement at each stage in funding. It will also be up to each broadcaster or funder to determine to what extent intention to undertake activities in the future are sufficient or if actual activities are required. For example, can a producer promise to engage a screenwriter from a specific community or do they have to demonstrate that they have engaged that screenwriter or at least identified them.

Community Engagement Plans for Development may include, but are not limited to:

A mission statement that outlines the overall goal of the Community Engagement Plan for Development and its importance to the development of the content. The mission statement may also include references to requirements and goals of funders and/or broadcasters.

Research practices, including primary and secondary sources. An example of a primary source would be interviews with subject matter experts. An example of a secondary source would be research reports such as the race-based audience research 'Being Counted' or Statistics Canada data on demographics. At development identification of general sources rather than specific ones (e.g. 'will interview BIPOC youth mental health experts' rather than the specific experts) may be sufficient.

How will the identity and lived experiences of the key creative team and leadership positions inform the creative elements of the project, and what will be the process for incorporating those experiences in the content. What are the plans for incorporating identity and lived experiences of the key creative team and leadership positions in the production of the project. If key creative team members have not yet been engaged, how will the intended identities of the team members inform the creative elements of the project.

How will sensitive content (e.g. suicide, police brutality, racist incidents and other storylines, scenes, interview subjects or dialogue that could offend or upset the viewer) be treated in scripts or, in the case of unscripted what is the plan for addressing it in the editing phase. How will the team engage resources (e.g., consultants, subject matter experts, research materials) to address sensitivities appropriately and what is the plan for it to be handled from pre-production to production and post-production.

Is there an intention to hire appropriate and specialized expertise, including (but not limited to): hiring advisors, consultants, on-set counsellors, local crew or crew from relevant communities, cultural knowledge keepers, etc., with preliminary information on when and how often they will be engaged. The team may not be able to identify specific people who they will engage but a plan to engage different kinds of expertise is helpful.

A plan to engage with local communities, organizations, and/or businesses to the extent suggested by the content.

There may be a need for training for the creative team, particularly if a writers room is being created, to create a safe and inclusive workspace and implement accessibility, anti-bias, anti-racism and/or anti-harassment training or providing information on previously conducted training. If available, share who will be conducting the training.

Engaging or planning to engage creative team members from the appropriate community. See HireBIPOC.ca, AccessReelworld, Out on Set, Culture Brew for help in discovering new potential team members. If none are available, are there opportunities to provide mentorship and training opportunities to grow the talent pool.

Compensating all roles, including trainees and interns, appropriately.

The details of the plan at this stage will depend entirely on the specific needs of the project, the communities involved, what the creative team deems is appropriate for their project and the level of detail required by the funder or broadcaster.

The details of the plan at this stage should be reflected in the Development Schedule and the Development Budget. For example, if the plan includes a review of scripts by a cultural consultant, that review should be provided for in the schedule and there should be a line item for the fee for the consultant in the budget. The plan should also identify which members of the creative team will be responsible for implementing the Community Engagement Plan for Development.

Accountability

Producers are encouraged to develop a plan that they are confident that they can execute but to also provide contingency plans should elements not be possible. For example, experienced screenwriters from a particular community might not be available. Contingencies could include a junior writer working under the mentorship of a more experienced screenwriter or engaging a cultural consultant to review scripts.

Throughout implementation of the Community Engagement Plan for Development, producers should analyze their success, their challenges and how they can improve on future productions. They may be required to deliver a formal report to funders or broadcasters on the implementation of the Community Engagement Plan for Development or reflect implementation within the more comprehensive Community Engagement Plan for Production.

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