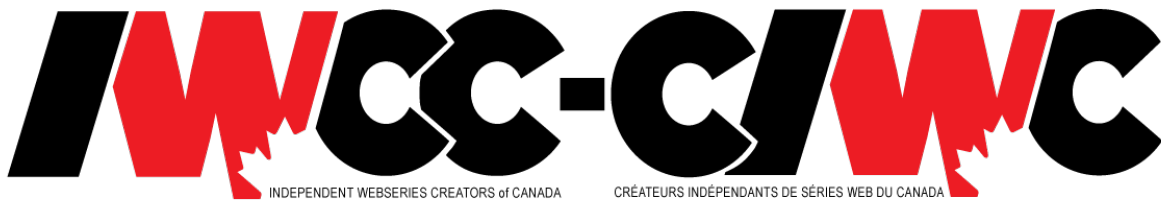


RE: CMF Industry Consultation 2015

**Submission of  
The Independent Web Series Creators of Canada – Créateurs  
Indépendants de Séries Web du Canada**



**November 9, 2015**

Emilia Zboralska (PhD, ABD, Ryerson University)

SSHRC Doctoral Fellow

Member, Board of Directors, IWCC

[emilia.zboralska@ryerson.ca](mailto:emilia.zboralska@ryerson.ca)

*On behalf of the IWCC-CIWC:*

The Independent Web Series Creators of Canada – Créateurs Indépendants de Séries Web du Canada (IWCC-CIWC) is pleased to provide comments relating to the CMF's visioning strategy.

The IWCC-CIWC is a not-for-profit association that seeks to build a strong Canadian digital media industry through education, policy and advocacy. Our goal is to ensure that the industry is innovative, open and inclusive, and economically sustainable.

In its slide deck presented to focus groups throughout the fall of 2015, the CMF asked questions pertaining to "online content". The IWCC would like to take this opportunity to share its position on these matters.

**1) Should the CMF support linear online content, including webseries?**

Yes. We believe that the CMF should support linear online content, including webseries. Canadian webseries are innovative, diverse and critically acclaimed. Canadian webseries are recognized internationally for their excellence, and frequently win major awards, including prestigious Digital Emmy Awards.

Webseries are an excellent entry point for emerging creators, and a powerful format for established independent producers. We strongly encourage the CMF to consider funding this exciting and emerging format.

**2) If so, what are the current gaps in funding such content and what could the CMF focus its support on?**

**3) If so, what additional triggers would be required for such content (market validation)?**

Few funding sources currently exist for Canadian webseries creators. The Independent Production Fund (IPF) is the primary source of funding for Canadian scripted independent webseries. The IPF is a private, CRTC certified independent production fund that is eligible to receive BDU contributions. It awards between \$25 000 up to \$150 000 per winning series in equity financing.

While the IPF is a much-needed source of funding, it is limited in scope to original productions. Non-IPF originated productions that are in their second seasons are not eligible for funding. The IWCC believes that this is a missed opportunity. There are many webseries, which show considerable promise after a self-financed initial first season, but are ineligible to apply for second-season funding due to this restriction. Mathew Murray's *Teenagers*<sup>1</sup> is an excellent example of such a series. This series has garnered in excess of 1.99 million YouTube views to date, and its channel contains over 11 000 individual subscribers, and active engagement via social media. Still, this standalone, linear webseries is not eligible to receive further funding from any established funds.

Currently, the CMF requires either interactivity (experimental stream), or a television component, which requires broadcaster support to trigger funding (convergent stream). The OMDC requires interactivity for its digital program. The Bell Fund similarly requires interactivity, broadcaster support, and/or the goal of adapting a digital product for television. The newly introduced Cogeco Development Fund offers digital scripted series up to \$10 000 in the form of development advances, to be reimbursed on the first day of principal photography.

The IWCC believes there is therefore existing need and opportunity for the CMF to provide support to independent webseries that have shown promise through self-financing, and self-distribution. Rights to these self-financed series are most often held by only the individual creators, and thus do not complicate the CMF's recoupment policy in relation to equity investments.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/user/teenagerswebseries/>

In addition, the IWCC also encourages the CMF to consider the possibility of providing supplemental **'discoverability support'** to both funded and unfunded existing and original digital-first series. The problem of discovering an independently produced digital series in the vast ocean of online content is a considerable challenge. A key finding from Board Member and PhD Candidate Emilia Zboralska's ongoing dissertation research into scripted digital-first series<sup>2</sup> is the significant need for support in this area. Proposed 'discoverability support' could be devoted to expenses related to marketing, audience building and targeting, and social media engagement (including the hiring of a social media expert). Such support is needed for digital series across all budget categories. The IWCC suggests that support between \$5000 - \$20 000 could be awarded per project, depending on the discoverability plans proposed.

Primary funding for webseries could be allocated according to the CMF's proposed program verticals i.e. Emergence; Growth; Sustainability. Funding across these categories should be awarded based on the merit of proposals, to be evaluated by a juried committee comprised of established creators, and media executives.

\*\*\*

### **Emergence**

This program vertical should be focused on getting new and diverse talent into the Canadian media ecosystem. A recent study of IPF funded webseries reveals that the underrepresentation of women has carried over to the digital space in some key categories.<sup>3</sup> If the CMF is committed to ensuring that its Emergence vertical succeeds in encouraging "[n]ew forms of storytelling, emerging voices", it must actively aim at representation with respect to gender and racial and ethnic diversity amongst applicants. Without such a goal, the Canadian media system is missing out on the development of rich stories, perspectives, creativity and talent. Barriers to entry to the Emergence category of funding for webseries should be as low as possible. To be eligible for such funding, applicants must be able to demonstrate a history of engagement with media. Evaluation of this history should be flexible, and evidence of engagement could come in many forms: film/TV education; training; self-produced projects; completed scripts; social media

---

<sup>2</sup> The ongoing PhD project is entitled, "Telling Our Stories on the Web: Canadian-English Language Webseries and the Production of Culture Online." The project is supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

<sup>3</sup> Women in View (WIV). (2015). "Women in View on screen: October 2015 report." Available at <http://www.womeninview.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Women-In-View-On-Screen-2015.pdf>

interaction etc. Funding awarded here should take on the 'less is more' or 'multiple baskets' approach, by providing micro-budget funding (for example, up to \$15 000 per project) to as many projects as possible. This would provide for the greatest amount of experimentation.

Market validation: In the Emergence category, metrics of success could include social media engagement; likes; tweets; shares; comments; YouTube or other platform subscriptions; views (across all platforms); awards and critical acclaim.

Emergence funding awardees should be required to work on the development or pre-production of another, more established CMF-funded production for a period of two weeks. This two-week period should be paid (at least, minimum wage) so as to not prevent participation in this opportunity due to economic status. The CMF could thus leverage its more established funding recipients to help develop the next generation of creators.

### ***Growth***

This next category of funding should provide awardees with an increased allocation of funds than in the Emergence category. Barriers to entry to this category should be heightened. The market validation achieved in the previous category should thus be the minimum entry points into this next level of funding. The IWCC proposes that the CMF award between \$50 000 to \$175 000 per project to awardees in this category. Funds awarded in the growth category could be divided between both successful CMF Emergence funded programs that have met the market validation metrics outlined above, and non-CMF originated programs for which copyright is Canadian owned and controlled, and which have also met the market validation thresholds indicated above. Applicants should have a clear plan for marketing and for increasing audience engagement and viewership (example – plans for subtitling to expand audience reach; exhibition at conventions).

Market validation: In the Growth category, metrics of success for series should include significant increases to social media engagement; likes; tweets; shares; comments; YouTube or other subscriptions; views (across all platforms); awards and ongoing critical acclaim.

### ***Sustainability***

This final category of funding is aimed at leading productions funded through the previous category, or those non-CMF funded series that have independently met the market validation metrics in the previous category, to sustainability. Barriers to entry should be highest in this

category. Applicants in this category must have a clear plan for return on investment, including timelines, as well as a proven track record of increasing market presence. Programs in this category of funding should be treated as start-ups that are actively engaged in the search for a repeatable and scalable business model for their series. The IWCC proposes that the CMF provide between \$175 000 to \$350 000 per project to awardees in this category.

Eligibility requirements for this category could include *expressed interest* from other partners, including brands, private investors, distributors (including international and domestic over-the-top distributors such as Netflix, Amazon, Shomi, Crave etc.), and domestic or international broadcaster commitments.

Market validation: The key metric of success for series awarded this category of funding is achieving a breaking even point in the timeline proposed by the applicant.

\*\*\*

The CMF might also consider a **'funding match program'** in which it could match funding for selected projects derived from crowd-funding campaigns, pre-sales, and other sourced funds.