

**Q+A**

# Targeted Program Design for Indigenous Filmmakers

**Reflections and Approaches to the Rogers Indigenous Film Fund Program  
(RIFF Program)**



# Introduction

## Who designed the program?

The [Rogers Indigenous Film Fund Program](#) was designed and delivered by a team at [Creative BC](#):

### Program Design + Delivery

#### **Lou-ann Neel, Indigenous Lead + Program Analyst**

Lou-ann is from the Kwakwaka'wakw people (the Kwak'wala-speaking people) but most of her life has been spent in the lands of the Lekwungen (the Songhees and Esquimalt people), also known as Victoria, BC. She has worked as an arts and culture manager for over 30 years, developing, launching, and overseeing grant programs, and working within both the Provincial Public Service and within First Nations and urban Indigenous organizations. Lou-ann recently worked with CARFAC to create the "Indigenous Protocols for the Visual Arts" publication and website. [View full bio here.](#)

#### **Rylan Friday, Coordinator, Funding Programs**

Rylan Friday (Saulteaux Ojibway / Plains Cree) is a multi-disciplinary director, curator, writer and producer from Cote First Nation, Saskatchewan, whose award-winning films are featured around the world, bringing an honest discourse of LGBTQ2+ and Indigenous representation to the big screen while being truthful to their own narratives. Rylan's work with Creative BC has included the design, delivery, and administration of granting programs across the creative industries and specifically, the Rogers Indigenous Film Fund Program. [View full bio here.](#)

### Partnership Design + Executive Support

#### **Robert Wong, Vice President**

At Creative BC, Robert is responsible for the delivery and leverage of all programs supporting B.C.'s creative industries. He is responsible both for administration of the Province of British Columbia's motion picture tax credit programs and for administration of all funds supporting Creative BC's various granting programs for B.C.-based creators and creative companies. [View full bio here.](#)

#### **Prem Gill, CEO**

Reporting to an independent board of directors to deliver grants and services across B.C.'s creative sector, Prem Gill oversees all activities of the organization. Her strategic leadership ensures ongoing work to evolve, establish, and deliver on the intent and commitment to advance reconciliation, as well as equity, diversity, and inclusion, across the organization and its supports for the sector. [View full bio here.](#)



## Who provided the funding?

This program is funded by [Rogers Group of Funds](#)' one-million-dollar, four-year investment in 2022 for Indigenous Storytellers in British Columbia.

The fund and its programs are delivered by Creative BC, the Province of British Columbia's agency of record for economic development of the creative industries, which include motion picture, music and sound recording, interactive and digital media, book publishing, and magazine publishing.



## Q+A with Lou-ann Neel Indigenous Lead + Program Analyst, Creative BC

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### Structure

#### **How did Creative BC come to establish targeted funding for Indigenous filmmakers?**

Rogers was already supporting a program at Creative BC for documentary and factual filmmakers. They wanted to know if there were Indigenous applicants and found that there were only a small number and that some applicants did not want to self-identify. Rogers wanted to encourage more applications and participation—Rogers wanted to create a way to support Indigenous creatives not only to receive funding, but also importantly, to apply to programs for filmmakers at Creative BC.

Consultations were introduced to start the new program – to get an idea of what the program should be, because it was discovered that Indigenous creators weren't applying. That's when the information came back to us that some people did get discouraged by the application forms – at least one person at every consultation session said they would think about applying, they would begin to apply, but halfway through the application they would give up. They worried they wouldn't qualify given the types of questions and answers in the existing application forms for other filmmaker programs.

#### **Was there any previous consideration and support through Creative BC for Indigenous filmmakers?**

Creative BC does use weighted criteria to prioritize Indigenous applicants in other programs, but the programs and application forms themselves were still in the process of adapting and updating to include considerations that align with Justice, Equity, Decolonization, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDDI) goals.

Experienced filmmakers were applying, but the emerging filmmakers didn't always know where to start.

This is something where collaboration with the film schools could be a valuable opportunity in future for RIFF and we'll explore that, and we've also talked with programs (such as the one at Capilano University) about preparing filmmakers to make application to granting organizations for support.

In addition, for people who don't go the conventional route of film school, all the information relating to programs could be better articulated and shared to remove the barrier for self-taught storytellers.



### **Were there any strategies implemented with the goal of increasing Indigenous Peoples' access to Creative BC funding?**

Across programs there were connections to networks and organizations like the First Peoples' Cultural Council (FPCC), but practices for RIFF have increased that outreach to directly message influencers within the Indigenous creative community and distribute information about programs to Indigenous community members that can share them across their respective networks.

Inside Creative BC, information was being gathered to go towards focused strategies intended to increase access and use of the programs. Early discussions with my colleagues revealed outreach was happening, but barriers might not have been removed in the program processes, such as types of questions being asked and the sheer volume of questions in applications.

### **What relationships already existed for Creative BC – associations, networks in common with Indigenous organizations?**

Creative BC works collaboratively with the Indigenous Screen Office (ISO) in a variety of ways. In addition, the ISO is part of the Creative Pathways Advisory Committee, and they were a partner in the announcement of the Rogers Indigenous Film Fund, and the first \$250K distributed by RIFF was invested to an ISO Development Fund for Indigenous filmmakers in 2022.

The First Peoples' Cultural Council was already and continues to be a partner of Creative BC's, originally receiving and delivering an envelope of funds for music investments through the Amplify BC Fund.

And Creative BC provides grants to a variety of Indigenous-led festivals and initiatives including Indigifest, imagiNATIVE. It also supports many festivals and markets with targeted events and streams for Indigenous creators.

### **Are there First Nations, Métis or Inuit leadership or staff at Creative BC?**

Yes. There is representation at different levels, including at the board and staff levels, as well as among contractors and jury members for various programs.



Included in the organization's broader strategies must be the review of recruitments strategies for review and improvement – where things get posted, the questions asked in interviews. Not only best practices for diversity, equity, and inclusion, but also informed by questions in relation to community and relation to place. Where suitable, creating questions suitable to Indigenous candidates.

**Are there values and strategy within the organization that form a foundation for, and inclusion of, Indigenous ways of knowing?**

Not specifically, but there may be existing concepts that align. When I think about Indigenous values, I think about words like Respect, Integrity, Trust, Tradition, Excellence, Creativity, Honour, Humility – and we see integrity as an organizational value in Creative BC's new strategic plan.

But exploring that word together and what it holds for each of us and where we are coming from, is important. For every program area to provide a “for instance” is a good exercise. For emerging artists, they would also benefit from those parameters and values applied to a program area and articulated for shared understanding. This sort of thing out front, coupled with relationship building, may help by setting the tone of engagement for applicants and long term, positive relationships.

There is a phrase I heard from Haida colleagues that talks of “seeking wise council”, and we do see that one of Creative BC's values is Wisdom – it says that at Creative BC “we seek, trust, and share”. When I think about “seeking wise council”, it has to do with when we start out, we seek out and follow wise council and then continue doing that because we see that's what works. So, there is a parallel, but contextualizing is really important.

Also, our green efforts and respect for our surroundings, the spaces we're doing our work on, this is aligned with Creative BC's Reel Green™, which is evolving. This is consistent in that it respects the land and sustainable decisions. It's about showing respect to people who have stewardship for territories. It's their responsibility to steward that land – so that wisdom, the ways of doing, and ways of knowing, requires us to have a proper conversation with these stewards. People know that if a company was going to come in to do filming in their community, they would have permission from the rights-holder and hereditary leaders. This is an important aspect of honouring the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\)](#).

**What is Creative BC's role as an organization and your role as the Indigenous Lead and Program Analyst?**



I see my role is to get the RIFF Program started, to start making the connections that weren't present between Creative BC and First Nations communities around the province, and to assist my colleagues in making their existing programs free of barriers based on learnings from my work. This is where Creative BC's role begins.

Creative BC's role is to set that level of direction for how the organization is aligning with UNDRIP – it is around cultural permissions, such as for Indigenous creators to tell their own stories, to hold copyright and sovereignty over their content and to define practices that ensure applicants have the right to tell the story. Defining these things puts an administrative burden on communities, and the support from organizations is needed.

## Strategy

### **You come from a programming background in arts and culture – what was it like to build a strategy for filmmaker funding?**

It was a balancing act with a range of considerations – from considering the needs and opportunities for emerging, early, and established filmmakers, but also considering the multiple formats in TV and film, and then also importantly, the ownership of the stories being told (copyright and IP), the integrity of who is telling those stories.

Make sure that as many considerations that come out of having a good and thorough, accountable, best practice granting program but making additional considerations for things like UNDRIP, the [Calls to Action of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission](#), the [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#), and being sensitive to historic programs that intended to be positive but didn't end up being that way. A strong implementation resource is the International Funders for Indigenous Peoples' [Funders Toolkit: Implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#).

Being able to implement and maintain the RIFF Program but also working alongside colleagues and their programs to inform them with RIFF Program practices can be a part of the broader implementation and strategy across Creative BC. It's really about getting that collective voice of the organization to ripple across the community evenly. So that you're hearing about all Creative BC's programs when we do our outreach work; we're marching to the beat of the same drum, sharing the same information, sharing consistent information; and access to programs and services are the same -- we've thought that through.

There's no separation or silos – it's all interconnected ways of storytelling.



Relationships and trust are the foundation upon which all programs, strategies, and approaches can be built for success.

Complementary partnerships and investments are needed to meet the wide range of needs that Indigenous filmmakers and creatives have. I created a map for Indigenous filmmakers showing Creative BC's RIFF within the broader funding context—an infographic on existing funding available to Indigenous filmmakers.

## Collaboration

### **The grantees and the existing networks hold an understanding of the issues and the obstacles – how was that expertise and knowledge shared?**

I built the feedback directly into the goals of the program, its guidelines, its application questions, and the process of adjudicating. An example would be the all-Indigenous advisory panel to adjudicate RIFF applications.

### **Consultation is key in any program's design – how was consultation unique for this fund?**

The difference is there was no foundation to build on for a targeted program at Creative BC – the timing was such that the organization was just in the midst of updating the mission, vision, values and strategic plan. So there wasn't a new or current platform to go out and say this is who we are and what we do. This was helpful in some ways, because the audience knew at least that Creative BC was a granting agency for filmmakers. But at that time there were no targeted streams.

My colleague Rylan Friday is a filmmaker, and he knew people in the sessions, and because of my history in the arts and program building, there was a degree of relationships, trust, and that foundation made it such that we could dive right into the conversation. You have to have the right people inside the organization doing this consultation.

Our 2022 consultations were all held online because of COVID. Initial questions were presented, and it was facilitated more as a discussion than a presentation. So, the emphasis was on myself and my colleague really listening and letting people talk. We could glean from what they were saying and make connections where the feedback would apply. And so we would reflect it back to them to ensure our understanding – such refining questions are important to be clearer, more relevant.

We tried to do a survey, but nobody filled it out. People wanted to talk – very consistent with oral traditions. I didn't present a 'draft guideline'





as I felt that this would seem presumptuous – I've seen this happen before, a draft document is used to start a consultation or conversation with community, and people wonder if the draft guidelines were already decided upon.

So it was important for both Rylan and I to keep detailed notes which informed key parts of the guidelines and application form.

### **What does it mean to move from consultation to collaboration and partnership and why is that important?**

Moving from consultation to collaboration and partnership involves relationship building, and that takes time. There needs to be trust, and there needs to be mutual benefits to both parties. This is why it is important to ensure each organization's vision, mission, mandate, goals, objectives, priorities, programs, and services have points of alignment – that they are complementary to achieve those mutual benefits. It goes beyond the program or fund in question, and it extends to the consistency of intent and experience over the long-term. Consultation has a focused, short-term objective – input that informs an output. But collaboration is ongoing and broader.

## Trust + Engagement

### **How did you do outreach?**

Resourcing targeted programs means resourcing unique outreach, new community partnership development (not just formal organizations and legal entities such as Band Administrative Offices, which are typically mandated to oversee housing, local bylaws, and social welfare programs funded by Indigenous Services Canada) but the informal community collectives and groups (that's where culture, creative and arts activities are often coordinated, and it's also where distribution happens – for instance, if I reach out to an Elders group or a youth group to coordinate a grant writing session, they're more likely to get the word out and fill the workshop!) It means resourcing non-conventional design, different eligibility practices, processes, and decisions, as well as resourcing how that will work across all of the other program requirements for any Creative BC program delivery.

Outreach, where do you even start? First consideration is always who has been historically excluded or not had the kind of access that they should have, so that comes about from seeing where previous applications in other programs were coming from and where they weren't coming from. That gives us the opportunity to connect with those communities and ask if they are interested in funding, early career, and other creatives.



I also ask about other information the community might be interested in covering during the session I can prepare myself for and bring that information when we do meet. So, that's where outreach expands to not just talking about this particular program, but outreach is really being informed of other related programs – sharing the big picture and potential pathways. For example, students wanting to go to film school and students not wanting to go to film school—in each case, how would this program help, what other programs exist that would help them, and what is the path from each that leads someone to RIFF.

We also consider whether there are other local community arts organizations that we can connect with and stay connected with to make sure that the community is always engaged and can always have access. Local organizations change emails, sometimes it's a cultural centre, youth group, Elders' group, or a Band Administration Office. I always make sure to connect with people who have already organized and seek advice from them. Draw on their experience and learn from what was successful and not successful.

Scheduling is a fact-finding exercise and it's about putting it out to communities. We didn't set any priorities except to work our way from more distant communities back to the Lower Mainland – we do not have trouble getting people from the Lower Mainland.

### **What adjustments need to be made when removing the colonial lens and shifting to a different set of values as the foundation?**

One of my first priorities in rethinking and reworking programs is due consideration of each First Nation's annual and seasonal priorities. Because every nation has different schedules that include everything from existing programs and services for community; traditional food harvesting times; and different types of cultural gatherings and ceremonies, we don't schedule during those times not because it doesn't align with community schedules.

Another approach is to pre-record information sessions so that people who aren't able to attend the session in person can listen on demand and set up a follow-up call if they have any questions or require more information.

And one very important consideration in shifting to a set of values that makes sense for a program such as this, is the fact that there are 35 different languages in the province and many of those communities



are wanting to work on language revitalization and telling stories about their legends and histories. So, I've been working closely with First Peoples Cultural Council's program staff (arts, language, culture and heritage), as there is a real richness about what communities want to do -- but it might be their first time having conversations about making film and documentaries related to their respective histories. This is the revitalization conversation -- and it expands beyond scripted and unscripted content for the screen, or live action and animated media, to book-writing, publishing, and visual arts -- many mediums and formats.

### **How will you continue to do so as the program evolves?**

We will continue to nurture relationships and continue to listen and learn. As noted, each First Nation and each urban Indigenous community will have different goals, priorities, and needs. These need to be understood not only for the program, but to continue working together as Creative BC continues to connect communities with opportunities through its broader activities. First Nations culture is inherently interdisciplinary.

In our first round of consultations, we asked participants if they wanted to be included in an email distribution list for program updates -- most participants said yes, some preferred to remain off distribution lists and check the Creative BC website if they were seeking program information or links to other resources. As we proceed with community outreach this year, we'll still ask participants if they wish to be on our distribution list. Currently there is a lot of focus from funders and agencies on inclusive and/or targeted outreach, but we have to remember the applicant's purpose for sharing that confidential contact information in the first place -- are they expecting to receive everything from your organization or did they provide their information for a very specific reason. We all know what it's like to sign up for one specific piece of information and then to receive unrelated or tangential communications that extend well beyond what was agreed to. The intent for sharing that information needs to be answered with respect and care -- we want to be offered choice to opt-in to further communications rather than having that decision made for us and our inboxes inundated with unrequested and often irrelevant communications.



## Eligibility

### How did you translate the ISO's research and recommendations into a tangible eligibility guideline and process for the program?

ISO's report, [Building Trust and Accountability: Report on Eligibility in the Indigenous Screen Sector](#), was a direct response to the need for greater clarity around eligibility for Indigenous-specific or 'targeted' funding programs in the public sector.

I read through the report several times to analyze the kinds of questions that we could be asking related to self-identifying as an Indigenous person to access a targeted funding program. I also reviewed the report's Environmental Scan (pages 48-53) and checked the eligibility criteria and processes other programs used to confirm eligibility so I could develop a clear and thorough process that would reduce or eliminate the potentially ineligible applicants or false claims of Indigeneity. This is a new process for all funding agencies, as it includes questions that haven't historically been included in funding application forms, so it was an exercise in finding the best way to include relevant questions.

I drew from the ISO report, our consultations, and a series of discussions with colleagues in other grant programs, to create an expanded eligibility section that invites applicants to share information about their community / communities. Consistent with the ISO report, I also included space for applicants who might have been separated from their community and were seeking to reconnect – this section is for the applicant to talk about the process they are taking to confirm their familial and community connections. I see this as a first step in an ongoing process of ensuring targeted funding programs reach their intended audience.

### What were your eligibility criteria?

#### **Guidelines section on eligibility**

*Applications will be open to individual Indigenous filmmakers and creatives including Indigenous-owned and operated companies (companies must be minimum 51% Indigenous owned and operated).*

#### **From the FAQ**

#### ***What if I don't have any proof of my Indigenous identity or background?***

*Through our consultation process, filmmakers and creatives reiterated what has been said in other discussions and reports around the challenges of 'proving' one's Indigenous identity - and*



*that this should not be an exercise that is limited only to status, citizenship, or membership cards; and should also be more than simply checking a box to declare Indigenous identity.*

*Instead, they talked about the importance of drawing from the respective oral history practices of Indigenous communities, which always involves individuals introducing themselves and describing where they are from, and their respective families.*

*This is especially important when the story (the content) or inspiration for a proposed project could have cultural and intellectual property, copyright and protocol considerations and permissions that need to be requested.*

*It was also seen as extremely important in terms of each Indigenous community affirming autonomy regarding their respective laws, protocols, and practices regarding membership and/or citizenship (see the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Article 11.1).*

*The application's eligibility section has been designed to provide space for applicants to identify their respective home Nation(s) and communities, and to elaborate upon this as part of affirming their Indigenous identity and the corresponding community connections.*

*If an applicant is unable to provide information that would enable the program's Advisory Panel to accept their application under this program, the panel or the Program Lead may work with the applicant to move the application to a non-targeted funding program.*

### **How did you evaluate/determine eligibility submissions? Who made the determinations?**

There's nothing like this [eligibility criteria] in Indigenous culture – but all arts programs experience this requirement, so I'm interested in having a discussion with more program funders.

It's the granting agency's responsibility to determine program eligibility for targeted programs. For instance, in RIFF Program, I assessed the eligibility. I didn't ask the advisory panel to do it, because they had told me that wouldn't be appropriate. Taking responsibility in-house and knowing what's our job and what's theirs is essential.

Scoring had to be documented very thoroughly behind the scenes, and we will do a lot more documenting. Because as we move along, we will want to answer the questions that come up.

For example, when two or more applications have the same score, how do we determine which is to be funded? That's where the



program's funding priorities come in – such as applicants who have had no funding in the past or projects that would include Indigenous languages.

### **Where does this information get stored?**

It is in the cloud and based in Salesforce, a huge platform in which Creative BC's programs and operations are managed. This platform has the best protections available from a security perspective, and the information is stored on Canadian servers.

How long do we store things? We need to think about this – peoples' private matter – banking, lineage. We understand FOIPPA and there is more to consider beyond this legislation.

### **What resources are needed to decide how long the information is stored, to do this well, and in the best interests of all parties?**

I suppose that's a bigger question for all of Creative BC, as I believe we will start to see a lot more crossover, overlap or interconnectedness between programs. Information gathered from each program could be used in really beneficial ways, so it will be important to have more discussions around the safety of information storage, data sovereignty, and constantly asking ourselves each year whether the information we are gathering is still necessary.

The BC Office of the Human Rights Commissioner's [Disaggregated demographic data collection in British Columbia: The grandmother perspective](#) is a resource that offers a framework centred on making systemic change with a respectful, relationship-based approach, grounded in community governance, where data is a tool that supports intentional purpose and process.

## Philosophy

### **What is your philosophy around targeted programs and open programs?**

I really appreciate them because they are usually intended to address a gap caused by systemic or other barriers resulting in individuals being excluded or denied funding and other supports.

But targeted programs alone aren't the only approach that should be considered – there remains a great deal of work to do to ensure existing programs, and some of the organizational structures that deliver them, are free from systemic and other barriers, so this work will need to continue. I am optimistic about these changes because



we have many creative thinkers working on this in conjunction with communities.

One of the new initiatives that is also being developed for the RIFF Program, are online professional resources. This was recommended in each of our consultation sessions, so we're in the process of creating that now. A preliminary tool was provided at the outset of the program to contextualize our program and can be found on our website under the RIFF Program page. [View the infographic here.](#)

We're hoping to have these online resources developed over the summer months (2023) and available in the Fall.

### **How are barriers uncovered and where do you still see them?**

My quick response to the matter of barriers, is that many are systemic because they are built into the system, which comes from a colonial model so start with the assumption that if you are working in a government model or Not-for-Profit based on colonial models, there hasn't been enough work done yet that I've found, to really unpack the idea of organizational structures being inherently embedded with systemic barriers. You really have to have a completely different set of eyes to look at that and draw that out and consider how is that a barrier and how do we counter that and address that.

We looked at existing Self-ID questions and practices at Creative BC, and knew a more tailored approach was needed to improve it and to meet the recommendations of the ISO and UNDRIP. Through the process of designing the approach we now have for RIFF Program, Creative BC can embed this process across all of its self-identification practices for Indigenous applicants.

Another aspect of systemic barriers are attitudinal barriers. Stereotypes and biases exist in systems and in individuals – and while many funding agencies have made cultural acumen sessions available to staff, this is only a starting point. As noted, there is still a great deal of work to be done to unpack existing policies, procedures and processes to ensure any bias or assumptions or stereotypes are removed.

### **What unique additional considerations and supports are established to support First Nations, Métis, and Inuit filmmakers at every career stage?**

We're working on this research to build professional resources for our Creative BC website.



We are currently looking at each step of a filmmaker or creative's career path to see if there are existing resources, and if not, earmarking that for development. For instance, during our consultations, participants told us they need access to more equipment, studio spaces, networking opportunities and mentorship or guidance from experienced Indigenous filmmakers and creatives.

### **How will you evolve the program over time?**

We will probably want to expand beyond emerging, early and mid-career to established filmmakers as program applicants move ahead through their careers. These same supports are needed at all career levels and not just in B.C. but across Canada, but for this particular program at this point in time, it made sense to support emerging, early and mid-career Indigenous filmmakers and creatives so we could work with them to successfully enter the sector, and then ensure they would have the ability to ladder to other funding that would support projects they began under RIFF.

Now the program is established, we have opportunity to form funding partnerships that leverage Rogers' current investment to expand and build on these program foundations.

Additionally, partnerships with various First Nations communities throughout the province will help to diversify our economic portfolios.

Because we will continue community outreach and consultations, we are confident that other community priorities will be identified, and this will inform how the RIFF Program can continue to evolve.