

CANADIAN VOICE SILENCED AS FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CUTS FUNDING TO CANADIAN INDEPENDENT FILM AND VIDEO FUND (CIFVF)

Dear Supporters.

As you may have read in the press, the Conservative Government has quietly announced the elimination of several programs in support of the Canadian film and video sector. The Canadian Independent Film and Video Fund (\$1.5 million) will be eliminated as of March 31, 2009. Other organizations/funds affected include: the A-V Preservation Trust (\$300,000), the National Training Schools Program (\$2.5 million), Trade Routes (\$1.5 million), and PromArt (\$4.7 million)

Twenty years ago, a forward thinking Conservative government launched a fund to help create Canadian content for use by Canadians in schools, universities, public libraries and for adult education and lifelong learning. It was created after they paid for a lengthy study into the non-theatrical industry. The resulting report demonstrated a huge concern over the shortage of audio-visual resources with a Canadian perspective and independent voice.

The new Government of Canada recently announced that this fund, now known as the Canadian Independent Film & Video Fund (CIFVF), will be terminated in March 2009, despite previously making a commitment to renew it until March 2010.

The CIFVF is deeply concerned about the Conservative Government's commitment to Canadian culture and to the independent production sector more specifically. These cuts may be the thin edge of the wedge to future cuts to the sector, and industry associations like DOC, CFTPA and APFTQ are in the process of mobilizing their members to action.

In a recent press release, the Canadian Film and Television Production Association (CFTPA) and the Association des producteurs de films et de television du Québec (APFTQ) underscore that the cuts to the CIFVF will undermine the industry. The Canadian Independent Film and Video Fund supports a critical niche in our industry; one focussed on lifelong learning in the non-theatrical sector, and most often supporting the early works of young, upcoming producers.

ABOUT THE CIFVF

The Canadian Independent Film & Video Fund (CIFVF) is a dynamic private sector funding body, which supports non-theatrical film, videos and new media projects created by Canadian independent producers to enable lifelong learning.

Since 1991, the Canadian Independent Film and Video Fund has reviewed 4,000 applications and funded 1,000 projects from all regions of Canada in both official languages for a total of \$20 million, many of which have won awards in Canada and overseas. In the latest round in 2008, 59 film and video projects valued at \$1.375 million were announced.

There are other government-funded organizations that assist the film and television industry, but none that plays exactly the same role as the Fund. The CIFVF is unique in focusing on the non-theatrical market. A broadcast licence is not required in order to apply to the CIFVF for funding: this is an extremely important factor for first time producers. The CIFVF assists projects that have been unable to attain the required level of broadcast licence fees to be eligible for Canadian Television Fund (CTF) or Telefilm funding. For example, in 2007, 73% of the projects funded by the CIFVF did not receive either CTF or Telefilm financing. CIFVF funding has been critical to the realization of these projects.

WHAT THE CIFVF INTENDS TO DO

In response to the announced cuts, the CIFVF will be meeting with the Department of Canadian Heritage to press them to reconsider their decision. Despite making a commitment to renew the

fund until March 2010, the cut was announced. We plan to seek reinstatement of the original terms of our agreement. We will also be raising the matter with all political parties with a view to putting federal support to our sector front and centre on each of the parties' agenda during the election.

What CIFVF Supporters Can Do

If you are a producer who has accessed project funds through CIFVF, a distributor or an end-user (public libraries, schools, universities, adult education) that has benefited from the use of a project supported by CIFVF, you can help to insure the continuation of this vital fund. In 1991, the government cancelled the non-theatrical fund before the end of its 5 year term, but a formidable public protest led to its reinstatement and it can happen again.

If you believe Canadians need and deserve audio-visual resources with a Canadian perspective, you can help by raising these issues with your local Member of Parliament. We suggest that you stress the importance of the independent production sector to Canada's Cultural identity. Perhaps more meaningful to this Government, you may want to emphasize the sector's contribution to Canada's economy. Annually, the film and television sector generates \$5 billion in production activity, including \$1.7 billion of exports, and sustains some 127,000 direct and indirect jobs.

Lastly it is important to stress that this cut is hitting ordinary Canadians, young and old, who learn about Canadian values and cultural identity through productions made by Canadians.

You will find a form letter on our website that you can use to send to the Prime Minister (pm@pm.gc.ca) and the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the Honourable Josée Verner (min_verner@pch.gc.ca). It would be greatly appreciated if you could send a copy of your letter to the CIFVF at info@cifvf.ca.

Background Information on the CIFVF

To assist you in writing your letter, we have included some facts and information about the CIFVF below:

Support to New and Emerging Talent

- The CIFVF has supported many award-winning projects and talent. For example, *The Corporation*, funded in part by the CIFVF, was the number one Canadian documentary as well as the second highest grossing Canadian-made film overall for 2004. The film has grossed \$5.6 million worldwide and garnered 25 awards at international film festivals. Serge Giguère, director of the award winning feature length documentary, *A forces de rêves*, made one of his first projects with the assistance of the CIFVF. The CIFVF was a funder in the award-winning children's series *This is Daniel Cook*. Jean Lemire's feature documentary *Le Dernier Continent* opened in Quebec theatres on December 21, 2007. One of Jean Lemire's first projects, *Rencontres avec les baleines du Saint-Laurent*, was funded by the CIFVF in 1996. Zacharias Kunuk, who won the Golden Camera prize for first-time directors at Cannes Film Festival in 2001, is a CIFVF alumnus.
- Since 2000, between 31% to 34% of the successful projects awarded money by the CIFVF have involved new and emerging talent
- Because the CIFVF assists emerging filmmakers, it often finds itself in the role of being the first financier to commit to a project. This is very important to a producer as it provides incentive to other funders to step forward and invest.
- The CIFVF provides application clinics, resources to assist the development and production process such as release forms, music master use and synchronization forms, examples of how to prepare a production schedule, notes on preparing treatments, etc. and feedback to producers on why their projects were or were not successful and how to improve them.

- Approximately 72% of CIFVF Recipients continue to work in the industry.

Diversity

- Since its inception, the CIFVF has found various ways to assist in giving voice to cultural diversity. It has done this through encouraging applications from visible minorities producers, Aboriginal people and people of various religious backgrounds.
- The CIFVF funds projects from across the country.
- Approximately 1/3 of CIFVF resources are spent on supporting French language projects and 2/3 on English language productions.
- An example of a film funded by the CIFVF illustrates its efforts to promote cultural diversity. “Just a Little Red Dot”, was produced by Mitra Sen (who has gone on to work on feature films) and is based on a true experience of racism in the multicultural mosaic of Toronto. When a new student enters the classroom wearing a bindi on her forehead, some children express racist attitudes and negative feelings. Shocked by their peers’ behaviour, a group of students decide they must educate their fellow schoolmates. Together, they create an ingenious solution to challenge prejudice and spread the message of respect and understanding for people of all backgrounds. The cast of the film went on to form the Little Red Dot Club whose purpose was to celebrate cultural diversity by organizing various activities and speaking at different schools.

CIFVF-Funded Projects & Social Impact

- Many of the projects assisted by the CIFVF are made for social purposes. These projects seek, through the filmmaking, marketing and distribution process, to raise awareness and build understanding of a specific issue, idea, topic, cause or situation. One such project supported by the CIFVF was *Silence of the Strings- A Community Movement for Music*. This film helped saved a public school music program. A year after its release, the producers showed the film at some Seniors Centres. They found many retired teachers and other seniors for whom making music was a critical social and educational force in their lives. A number of seniors they met became active, as a result of seeing *Silence of the Strings*, in petitioning the provincial government to return full funding to music education.
- One CIFVF Recipient whose life is devoted to social action is Alexandra Sicotte-Levesque, cofounder of JHR Productions in Montreal. Her film “Silence is Golden” has been responsible for raising awareness and public outcry over the Canadian gold mining operations and offenses in Ghana.
- *My TV, Your TV, Our TV, Episode 1* was funded by the CIFVF and produced by a first-time producer, Cathy Edwards. The first episode of this series has helped stimulate debate on community TV and the loss of access by the public to “community TV” channels. The Winnipeg Free Press has published two articles written by the producer of *My TV, Your TV, Our TV* on the status of community television in Winnipeg and Canada. Cathy’s film and work contributed to the public consultations on the CRTC’s diversity hearings held in 2007. The producer, along with other interested individuals and groups involved in community television, have launched the Canadian Association of Community TV Users and Stations. Because of her film and subsequent work in this area, the producer has been contracted by the CRTC to write a report summarizing policy directions and results for community television around the world as part of a review of the community TV sector to be conducted by the CRTC in 2008.

- *SCAMS* was supported by the CIFVF in 1997. It focuses on classic scams, their victims and families who are hurt by them and the scammers who continually target the elderly and most vulnerable in society. More than ten years later, the film is still being used in federal and provincial training sessions for employees. The federal Department of the Attorney General has adapted the series for its website. The Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) uses *Scams* as part of its college curriculum program.
- Daniel Cross produced his first documentary called *The Street: A Film* (funded by the CIFVF) which is about homeless people. Daniel Cross subsequently created the world's first website, *Homelessnation.org*, created by and for the homeless, where the majority of voices are street people. Through this website, homeless people share their stories, overturn stereotypes and experience the therapeutic power of self-expression. They create legitimacy, act as informal national lobby, mobilize protest and alter public opinion. Outreach teams operate in Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, Quebec City and Victoria and are supported by a national network of in-kind community partners. Coordinators from within the street community train, network and empower the homeless by teaching them basic film and web skills. Street teams record, edit and upload first person homeless audio, text and video testimonials, creating an interactive network of voices. This website was funded in the prototype stage by the CIFVF in 2002.

Cross Fertilization

- CIFVF-funded projects have provided opportunities for “cross fertilization”. The term has been coined to describe the phenomenon of CIFVF Recipients working on CIFVF-funded projects which are not their own. These opportunities give CIFVF Recipients the ability to increase their experience; often learn and/or practice new skills and have employment when not working on their own productions.