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The Roadmap to Creative Distribution

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for: Documentary Organization of Canada



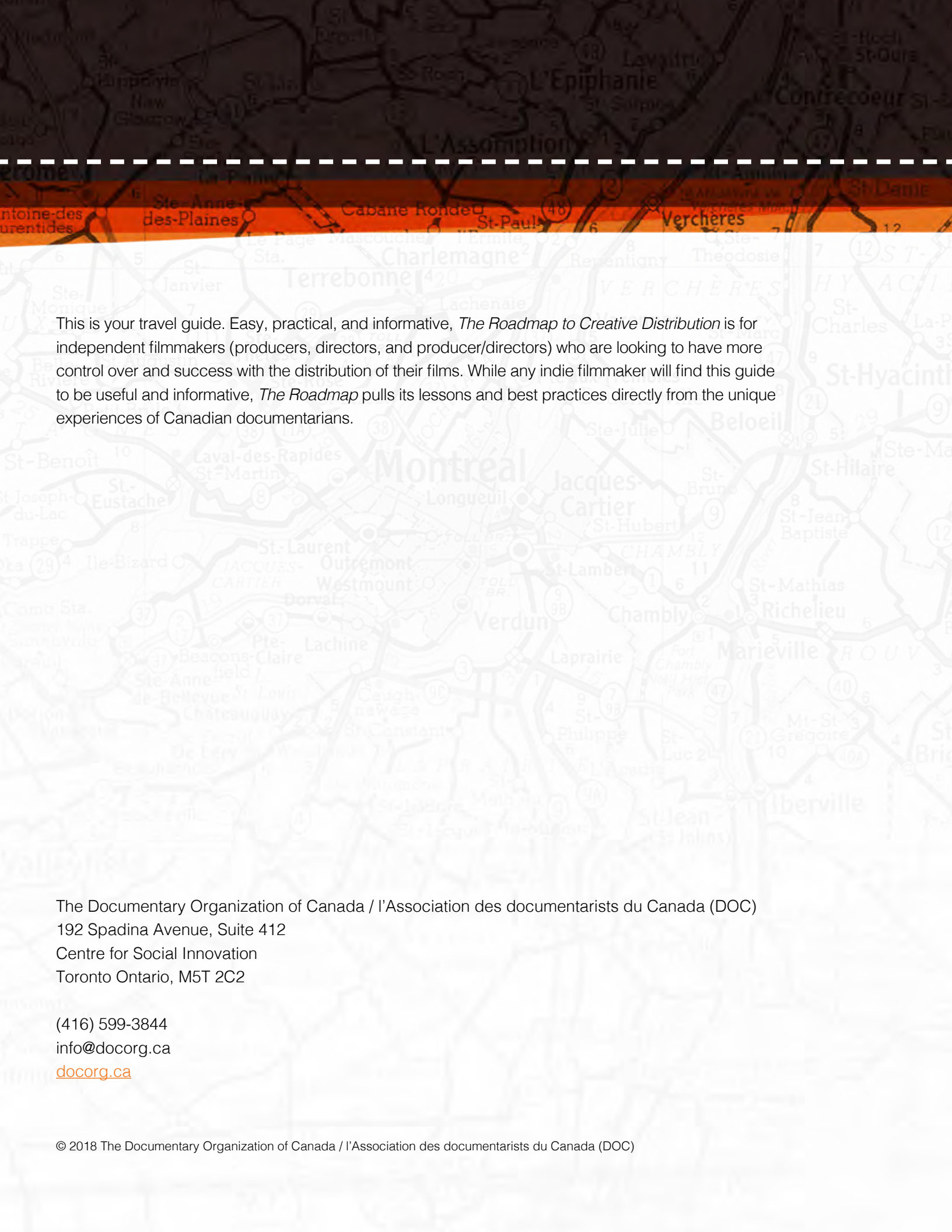
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This is your travel guide. Easy, practical, and informative, *The Roadmap to Creative Distribution* is for independent filmmakers (producers, directors, and producer/directors) who are looking to have more control over and success with the distribution of their films. While any indie filmmaker will find this guide to be useful and informative, *The Roadmap* pulls its lessons and best practices directly from the unique experiences of Canadian documentarians.

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Before You Embark on the Journey of Creative Distribution

The journey of creative distribution cannot be taken by following a prescribed set of turn-by-turn directions. There are countless end points and multiple routes to get there. The trip is different for every filmmaker—and for every film.

The Roadmap to Creative Distribution is intended as your travel guide. Easy, practical, and informative, it's for independent filmmakers (producers, directors, and producer/directors) who are looking to have more control over and success with the distribution of their films. While any indie filmmaker will find this guide to be useful and informative, *The Roadmap* pulls its lessons and best practices directly from the unique experiences of Canadian documentarians.

The **traditional model of distribution** involves filmmakers assigning all their rights to one or more distributors, who then make all the sales. The filmmaker makes the film and once the film has been made, they might attend a few film festival screenings, but basically, their work is over. From there, the distributor gets the film into the hands of customers and in front of audiences.

But traditional distribution doesn't always work well for independent filmmakers. After the distributors cover their expenses and take their percentage of the sales, filmmakers have little money left to repay our equity investors. And because most distributors have expertise in

specific territories or with the exploitation of certain rights, there are often territories that remain underserved and rights that are left unexploited.

The self-distribution model is typically positioned in direct contrast to traditional distribution. The term **self-distribution** has been in our professional lexicon for a long time. It is the process of filmmakers distributing our own work. If you are a documentary filmmaker, it's likely that you've already engaged in some form self-distribution, whether you know it or not. Every time you sell your film without the help of a distributor, you're engaging in self-distribution. But just as it is risky to place your film with a single distributor, it's also risky to try to engage in the purest form of self-distribution, where you're exploiting all the rights yourself.

And so, most people work somewhere along the continuum between traditional distribution and self-distribution, assigning specific rights to specific distribution partners, while keeping some rights for themselves. This middle ground has been given many names, including **DIY distribution, producer-led**



**START
HERE!**

distribution, and **hybrid distribution**. The latter is a term coined by Peter Broderick, a distribution consultant whose work and ideas have significantly informed this guide. In *The Roadmap*, we will most often talk about **creative distribution**, a term—and a concept—that is rising in popularity with the Sundance Institute’s 2017 launch of their prestigious Creative Distribution Fellowship.

The story that is commonly told is that creative distribution is a new practice. But it’s not. While the terminologies and strategies evolve depending on market forces and technological capabilities, the reality is that Canadian documentary filmmakers have been active in this realm for a very, very long time. In a survey of documentary filmmakers conducted by the Documentary Organization of Canada, we found that 76% of respondents have engaged in self-distribution on at least one of their documentary projects. And almost 18% of those filmmakers have been doing this work since 2001 or earlier.¹

We are engaging in creative distribution because the production and distribution landscape in Canada makes it impossible not to—or at very least, it opens up gaps in our distribution that cannot often be filled by traditional distributors.

The idea that creative distribution could help us to better sustain our businesses grabbed hold in Canada more than a decade ago. The buzz began in earnest in 2008 with *IndieWire*’s publication of Peter Broderick’s article “Welcome to the New World of Distribution.” We’ve been inspired by amazing creative distribution success stories in Canada and abroad. Think of the groundbreaking box office success of *The Corporation* by Mark Achbar, Jennifer Abbott, and Joel Bakan in 2003. Or the stunning audience-building work of Lianne Pajot and James Swirsky, with their 2012 release of *Indie Game: The Movie*.



Point of Interest: The filmmakers behind *Indie Game: The Movie* wrote a detailed five-part case study on their self-distribution efforts. Read it here: <https://tinyurl.com/cn63x98>

These inspiring victories, along with the myriad distribution case studies offered by both consultants and filmmakers, made us all incredibly hopeful that creative distribution would be a silver bullet. And when the Internet and new technologies continued opening up alternate routes to our audiences, filmmakers were hopeful that we could grab hold of the wheel and steer ourselves towards financial success.

¹ *Self-Distribution Survey of Documentary Filmmakers*, Documentary Organization of Canada, June 2018, questions 3 and 5, survey results available at: <https://www.docorg.ca/research>



Driving with Selvi

But, the road to self-distribution is clearly not paved in gold. Even though Canadian documentarians are actively engaging with self-distribution, most would like to be more successful at it. According to DOC's survey, less than 25% say that they have been financially successful in their self-distribution work. (52% feel they have been somewhat successful, whereas 23% indicate that they were not at all successful at making money). 45% have earned only \$10,000 or less on their most successful self-distributed project.² Some commonly expressed reasons for the less-than-thrilling monetary results seem to be: lack of time, lack of money, and lack of expertise.

Of course, some Canadian documentary filmmakers *are* adept at self-distribution: 25% of survey respondents indicated that they had made \$50,000 or more on their most successfully self-distributed project.³

Many filmmakers who have had success in this realm have been kind enough to share their insights throughout this guide. What they have to teach us through their own journeys is all about a more creative and strategic approach to distribution.

So, while creative distribution might not be the key to fiscal sustainability that we had initially hoped, it can most certainly help us to reach new audiences and increase our revenues. Just as we are adept at raising the financing for our films from a large number of sources, we can become more adept at working to get our films in front of new audiences—and increasing our revenues as a result.

Many of us are already choosing to take the creative distribution route. *The Roadmap* will guide us in doing it better.

² Ibid, questions 9, 11, and

³ Ibid, question 11

Understand the Terrain

The only constant in our world is change. Documentary filmmakers know this better than most. We have learned this lesson as creatives—through the stories we tell, which are always evolving. But we have also learned this lesson as businesspeople—working in a media landscape that is continually being remade by new technologies, shifting market forces, and shifting market forces, and changing funding priorities.

Before we can set the goals for our creative distribution and begin planning its execution, we must first begin by getting a sense of the current landscape. This will help us decide how to position our films within the broader context.

Topics to consider in your review of the terrain include:

- why you would choose to engage in creative distribution in the first place
- how you will divide your rights, territories, and markets
- how you will roll out your distribution

Reasons for Creative Distribution

Traditional distributors can be vital partners for documentary filmmakers. They take our work and sell it so we can get on with the work of making the next film. But because our films are often labours of love, we passionately want them to make their way into the world as successfully as possible. We often feel that no one

knows our film better than we do—and therefore, no one will know how to sell our film better than we can. And the hard truth is that sometimes, no one wants to. And so, documentary filmmakers often continue to work on the distribution of our films long after their making is complete.

As marketing strategist and distribution consultant Mia Bruno wrote, “If fundraising is your first act and production the second, distribution is the third act of your story. Stay with it, infuse it with creativity, work as hard to reach your audience as you did to bring your film to life to begin with. It will make all the difference.”⁴

In the end, there are many different reasons for documentary filmmakers to engage in creative distribution:

- We have a specific vision for our distribution that we feel we want to carry out ourselves
- We feel we can make more sales, earn more money, and get our work in front of more viewers by doing it ourselves

⁴ Mia Bruno, “A Recipe for Distribution: Five Ingredients of a New Formula for Your Indie’s Release Strategy,” *MovieMaker*, January 2018, retrieved from <https://www.moviemaker.com/archives/moviemaking/distribution/new-formula-for-release-strategy/6/>

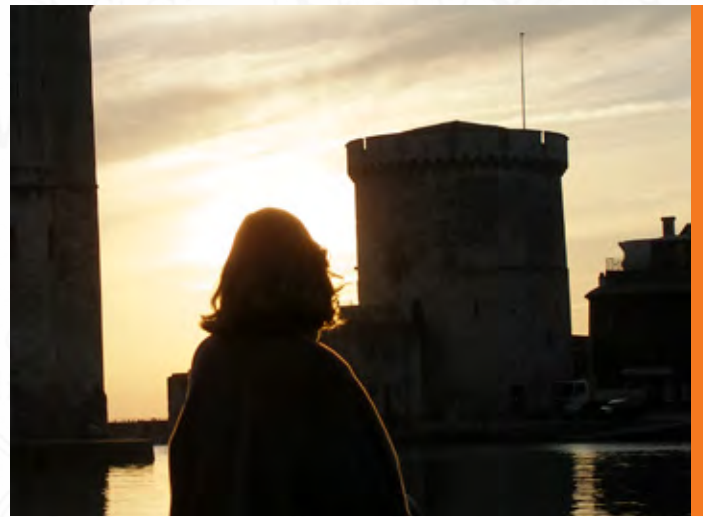
- We have rights that traditional distributors choose not to exploit (or rights that have reverted back to us after their distribution/broadcast terms have expired)
- Traditional distributors are not interested in our projects

Producer/director Annabel Loyola's experience with her one-hour documentary ***La Folle entreprise, sur les pas de Jeanne Mance*** (*A Mad Venture: In the Footsteps of Jeanne Mance*) offers a compelling window into the rationale for filmmaker-led distribution. Loyola first decided to self-distribute this project, about one of the founders of Montreal, because she could not find a traditional distributor who would add it to their slate.

La Folle entreprise was 100% independently produced and financed (by such sources as private donations, cultural sponsorships, DVD pre-sales, and a filmmaker investment). And so, having already chosen an alternative route to making her film, Loyola chose an alternative route to its distribution as well. She was encouraged in these efforts by friends and colleagues, who told her that there could be no better distributor than her, because she was the most knowledgeable about the subject of her film. And after all, in addition to having spent four years learning all about Mance for her first foray into filmmaking, Loyola had previously spent 25 years in the film/television industry. Having worked in production, broadcasting, and international distribution, Loyola had a wealth of international experience that served her well as she launched into creative distribution—which might itself be considered as a “mad venture” by some.

Indeed, Loyola's friends and colleagues were right. *La Folle entreprise* was completed in 2010 and Loyola currently has screenings scheduled into October 2019. During the first six years of its independent distribution, the film has brought \$120,000 in revenues to Loyola.

The revenues have come from a number of different sources: over 1,300 DVDs sold; public screenings; Vimeo on Demand sales; and lectures delivered by Loyola, who has become one of the leading experts on Mance.



La Folle entreprise

Perhaps equally important, Loyola's success with the independent release of her film was a major factor in her ability to secure funding from more traditional sources with her 2017 follow-up, *Le Dernier souffle, au cœur de l'Hôtel-Dieu de Montréal* (*The Last Breath: At the Heart of the Hôtel-Dieu de Montréal*). And even with solid interest from traditional distributors, Loyola is blazing the creative distribution trail yet again.

Dividing Rights

This is one of the most critical considerations in your work of creative distribution: which rights can you exploit well and which rights should be assigned to those who have the necessary expertise? Do you already have a structure in place (or a long list of connections) that will make the sale of some rights easier for you?

Often, distributors will request exclusive rights to all markets in a given territory (or several territories). The term **exclusive rights** means that only a single entity is permitted to exploit those rights. For example, if you give your distributor exclusive rights to all markets in the US, when someone in the US wants to buy the film from you (whether it's a broadcaster, an art house theatre, or a high school teacher), you will not be able to make these sales yourself. Instead, you will have to send that customer directly to your distributor, who will make the sale and take their split of the revenues. The split distributors take is incredibly variable, often negotiable, and can be different for the same film in different markets. The distributor's cut

will be anywhere from 25-75% of distribution revenues, after distribution expenses have been deducted. When negotiating with a distributor, be sure that the distribution agreement identifies the maximum amount of allowed expenses, called an **expense cap**. Telefilm Canada advises that: "Such expense caps should be negotiated based on reasonable projections for revenues and expenses, and should generally include a cap based on a percentage of gross sales as well as an absolute dollar amount."⁵

While signing over exclusive rights to your distributor is simpler from an administrative perspective, there are more creative and strategic ways to structure a distribution deal. You might give your distributor the markets where they can demonstrate good performance (for example, theatrical, broadcast, and home video), but you yourself might retain the other markets where you think you will be able to do better (maybe educational, non-theatrical, semi-theatrical, and VOD).

You might also choose to share exclusive rights to certain markets with a distribution partner, both holding **co-exclusive rights**. Or, you can choose to share rights even more widely, giving all distribution partners **non-exclusive rights**.

And don't forget that a final option exists: to engage in true self-distribution, keeping the exclusive rights to a market for yourself.

Dividing Territories

When thinking about distribution within the various territories, first ask yourself: *What are the key territories for my film?* And: *How will these key territories be best served?*

This decision involves doing your research, asking potential distributor partners some hard questions, and being honest with yourself about your own capacity. Perhaps you are more tapped into the Canadian market, from the years of sales you've done previously. That's an argument for retaining the Canadian rights. Maybe

you think that, as a Canadian filmmaker you're better positioned to pitch your film to Canadian audiences.

There's also an argument that is driven less by sales figures. For example, is it important to the life of the film that the distribution occurs in a certain way in a given territory? Is it personally important for you to connect directly with your Canadian audiences, for example? If the answer is yes, you may choose to take on the rights to this territory yourself, to realize your specific vision for the film's dissemination.

But you simply cannot do this the whole world over. So, look at a map and begin carving up territories, keeping those for yourself that fulfil whatever criteria you have set. Be sure to give the territories that you cannot handle to someone who can. This will likely mean working with a few distributors who specialize in different regions of the world.

Of course, if there are countries that aren't being well-served by distribution partners, don't be afraid to open those territories up directly to the people who want to see the film, through DVD sales and online streaming. The world is big—work to find the folks in it who are too easily forgotten.

Dividing Markets

Documentary films have an incredibly wide appeal. They can be run in theatres, aired on television, streamed at home, screened in community centres, and integrated into classroom teaching. Each represents a different potential market for your film.

One frustration amongst filmmakers is that definitions around markets can vary widely from person to person. Before working with distribution partners, be sure that everyone is on the same page by clearly establishing the uses and users that fall into each market. To help you with this, the various markets are listed below, each with a general description and some things to consider in the context of creative distribution.

⁵ Canada Feature Film Fund Distribution Terms & Contracts Requirements, Telefilm Canada, March 2003, page 2, retrieved from <https://telefilm.ca/wp-content/uploads/distribution-terms-contracts-requirements.pdf>

Theatrical

Theatrical rights allow your film to be screened in a movie theatre, to an audience for a fee. Theatrical runs can be single-night, a renewable week-long booking, or anything in between. While most of us dream of long theatrical runs, it's not a reality that many can afford without a distributor shouldering the load. And truthfully, very few Canadian distributors are interested in releasing documentaries in the theatrical market, which is an expensive proposition that does not often yield the desired profits.

Therefore, the main reasons for attempting theatrical distribution are almost never monetary. Instead, a theatrical release serves other purposes, including:

- generating publicity, which will hopefully lead to increased sales in other markets;
- awards qualifications, such as the Oscars, which require a week-long theatrical run in both New York City and Los Angeles (although winning an award at a qualifying festival will also do the trick); and
- meeting funder requirements, such as those of the Ontario Media Development Corporation⁶ (OMDC) Film Fund⁷, which requires a Canadian theatrical release.

Additionally, filmmakers who are working to achieve social impact with their films often believe that theatrical screenings are important in reaching their goals. American documentarian Morgan Neville (*20 Feet from Stardom*, *Won't You Be My Neighbor?*) recently encapsulated this

belief, saying, "I feel like a theatrical release helps a dialogue around a film seep into the culture."⁸

Considerations for Creative Distribution: Although the conventional wisdom dictates that it cannot be done, many filmmakers have still found a way to launch a theatrical run of their films without breaking the bank. The key is to keep overhead costs low and to plan event-type screenings wherever possible. An event screening is a single-night engagement that is made to feel like a special event for the audience. Perhaps you attend the screening and participate in a post-screening Q&A. Maybe your subject is also there. Maybe there is some live music before, or a reception afterwards. Anything you can do to make the screening feel special will help you to sell more tickets and fill those seats.

Getting your film into theatres takes some legwork, but those who have done it successfully are often surprised at how simple it is to engage indie theatre owners in a conversation about their films. Suzanne Crocker, whose 2014 film *All The Time In The World* screened at 25 indie cinemas, suggests that filmmakers research the indie theatre world in the same way they would research film festivals: doing Google searches, looking at theatres where similar films have played, and chatting with folks who know the art house cinema world. From there, you can make contact with the theatres' programmers, telling them about your film and about why you think it would do well



All the Time in the World

⁶ Please note that as of September 2018, the OMDC began operating as Ontario Creates.

⁷ OMDC Film Fund Production Guidelines, including Diversity Enhancement Ontario Media Development Corporation, 2018, retrieved from http://www.omdc.on.ca/Assets/Industry+Initiatives/English/Content+and+Marketing/Film+Fund/Film+Fund-Production-Guideline_en.PDF

⁸ "Morgan Neville on 'Won't You Be My Neighbor?'" *The Business*, KCRW, June 2018, retrieved from <https://www.kcrw.com/news-culture/shows/the-business/morgan-neville-on-his-unexpected-tearjerker-wont-you-be-my-neighbor>

in their community.

Ideally, you are looking for the theatres to offer a flat screening fee, or to share a split of the box office revenues (box office splits typically range from 30% for the filmmaker and 70% for the theatre, to a 50/50 split).

If you don't have success in convincing theatres to book your film, two alternatives exist: you could take a gamble and rent a theatre yourself or you could work with an on-demand theatrical service.

Renting a theatre is also known as **four-wall**. Once you four-wall a theatre, all the box office revenues are yours, but it's also more risky because it means you have to commit the rental fee far in advance of having confirmation on your ticket sales. It also might mean more work: some venues will offer full services (like box office staff, advance ticket sales, audio-visual supports) while others require additional fees or that you bring in your own staff to ensure things are running smoothly.

On-demand theatrical is a process by which potential audience members can make a request to have your film screen at their local theatre. Once a specific number of audience members have requested tickets, the theatre booking is confirmed and the ticket orders are placed. (For more information about on-demand theatrical, see "Share the Driving with Others" later in this guide.)

The approach to the theatrical market taken by the Canadian team behind ***The Messenger*** is instructive. Joanne Jackson (producer) and Su Rynard (director) identified the core audience for their cinematic documentary about songbird extinction to be bird enthusiasts, with a secondary audience of environmentally oriented documentary- and nature-lovers. Because the film is so visually evocative, Jackson and Rynard had always known that it would resonate powerfully in theatres. It had been envisioned as a theatrical film and funders like the OMDC required a theatrical release in Canada.

The Nature of Things on CBC had offered a license fee for the one-hour version of *The Messenger*, titled *SongbirdSOS*. This broadcast license was a crucial piece of the film's financing, because it triggered all the

other Canadian financing. But, as is often the case for documentaries with a Canadian broadcaster attached, Jackson was not able to find a Canadian distributor who was interested in attempting to exploit the remaining rights, even though the theatrical version is a significantly different film.

So, Jackson decided to run the domestic theatrical release herself. She hired a booking agent and they set



At a screening of *The Messenger*

to work getting the film into theatres across Canada. The release was a success. The booker secured 12 venues. His rate (approximately \$4,000) was easily covered by the box office revenues (the most lucrative venue brought in \$10,000). Jackson and her team then went on to book another 23 venues themselves, in some cases negotiating very favourable box office splits. It's typical for a theatre to take 65% of the box office, leaving the filmmaker with 35%. But Jackson was able to negotiate a 50/50 split of revenues with some theatres. In total, the film was in Canadian cinemas for 100 days, including a 21-day run at Toronto's Carlton Cinema.

In the US, however, Jackson had already formed a strong relationship with powerhouse distributor Kino Lorber, who had taken an early interest in *The Messenger* during its world premiere at Hot Docs and offered a significant distribution advance. Kino Lorber was confident in their ability to release the film theatrically in the US. (In fact, they wanted to release it in Canada, too, but having an American distributor conducting the theatrical release in Canada would have gone against the Canadian financiers' regulations.) The distributor's confidence was justified: the

film was booked into more than 130 venues across the US, typically with limited theatrical runs of 3-7 days. The film also garnered a good deal of public interest, resulting in a significant number of on-demand theatrical screenings.

In order to ensure that the core audience for the film (bird enthusiasts and nature lovers) came out in droves, the team partnered with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in the US and Bird Studies Canada as outreach partners. Many local groups hosted screenings, including local Audubon Societies and conservation groups. And recently, more than two years after its premiere, the team behind *The Messenger* launched a theatrical run in the UK, booking 20 single-night theatrical events, generating solid box office returns and DVD sales, and repeating the success they experienced on this side of the Atlantic.

Semi-theatrical

Semi-theatrical rights give organizations (such as film festivals, museums, science centres, colleges and universities) the right to screen your film in a public venue for a paying audience.

Note that distributors will often lump the semi-theatrical, non-theatrical, and educational markets into one category. While some overlap exists, these markets are each distinct, with specific defined uses.

Considerations for Creative Distribution: Beyond film festivals, the semi-theatrical market is one that is often overlooked. And yet, screenings in the semi-theatrical market can be lucrative, as organizations in this category often have significant operating budgets and many value artists' work. Tapping into this market requires research to determine which institutions might be interested in screening your film. While more and more festivals are now paying screening fees to filmmakers, money is not the primary motivation for a strong festival release. It's the introduction to the media and the public that makes a festival truly valuable to your film's distribution. (More on crafting a successful film festival strategy in the "Distribution Rollout" section below.)

Non-theatrical

Non-theatrical rights give organizations (such as activist groups, community groups, film clubs, and religious groups) the right to screen your film in a public venue, for either a paying or non-paying audience. These screenings are often referred to as **community screenings** and are typically hosted by organizations that have an interest in the subject matter of the film. For example, the sustainability committee at a local church might be interested in screening your documentary about climate change.

Considerations for Creative Distribution: Very often, filmmakers will retain non-theatrical rights for themselves. In fact, DOC's survey found that semi- and non-theatrical are the rights that are retained most often by doc makers.⁹ This is partly because traditional distributors do not often exploit these rights well—if at all. Distributors build relationships with specific clients, maintain buyer lists, and attend markets and conferences as a way to shop their films around.

Because buyers in the non-theatrical market might not be habitual customers, making a sale to these entities is more time consuming and less lucrative than selling to theatres or educational institutions. Continuing our example from above, a church group may have never hosted a screening before. Once you've done the legwork to find them, they will then need you to guide them through the sales/licensing process (and maybe even the screening process).

But even with the extra investment of time, the non-theatrical market can be lucrative for filmmakers, with screening fees running from \$300 to \$500, or more. If you also have the goal of creating impact with your film, community screenings are the perfect venue for post-screening conversations and building partnerships amongst change-makers.

Educational

Educational rights give schools, public libraries, governmental agencies, and other organizations (for-

⁹ *Self-Distribution Survey of Documentary Filmmakers*, Documentary Organization of Canada, June 2018, question 7, survey results available at: <https://www.docorg.ca/research>

profit, non-profit, and unincorporated grassroots groups or clubs) the right to screen your film for educational purposes and hold a copy of your film in their library collections. Institutions and organizations once bought VHS tapes and DVDs, but now they are often requesting access to online streaming versions of films; digital downloads; or permission to create a digital file from an existing hard copy.

Often, institutions will request educational copies with **Public Performance Rights (PPR)**. Whereas educational rights allow a film to be used in face-to-face teaching environments and held in a library collection, PPRs grant permission to screen the film beyond the classroom: in public screenings, film clubs, extracurricular activities, campus-wide events, and online teaching environments.

The typical educational price for a disc of a feature-length documentary with PPR is around \$300. The cost for a digital file might be slightly more, perhaps around \$400 or \$500. When a school purchases a digital file, the film can be made available to the entire school community through the library's online holdings and screened by many individuals at the same time. In the past, institutions would have had to purchase multiple discs to make the film similarly available—thus the higher price point of the digital files. It's also important to remember to consider the term of the license being sold: when purchasing a DVD or Blu-ray, the rights are being purchased only for the life of the disc. When it is lost or damaged, they must purchase a new one. In the case of a digital download, once the institution has the file, they will potentially have it in perpetuity. Of course, many filmmakers work to limit the license term (typically to 3-5 years), at which time the institution must renew their license by paying a new fee.

Considerations for Creative Distribution: There are many great educational distributors who only want to sell your film within the educational market. They have long lists of buyers from universities and colleges and are able to get your film in front of those buyers. A skilled educational distributor can make significant

sales, especially if they specialize in your film's particular subject matter. At the same time, however, your film will be one title in a big catalogue and the amount of time that any distributor can spend on any one film is relatively small. For these reasons, many filmmakers choose to share co-exclusive rights with an educational distributor, allowing both parties to sell the film in the educational market.



Point of Interest: Some educational distributors have chosen to specialize in specific subject matter. This means that their outreach and marketing can be even more successfully targeted to your core audience. For example:

- Bullfrog Films, films on environmental and social justice issues <http://www.bullfrogfilms.com/>
- Women Make Movies, films by and about women <http://www.wmm.com/>

If your film is well suited to the educational market, your sales can be significant. If your subject matter resonates in the US, consider focusing efforts on that territory. Under current Canadian law, educators are no longer required to purchase educational copies of films and videos. This shift occurred in 2012, with the passing of Bill C-11, the *Copyright Modernization Act*. The bill aimed to bring our federal copyright legislation up to date for the digital era. It expanded the understanding of the scope of Fair Dealing to include education, satire, and parody. What this means is that educational institutions are no longer required to purchase an educational version, and can instead make use of any copy that was legally obtained.¹⁰ (As of the publication of this report, C-11 is currently under review by the federal government.)

Ever the creative problem-solvers, doc-makers are finding ways around this roadblock. Some are delaying the home video release of their films, forcing the educational market to purchase the discs at the educational rate (as it is the only version legally available). Others are standardizing all prices,

¹⁰ "Bill C-11: The Copyright Modernization Act," University of British Columbia website, retrieved at <https://copyright.ubc.ca/guidelines-and-resources/support-guides/bill-c-11-the-copyright-modernization-act/>

regardless of usage. This approach requires individuals to pay the same amount as institutions, setting the price around, perhaps \$50 or \$60. While simplifying the process and offering institutions a significant savings, most individuals would probably be unwilling to purchase a DVD at this price point.

Of course, these decisions around release schedules and pricing become more complicated if you are working with other distribution partners, who will need to be consulted. Often, those distributors who are willing to work with non-exclusive or co-exclusive terms require fixed prices and shared windows of availability.

Home Video

Home Video rights allow individuals to own a copy of your film (on DVD or Blu-ray) and to screen it in their own home and for personal use.



The Messenger

Considerations for Creative Distribution: These discs are typically sold for around \$20. Compared to educational copies of the same film, the per-unit profits are clearly much lower. But home video distribution worked in the past because of volume of sales. If you expect to sell hundreds of educational DVDs, you might expect to sell thousands of home video discs. Unfortunately, with the decreasing popularity of physical media, DVDs and Blu-rays are no longer selling in the

quantities that make their distribution as attractive. But DVDs and Blu-ray discs aren't dead yet. Consider your core audience. Are your viewers living in remote areas where Internet access is expensive or the bandwidth is insufficient for video streaming? Or perhaps your core audience is elderly viewers, who simply prefer the more familiar technologies. Or maybe your core audience is comprised of gift-givers or other folks who still value a copy they can hold in their hands.

That's what happened with ***The Messenger***, whose core audience of bird-lovers purchased the home video discs enthusiastically. To create added value, the discs come with French and Spanish subtitles, exclusive bonus video content, and a glossy souvenir booklet. While the subtitles expanded the film's reach into new educational markets, the booklet and bonus materials appealed especially to bird lovers, who wanted to watch the film for a second time or gift it to their friends and family. As a result, the traditional home video sales thrived.

If you *do* choose to self-distribute DVD or Blu-ray copies of your film, you will need to decide how to produce them and sell them to your customers. (More on this in "Share the Driving with Others.")

VOD

Video On-Demand (VOD) is the online equivalent of Home Video rights. In short, it's digital rentals and sales of your films. Gains in this market have been exponential in the past few years, with a 12.5% year-over-year revenue increase in 2018. In this same year, revenues in the Canadian VOD market were approximately \$485 million USD, with streaming revenues accounting for \$309 million. By 2022, VOD revenues in Canada are expected to reach \$613 million USD.¹¹

There are three different types of VOD:

- **Ad-Supported Video On-Demand (AVOD):** Online streaming videos, free for viewers, but using an ad-based model for revenue generation

¹¹ "Video-On-Demand (Canada)," Statista: The Statistics Portal website: <https://www.statista.com/outlook/201/108/video-on-demand/canada>

for the platform and the filmmakers. Example: YouTube

- **Transactional Video On-Demand (TVOD):**

Online videos available on a video-by-video basis for a fee. These videos are typically available as **download to rent (DTR)**, which makes them available temporarily or as an **electronic sell-through (EST)**, which offers a permanent digital purchase via download or cloud-storage. Example: iTunes

- **Subscription Video On-Demand (SVOD):**

Online videos available for streaming from various subscription services. Customers pay a low monthly fee for access to the service's entire video collection. Example: Netflix

Considerations for Creative Distribution: While several VOD services have revolutionized the film and television industry in their own way, it's fair to say that Netflix's model has completely changed how we consume media. It has increased binge viewing, popularized subscription services of all kinds, and increased the quality and amount of programming available to audiences at any one time. As a result, audiences are less interested in leaving their homes to watch films and expect to be able to see a film the minute it's released. They are also far less willing to pay for individual programs—thus valuing creative content less than ever before.

As VOD sales and rentals continue to increase and DVD and Blu-ray sales continue to decrease, VOD sales are the best bet for long-term profitability and for reaching our audiences where they are—in their homes. However, conducting creative distribution in this realm is currently fraught. There are a significant number of platforms and revenue models to consider, with some platforms being tightly curated and others refusing to deal directly with independent filmmakers. There is also a significant expense involved in preparing the digital files of your film for these online platforms. (For more information on VOD platforms and services, see “Share the Driving with Others” and “Digital Distribution Resources.”)

Domestic Television

Domestic television rights are ideally sold to Canadian broadcasters during the development phase, in order to trigger the additional public and private funding available within the broadcast funding system. Canadian broadcasters typically require a license term of 5-7 years, with an exclusive 1-year window at the beginning of the period. They also require the exclusive domestic streaming rights for this same window, during which time the production will be available for geo-blocked VOD streaming from the broadcaster's website. (**Geo-blocking** prevents Internet users who are not in Canada from watching video content, thus allowing you to sell VOD rights in other territories.)

Sales made to a broadcaster before the film is complete is referred to as a **broadcast commission** or a **broadcast pre-sale**. A commission is typically reserved for the sale made to the main broadcaster, who has bought in early, contributed the highest license fee, may have an equity stake in the film, and has the most input into the creative and editorial direction of your work. The financing for both commissions and presales are typically included in a film's financing structure and broadcasters receive on-screen credit for their contributions to the film. A sale made after the film is complete (and offering no creative input or on-screen credit) is known as an **acquisition**. The license fee for an **acquisition** is typically much lower than that for a pre-sale.

Considerations for Creative Distribution: Because the traditional Canadian television funding model requires a broadcast license fee to trigger eligibility for a range of other funding, Canadian documentaries produced under this model become far less attractive to Canadian distributors, because both the domestic television and VOD rights are off the table. (And while the system is slowly changing, with VOD licenses being included as acceptable triggers by more and more funders, conventional broadcasters are still the first stop in the documentary filmmaker's fundraising journey.) As such, many filmmakers choose to engage in creative distribution, in order to exploit the rights that remain after their broadcast sale.

For those who choose—or are forced—to work outside the broadcast funding model, we do not face the same distribution constraints. While financing our work through the non-traditional sources of arts councils, foundations, and crowdfunding might be more onerous and less lucrative, it typically guarantees that we retain exclusive rights to our projects, which can be exploited as we see fit. But, it also means that we are making films without a guaranteed audience—thereby potentially increasing the need for a creative approach to distribution.

International Television

International television broadcasters have similar requirements to domestic broadcasters, regarding their terms, territories, and digital rights. Sometimes, your international television rights may be pre-sold in one or two territories to bring in additional production financing. Typically, however, most international television sales are executed after the projects are complete. Producers with experience in the international marketplace will make their own sales, but more often, sales agents come on board to make these deals.

Considerations for Creative Distribution: If you are planning to sell your film to international broadcasters—and there is little reason *not* to tap into this revenue stream in some way—you need to understand how the international marketplace differs from the domestic marketplace. For example, international broadcasters rarely have feature-length slots for documentaries, so it's advisable to create an international version with a running time of approximately 50 minutes. Broadcasters generally expect the producer to pay for the versioning costs, although in some situations broadcasters will do cut-downs themselves. Remember: all the terms of broadcast deals—including the license fee amount—are negotiable.

Securing a domestic broadcast license before pitching to international broadcasters is generally considered to be advisable, as having a broadcaster from your home country on board is seen as a stamp of approval.

International markets and conferences are useful for building relationships with international broadcasters, distributors, and producers—and, happily, there are significant public funds available for international market participation (see “Fill Your Tank” for more information).

Distribution Rollout

How—and when—you roll out your distribution will be a critical key to revenue generation. As Jon Reiss puts it in his comprehensive book *Think Outside the Box Office*, “Windows were established so as to maximize the revenue for one rights category before allowing the film to be released in a second less expensive per-person rights category. This windowing structure allowed distributors to charge more to customers who wanted to see a film sooner than others. Seeing a movie in a theater has traditionally been the most expensive way to see a film, so it was given first priority.”¹²

In the Canadian documentary industry, there has been a fairly typical documentary film rollout schedule in place. It looks something like this:

Typical Rollout

1. Film Festival Screenings

A successful film festival release can make all the difference to your film's subsequent success, regardless of whether you are engaging in traditional or creative distribution. Film festivals put your film in front of its first audiences, helping garner reviews and other media coverage and creating a buzz for your film with the general public as well as within the film/television industry. If you are already signed with a distributor, they can help introduce your film to the appropriate festivals. If you do not yet have distribution partners, a strong festival run will make it easier for you to interest them in your film. Some distributors might even seek you out, based on your festival performance. If you are not interested in working with a distributor, a film festival release is perhaps even more important, as it will be your first experience of connecting directly with your audience.

¹² Jon Reiss, *Think Outside the Box Office*, Hybrid Cinema Publishing, 2010, pg 49.

 **Point of Interest:** Film Festival strategy is an entire topic unto itself. If you are looking for a consultant in this area, check out DOC's Festival Concierge program at https://www.docorg.ca/about_fc and the forthcoming Festival Concierge Festival Strategy Guide (available in 2019) at <https://www.docorg.com/research>

2. Theatrical Release (if applicable)

Whether or not to release your film theatrically is a big question. For those intrepid souls who do choose to embark on a theatrical release, the strategy has been to follow as closely on the heels of the major film festival screenings as possible. A few splashy festival premieres will get audiences excited about seeing your film in theatres, so capitalize on that by getting it into cinemas as soon as possible.

3. Television Broadcast & Broadcaster VOD Release

If you sold your broadcast license to your Canadian broadcaster as a pre-sale (i.e., the license fee formed a portion of your financing and the sale was not a pure acquisition), your Canadian broadcaster will typically want to air the film as soon as possible after its festival premiere and/or theatrical run, to make the most of the buzz.

Some filmmakers sell the broadcast rights to several different Canadian broadcasters, which can be done, provided the languages and territories licensed don't overlap. For instance, you could sell the first window rights to TVO for broadcast in Ontario and rights for the same period to Knowledge Network for broadcast in British Columbia. Or, CBC's documentary could purchase the English-language broadcast rights across Canada, while Canal D could purchase the Canadian French-language broadcast rights. The traditional exclusivity period in the Canadian television industry is 1 year starting at beginning of the license term, followed by up to an additional 6 years of non-exclusive broadcast (and VOD) rights

4. Semi-Theatrical (not including major film festivals) & Non-Theatrical

Once your main film festival and theatrical runs are complete, semi- and non-theatrical screenings can begin in earnest. These screenings might follow closely on the heels of broadcast, or might precede broadcast. They help bring your film to audiences in a shared experience. Unlike the initial rollout windows, which have a sense of urgency and a time limit, semi-theatrical and non-theatrical screenings can occur for years—or even decades—after your film's release.

5. Educational Release

Once your film has made the rounds in film festivals and theatres, you can begin releasing it to the educational market. Educational release may coincide with the semi- and non-theatrical release of your film.

6. Home Video Release & Transactional VOD

Releasing your film for TVOD sales on a platform like iTunes (or for sale as a DVD or Blu-ray disc) will bring your film into people's homes and offer them the convenience of watching it when it whenever they like.

7. Subscription VOD

If you have sold the Canadian VOD rights to your broadcaster, an SVOD platform like Netflix might not be able to exploit the Canadian SVOD rights during the typical 1-year exclusivity window.

Collapsing Rollout Windows

As audiences begin watching more and more content on their personal devices and are going to theatres less and less often, the traditional windows described above are collapsing. Collapsing the windows completely is known as a **day-and-date release**. This means it will be made available across all markets and platforms and in all venues, at the same time. For example, if your film's theatrical release is set for November 15, its VOD and DVD release will also be set for November 15.

On the other hand, a simultaneous release has the effect of reducing audience sizes in theatres, by making the theatrical experience feel less valuable. As such, day-and-date releases are deeply controversial in the traditional distribution industry—especially with theatre owners.



This Changes Everything

Considerations for Creative Distribution: Opinions on the value of a quick rollout for indie films is incredibly mixed. On one hand, as we have seen above, day-and-date releases are negatively impacting theatrical revenues. But on the other hand, a quick rollout across multiple platforms means that any publicity garnered

will drive audiences to your film in one way or another. A review in advance of your theatrical release in the *Toronto Star* or *Vancouver Sun* will drive people to the theatres to see your film, but it will also drive people to Netflix and iTunes. In a traditional rollout, when your audience goes to iTunes, they will see that they have to wait until the theatrical run is complete before screening your film. At that point, a few of them might head out to the local cinema. But the majority will begin searching for something else to watch online and forget all about the press that drove them to seek out your film. You will then have to engage in more publicity for the iTunes release to bring those audience members back to your film. So, giving your audiences a film to watch in whatever venue and on whatever platform they want is very satisfying. Overall, it is believed that a fast rollout—if done well—will increase our total revenues and audience sizes.

When releasing ***This Changes Everything*** in 2015, producer/director Avi Lewis and co-producer/impact producer Katie McKenna believed that time was of the essence for this film, based on Naomi Klein's book about the global crisis of climate change. As such, they approached their distribution with an “all of the above” distribution strategy. While not quite a day-and-date release, the film's rollout happened incredibly quickly. From its world premiere at the Toronto International

Distribution Rollout Schedule for *This Changes Everything*

Sept. 13, 2015	World Premiere at TIFF
Sept. 26, 2015	Movement Premieres in Manila and 16 EU cities, with Klein and Lewis Skyping into most of the post-screening Q&As
Oct. 1, 2015	NYC Theatrical Run at IFC (held over)
Oct. 4-9, 2015	Canadian Tour with Klein and Lewis
Oct. 9, 2015	Canadian Theatrical Release in 20 cities
Oct. 20, 2015	US Theatrical in over 50 events iTunes Release Community Screenings Begin
Nov. 3, 2015	All broadband EST: Amazon Instant Video, GooglePlay, Xbox, PlayStation, Vudu, VHX, Vimeo on Demand
Nov. 20, 2015	Broadband and cable EST and VOD: DIRECTV, Time Warner Cable, Comcast Xfinity On Demand, Verizon FiOC, COX, etc.

Figure 1.0



Québécoisie

Film Festival, it was just five weeks until the film was available everywhere. Here's the schedule, as shared by McKenna at the 2016 Rio Content Market in Brazil (figure 1.0).

The urgency of the message dictated the urgency of the distribution schedule. And McKenna and her team learned that an “all of the above” release strategy can work—if you have the right partners.

However, when most indie doc makers look at their options realistically, a film with a small team and a modest outreach and distribution budget won't have the capacity to grab the public's attention and simultaneously roll out across all markets. A slower build, where you focus on one market at a time is a more targeted approach. By moving more slowly through the rollout of your film, you can learn from your audience and change course as necessary.

A great example of this is the work done by the producing/directing team of Olivier Higgins and Mélanie Carrier on their 2013 feature documentary ***Québécoisie***. The film, which follows the team as they cycle the North Shore of Quebec in an attempt to better understand the complex relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, premiered at Rencontres internationales du documentaire de Montréal (RIDM) but then went on a slower city-by-city rollout. Typically, films that are not released in all cities

simultaneously will begin in Montreal and then roll out across the rest of Quebec. But Higgins and Carrier decided to reverse the rollout. After RIDM, *Québécoisie* screened at Cabaret du Capitole in Quebec City. It was a free, invitation-only event. The first night, the filmmakers asked the audience to become their ambassadors. The next night, the film opened to the public at the Cinéma Cartier, also in Quebec City. The film screened in that theatre for 15 weeks, with stellar attendance. The film then played at the Cinéma Beaubien in Montreal for five weeks, and then in Sherbrooke, Trois Rivières, and many more. The film is still having public screenings four years later. At first the team was afraid to put the film onto online platforms, mainly because they were worried that it would prevent them from screening in film festivals. While this is quite possible, the online platforms do not seem to have hurt the film's public screenings in any way. The film was made available on Illico, Tou.tv, ONF, and eventually several other educational platforms.

But not each documentary will find success across all markets. Where is your core audience likely to be found? Are they in the classroom or the community centre? Are they theatregoers or homebodies? Thinking about this will help you to determine the key markets for your film.

Taking it deeper, beyond simply identifying *where* your audience is, you should also calculate *how much*

money you can earn in each market for your particular film, and *how long* it will take to make any one sale. With non-theatrical screening rights typically selling for \$300-\$500, a single sale in the non-theatrical market is far more lucrative than a single sale on the VOD market, which could yield less than a dollar after the online platform and your distributor/aggregator take their cut. We hope that the volume of VOD sales make it a lucrative prospect, but the work of spreading word about the film to individuals can be expensive and time consuming and often feels like a crapshoot. Conversely, word needs to spread to far fewer people in the non-theatrical market to yield positive results for your film. With just a few emails, it's possible to book a non-theatrical screening with local groups who will then see word of your film far and wide. Of course, a broadcast sale would be far more lucrative than both of these options, but would also typically take far more time and energy to secure.

Set Your Destination

The road to creative distribution stretches in front of you. You now know the terrain well. But before you pack your bags, you need to decide where you're headed. Just as you plan your production, you must plan your distribution. For the best results, this planning should begin as early as possible (ideally, during pre-production).

Take some time to think about your specific film. Is it a film that will do well in the landscape of creative distribution? There are no hard and fast rules for what will succeed in this terrain, but films with built-in audiences—enthusiastic and committed ones—will have a better chance. A built-in audience could be: the loyal fan-base of your main character, the people who are fighting against the injustice depicted in your film, or any other group that is passionate about the topic of the film—or about you as its filmmaker. (For more details on thinking through your audience, see “Chart a Course”.)

In our survey of documentary filmmakers, we found that the top reason for documentary filmmakers to engage in self-distribution was because they felt as though they had a specific vision for the distribution of their work that they alone could realize (often in collaboration with specific partners).¹³

So, what's your vision? What are your goals for your film's release? What would a successful rollout of your film look like?

Possibilities to consider include:

- Dollar value and/or number of sales made
- Number of screenings held
- Types of audiences and/or number of viewers
- Social impacts achieved

Educators and corporate trainers often encourage the creation of SMART goals:

- S** – specific
- M** – measurable
- A** – achievable
- R** – relevant
- T** – time-based


This well-known system for setting goals is underutilized in the work of self-distribution. But thinking about your goals in this laser-focused way can be very helpful. For example, distribution goal might resemble the goal set by the filmmakers of *Bully* (directed by Lee Hirsch and released in 2011). Their goal: To screen *Bully* for one million kids.

¹³ *Self-Distribution Survey of Documentary Filmmakers*, Documentary Organization of Canada, June 2018, question 8, survey results available at: <https://www.docorg.ca/research>

It's specific, measurable, achievable, and relevant. The only element lacking is that the goal did not include a deadline (i.e., "by June 2013"). For the filmmakers of *Bully*, this goal helped them to focus on schools, where they would find entire communities of kids (and educators) for their screenings. This goal would have helped them to know that an educator's guide would bring added value to the film, and help the screenings to have a greater impact. It also would have helped them to recognize that the R-rating that was assigned to them by the MPAA would be a significant roadblock—and how to react quickly and call media attention to this fact. (This media attention then helped generate a significant buzz for the film, which brought more kids to the theatres to see the film.)

The goal of reaching 1 million kids was also incredibly relevant to the larger impact goals of the film, which were to sound the alarm and fuel a cultural shift, ultimately making bullying unacceptable.

Many filmmakers who engage in creative distribution are focused around creating social impacts with our work. In fact, 85% of filmmakers surveyed reported that they felt that their self-distribution efforts had been successful or somewhat successful in creating their desired social impact.¹⁴ This is great news—and deserves to be celebrated. And yet, some of the same filmmakers who reported significant success in creating social impact with their self-distribution efforts reported only lukewarm financial success. And while it's vital to remember that the success of a film is measurable by more than just ticket sales, all forms of distribution are ultimately business endeavours. As professional documentarians, we should never be shy about expecting fair compensation for our work. So, as you plan your goals for your film, remember that it's not necessary for you to sacrifice financial success for social impact. It's possible to achieve both.

 **Point of Interest:** To see more information on *Bully's* impact and how it was achieved, check out the informative case study produced by the Doc Impact Award: <https://tinyurl.com/ybx9ym9n>

¹⁴ *Self-Distribution Survey of Documentary Filmmakers*, Documentary Organization of Canada, June 2018, question 10, survey results available at: <https://docorg.ca/research>

Chart a Course

There are many routes that can be taken to the destination you have set. There are many different creative distribution strategies that have previously been successful for other filmmakers. Which ones might work for you?

Think about where your film will do well and how you can plan your distribution in a way that will get you over the rugged terrain to those places. What are your target film festivals, and how will you roll out your distribution thereafter?

Create a Distribution Plan

Regardless of the route you set and the strategies you decide to try, an important step in the process is to formalize your distribution strategy in a written document.

Writing down your plans for creative distribution is not an easy task, it demands that you consider all aspects and ensures you haven't overlooked any key areas. For that reason, devising your plan clearly and in detail is a critical step in the creative distribution process. Not only will the distribution plan be your guide through the process, it will also serve as a key deliverable in any funding applications you make.

The core components of your plan should echo the various topics covered in this guide:

- Dividing rights, markets and territories;
- Securing funding;
- Identifying potential partners; and
- Planning specific activities.

It should also include a distribution schedule and (if possible) a budget.

Begin crafting this plan early. But allow it to be a living document, revise it often and allow it to evolve as your project evolves.


Identify Your Core Audience

Core audience is a term often used by Peter Broderick, who asks us to drill down to a very specific core group of people who will be deeply enthusiastic about our work. If you had made a film about the making of a

Steinway piano, who would your core audience be? Pianists? Piano teachers and their students? Music lovers in general?

In Broderick's well-known example, he describes the very specific core audience identified by Ben Niles (Producer/Director) for his 2007 film *Note by Note: The Making of Steinway L 1037*. The film's core audience was: piano tuners.

Through this laser-like focus, Niles was able to build incredible enthusiasm for his film. He held a screening of his film at a convention of 750 piano tuners. These professionals then became ambassadors for the film—talking about it whenever they went to tune someone's piano. In this way, a large ripple effect was created.

 **Point of Interest:** For more insights and ideas on creative distribution, check out Peter Broderick's *Distribution Bulletin* at: <https://www.peterbroderick.com/distributionbulletins/distributionbulletins.html>

One way to hone in on your core audience is to think about the “law of the few”, so beautifully described by Canadian author Malcolm Gladwell in *The Tipping Point*. In short you don't need to put your film in front of scores of people. You just need to put it in front of the *right* people, and they will get it to the scores on your behalf. According to Gladwell, there are three key kinds of people who are responsible for cultural phenomena tipping into popularity:

- **Connectors:** Like the premise of the party game Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon would have us believe, we really *are* each connected to everyone on Earth by six people. But here's the catch: we're all connected through the same few people—these are the connectors. They are people who know a lot of other people, who spread information and ideas throughout their relationships.
- **Mavens:** These individuals are information specialists, focusing on very specific areas of

interest, and always on the cusp of new information, ideas, and technologies.

- **Salesmen:** As their name describes, salesmen are individuals who are good at persuasion. They might not know as many people as the connectors, and they might not be on the cutting edge with the mavens, but when they hear about something incredible, they are able to sell the idea through to the public.

Finding a core audience that has lots of connectors in its midst (with a few mavens and salesmen, for good measure) is the best way to ensure that news of your film will spread to those who would be most interested in it. While Gladwell states that people in every profession and walk of life can be connectors, there will be some people whose interests and careers bring them into contact with more people than others: teachers, journalists, medical professionals, entertainers, retail workers, etc.¹⁵

Once you have identified your core audience, imagine where you will find them. This will inform how you deal with division of rights, territories, and markets.

Leverage Your Project's Natural Strengths

One of the most critical pieces to a successful creative distribution release is being aware of your project's natural strengths. What aspect of your film will bring greater value and interest as you work through the process of creative distribution? Possible strengths to consider include:

- **A main character with a large fan base.** This fanbase could potentially be your core audience. Making sure they hear about your film will be key to your success. Will your main character agree to do publicity for your film? Will they share updates about your film with their email list, create social media posts about your film, travel with you as you screen the film in festivals and beyond?

¹⁵ Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, Little, Brown and Company, 2002, Chapter 2.

- **Connection to an existing property**, like a book or an article. That original material becomes a significant strength in the marketplace. People who are familiar with the property on which your film is based will naturally be inclined to want to see your film. You can work with the publisher to create promotional tie-ins. You can work with the author to bring them in for post-screening conversations, or write an op-ed about the film. You can sell copies of the book alongside your film on your website or after screenings.
- **A timely topic of focus.** You've been making your doc for years, but just before its release, something happens in the news cycle that makes your film seem more relevant than ever. This coincidence of timing (or your own ability to forecast trends) should be capitalized on. Place the film in the context of these new developments when pitching your film to potential buyers, film festivals, media, and during post-screening Q&As. Online, engage in the current affairs conversations to drive traffic back to your film's social media platforms.
- **A social issue with a strong grassroots following.** The issue at the heart of your film is something many people care about deeply. Those people will welcome your film as an opportunity to educate others about the issue and as a tool for use in their own work. They will help you get word out about your film and will likely want to help bring your film into their own communities, too.
- **Yourself.** Your experience in making the film is valuable and interesting to your audiences. Contributing your voice and your expertise to the marketing, outreach, and screenings of your film helps audiences engage with your work in a deeper way. Write op-eds about your experiences, speak at screenings, offer yourself as a public speaker about the filmmaking process or the subject matter of the film, invite your friends and family and colleagues to be in the theatres to support you.

One recent Canadian film that has had significant success by playing to its own natural strengths is **MILK**. Produced and directed by Noemi Weis and released in 2015, *MILK* is a Canadian documentary with a global perspective, taking audiences around the world on a poetic journey through the politics and controversies of childbirth and infant feeding.

From the beginning of pre-production, Weis was strategic in her approach to the film. In addition to profiling everyday mothers and their babies, she also interviewed many prominent figures and experts in the world of infant and maternal health. By doing this, she was creating a film that contained valuable information, thereby making it useful to her core audience of healthcare workers and advocacy groups focused on infant and maternal health.

But Weis was *also* building early relationships with Canadian and global leaders and experts who worked at key organizations, such as UNICEF and WHO. When it came time for the film to be released, these groups—both large and small—went on to support the film in a big way. They became the primary advocates for the film, encouraging its use within their organizations and amongst their partner organizations. The film had its world premiere at Hot Docs, but then went on to have very strategic grassroots-level screenings, which put the film squarely in front of its core audience. As partnerships with different organizations developed, so too did the number of requests for community screenings. A strong social media campaign was created at the launch of the film and a very loyal audience was achieved. Regular posts and attention to detail with marketing and promotions meant that the outreach for each community screening was a valuable branding opportunity for the film, but also for the hosting organizations. (See more details on this below in “Seek Out Single Organizations for Significant Group Licenses.”)

After the first year of intense outreach to the core groups, Weis created the *MILK* Educational Program, which was implemented in partnership with Health Canada and many NGOs across the country. The



MILK

program (which was supported by the Telus Fund and the OMDC as a pilot marketing program) reached 72 communities, which were mostly Aboriginal. The film was used as an educational tool, always followed by practical workshops, training sessions, and/or panel discussions. Ultimately, the *MILK* Educational Program brought change to many communities across Canada and its success is now being replicated in rural Kenya and China—and will be moving into other countries.

In a quest to build awareness and create impact, Weis also reached out to influential people with influence who could act as ambassadors for the film. She invited Sophie Trudeau to attend a screening of the film in Ottawa. While Trudeau was unable to attend, she did offer a video endorsement, which Weis used to spread the message of the film far and wide.

But Weis didn't stop there. In an effort to bring the film's message to the world in a big way, she contacted the Vatican to invite Pope Francis to become a voice for the eradication of malnutrition and infant mortality. The team at the Vatican heard her message and Weis was invited to personally meet with Pope Francis. This meeting was followed by a screening of the film at the Vatican Auditorium, which was attended by 60 targeted world leaders. The intention was to inspire them to replicate the *MILK* Educational program in their own countries. The screening at the Vatican was closely followed by a first-of-its-kind screening at the United Nations in

Geneva, which was attended by another audience, strategically comprised of world leaders working on issues related to women, children, and public health. Although *MILK* was launched three years ago, the film hasn't lost momentum and it continues to reach new groups around the world on a daily basis—all because Weis knew how to play to the strengths of her film.

Value Your Work (and Insist that Others Value it, too)

In the age of Netflix, where audiences are used to paying one low subscription fee for access to libraries full of content, it is becoming harder and harder for documentary filmmakers to make sales of our films to individual customers. And even at the institutional level, many individuals and groups do not understand why they would be asked to pay screening fees. Elisa Paloschi, the producer/director of *Driving with Selvi* laments that one of her greatest challenges is convincing organizations to pay a license fee for the film. According to Paloschi, even multinational corporations and charities with huge operating budgets are reticent to pay a screening fee, even though they have seen the impact of the film and are excited about using it to further their goals.

Paloschi believes that it's a problem that documentary filmmakers are creating for ourselves. "We should be happy that people want to show our work, but we

shouldn't feel lucky. We need to value our work and consistently request screening fees. As a community, we need to find a way to make it more apparent that documentary is not only a valuable tool and form of education, learning, and entertainment, but it's also an expensive thing to make. And the films we make have value—socially, culturally, and monetarily.” Paloschi points out that the people who want to screen our films typically receive a steady salary from their employers and don't understand that distribution revenues are critical to our livelihoods as filmmakers. Being a filmmaker is a respected occupation, and yet the respect doesn't necessarily translate when screening fees are being negotiated. “Often screening partners expect filmmakers to volunteer our time and expertise. But no one asks a teacher, barista, or lawyer to work for free.”

Valuing our work doesn't necessarily mean *never* screening our film without monetary compensation. (In the section below, you will see some ideas for playing with price points and even making your film freely available.) But it *does* mean that we should think hard about the income we deserve to earn, and what is a fair price for a group to pay. It means using the concept of “free” as strategically as possible. It means seeking out sponsorship so someone is compensating you, even if the audience is getting to see the film for free. Maybe most importantly, it means educating audiences, funders, and partners about the value of our work—and the reasons why earning back-end revenues is so important to being able to continue to make it.



Point of Interest: The filmmakers behind *The Age of Stupid* (2009) created a website that would help them to manage the public screenings of their three documentaries. On that website, they have a page that offers an elegant explanation of the need for screening fees. Check it out at: <https://tinyurl.com/yaynuceh>

Focus on Specific Distribution Strategies

The distribution strategies you choose to undertake

will be largely based on your goal, your core audience, and your project's natural strengths. Some of the most common creative distribution strategies are listed below.

Event Screenings

As watching content at home and on mobile devices becomes more and more common, it can become harder and harder to get people to come out to the theatre. That's why Hollywood movies are producing more big-budget superhero films: to create the feeling of a unique experience. While most of our documentaries don't use 3D technologies or pyrotechnics, we can still create the feeling of something big and meaningful—by planning a special-event screening.

These screenings typically happen for one night only—and on the heels of your festival release, if possible. These one-off events keep the costs lower, but also create a feeling of exclusivity and urgency. They might feature an opening band or a special guest appearance. As the filmmaker, you should do your best to be present and to participate in the post-screening Q&A. You might also choose to invite the subjects of your film or your crew members to participate. Consider inviting someone well known in the community who has a connection to the film or its subject matter. From an impact perspective, involving a local guest is always helpful, because they are better able to place the ideas of the film into a local context, making it more immediately actionable for your audience members. All of these invited guests will help to attract more press attention and also draw a larger crowd.

Joanne Jackson did this with *The Messenger*, creating different themes for each of her screenings during the film's three-week release at the Carlton Cinema in Toronto. One night featured a Q&A with the film's composer, another presented a talk-back with the editor, and so on. Sometimes, conservation groups co-hosted screenings, providing local context to the issues in the film. Each night brought out a crowd of people with different interests.

Consider Doing an *Actual* Road Trip

Planning a series of one-night-only screenings back to back in different towns is a popular strategy for self-distribution. Your road trip creates a feeling of energy and excitement and the opportunity for more publicity, which can ripple from one screening to the next, amplifying the media coverage and building a feeling of real momentum in a community.



The Ghosts in Our Machine

Keep a Travelogue

As documentary filmmakers, we know the inherent power of story. The story in our films is what resonates with our audiences. The story of our film's release can likewise resonate, growing your audience exponentially. Documenting and sharing your experiences during the release of the film through written posts, photographs, and livestream videos will help spread the word about your film and make your audiences feel as if they are a part of it all. Bringing information and ideas from the different communities you visit will help build a web of connections between the film and all the individual communities where it has been seen.

Throw Some Swag in Your Trunk

Consider bolstering your film sales with additional merchandise that your audiences might want to purchase. While it's true that merchandising can be an expensive undertaking and that physical products are generally falling out of favour with media consumers, think carefully about the specific opportunities for

your film before dismissing the idea altogether. If you have made the decision to release a DVD or Blu-ray, maybe it's worth your while to try to sell these discs at screenings of your film (or sell them at a reduced bulk rate to grassroots screening organizers, who can sell your film as a fundraiser). Perhaps your core audience will feel motivated to buy products that are aligned with your film's message after the screening is over, like the audiences of *The Messenger*, who purchased bird-friendly coffee during the film's Canadian theatrical release.

Create Bonus Materials for Educators and Activists

Offering additional tools and content is one way to entice organizations to purchase your documentary. Whether it be a teacher's guide, a manual on how to hold a community screening, or access to bonus video content, resources that have been made specifically for your audience will resonate strongly with them, ultimately increasing sales and perhaps even allowing you to set your product at a higher price point.

Give the Film Away for Free—or Play with Prices

Making films available free-of-charge is a hotly debated strategy in the world of creative distribution. We've likely all done it at one point or another. Perhaps you've hosted a free screening of your film for potential ambassadors, or maybe you've donated some DVDs to your local library. Giving your film as a gift to people who will truly appreciate it can create a genuine bond between audience and filmmaker.

Producer/Director Liz Marshall decided to make her 2013 feature documentary, *The Ghosts in Our Machine* about the rights of non-human animals, freely available online for a three-day period. This experiment was aimed at helping Marshall to understand the impact of her film. Since the film's world premiere at Hot Docs, Marshall had been hearing about its impact from individual audience members, many of whom said that *The Ghosts in Our Machine* had changed their lives. But Marshall and her team required evidence

beyond individual anecdotes. So, before people could watch the film online, they had to provide their email addresses, complete a brief survey, and commit to completing another brief survey three weeks after watching the film. 4,500 people screened the film during those three days, and 12% of viewers responded to the post-screening survey request (typically, one might expect a 5% response rate to a survey of this kind). From these responses, Marshall was able to learn a lot about the impacts of the film. Maybe more importantly, she was also able to build a large email database of audience members who are interested in her work.

Trading free access to the film in exchange for information on her film's audience and its impact felt like a good deal for Marshall. But her team was also incredibly strategic about this decision. The free viewing period happened 20 months after the film's first screening—a long enough window to ensure a strong festival and theatrical release. And her distribution partners agreed that a three-day free release almost two years after the premiere would not negatively impact sales. When asked if she felt worried or uncertain about making her film freely available, Marshall says she was not: "You have to be bold about these things."

Playing with your pricing strategy is another technique that some filmmakers have tried. Producer George Hargrave and his partner, director Paul Rickard, produce work that focuses primarily on Aboriginal content and stories, like their 3-season series ***Finding Our Talk***. Hargrave and Rickard have chosen to sell all their DVDs at one price, regardless of how the discs will be used. The team believes that multi-tiered pricing structures are out-dated. But they also want to encourage libraries and schools to house as many of Mushkeg Media's projects in their collections as possible. They believe that these buyers are also having to work with reduced budgets and he is keen to provide this assistance.

Make Sales With the Help of Partners

Collaborating with partners who might benefit from selling your film to their audiences and constituents is yet another way to get your film to its audience. Perhaps you've made a documentary about a band—they might like to sell a digital download to their fans from their website. Or maybe you've made a documentary about a Canadian artist, perhaps the museum that houses their collection would sell the DVD from their gift shop. Or maybe your film is about an environmental issue and a grassroots organization would like to sell the Blu-rays as an organizational fundraiser. Your sales model could be structured in different ways:

- **consignment sales**, where the bricks-and-mortar or online store puts your discs on their shelf and pays you your share of the revenues once a disc sells;
- **bulk-order sales**, whereby the entity purchases copies of your disc at a bulk discount, selling it to their customers at a higher price, thereby turning a profit through the sale of your work; or
- **affiliate sales**, whereby an entity shares a weblink to your site or your distribution partner's site and receives a commission for each sale they helped you to make.



Finding Our Talk

Seek Out Single Organizations for Significant Group Licenses

Selling access to your film one school or grassroots group at a time can be rewarding and can add up to tangible profits. But working piecemeal is time-consuming and tiring. Understanding this, some filmmakers have taken a more direct route to generating significant sales: group licenses.

Group licenses are one way to make money in a simple and energy-efficient way. By selling a license to one group, the filmmaker is earning money, but also ensuring the longevity of their distribution by empowering individual groups to distribute the film more widely to their constituencies. Group licensing can work in many different ways, for example, you might:

- Sell a large educational license to a school board, teacher's union, or provincial education ministry, permitting that entity to screen your film throughout the schools under their jurisdiction.

- Sell the rights to distribute the film in a specific territory to an organization with some connection to your film or its topic.
- Sell the rights to screen your film in a specific territory to a corporation that can use the film as a way to promote their ideas or products.

MILK is an example of the successful use of the group licensing model. The film's community screenings have reached over 60 countries to date. Organizations pay a public performance license to acquire the rights. The cost of the license varies according to audience size and number of screenings planned. With the license fee comes a copy of the film to screen publicly, a variety of marketing materials, and a toolkit with instructions on how to maximize the screenings and adapt MILK's message to each community. Producer Noemi Weis leads each program and is available to guide each group.



MILK

Fill Your Tank

Raising some funding to help you in your distribution efforts is critical to being able to realize the project you've planned. You can't get very far if you're running on fumes.

Most of those who responded to DOC's survey were investing their own time and money into their self-distribution work. As documentary filmmakers, this is a constant reality. But your time and money shouldn't be the *only* resources that are pushing your project forward. If you can find marketing or outreach funding, you can pay yourself—and, ideally, some team members—making the work far more sustainable and your goals far more achievable. As you begin to make money in your creative distribution efforts, those funds can then be used to make the work self-sustaining.

Currently, the most talked-about fund for filmmaker-led distribution is the Sundance Institute's Creative Distribution Fellowship. Launched in 2017, this highly competitive program aims to make the process of distribution completely transparent. The Creative Distribution Fellowship consists of a distribution grant, access to distribution resources, and professional development opportunities. In 2017, two films were selected for the fellowship: *Unrest* (a documentary film) and *Columbus* (a fiction film). In 2018, three films (two documentaries and one fiction film) were selected.



Point of Interest: Read Sundance's comprehensive Creative Distribution case study for *Unrest* at: <https://tinyurl.com/ybgc5l37>

While you might choose to throw your hat into the ring and apply this fellowship, in all likelihood, the funding you raise for your distribution work will be far more piecemeal. What funding you seek will largely depend on the nature of your specific plans for creative distribution and the specific activities you wish to undertake. Are you in need of marketing assistance to support the release of your theatrical doc? Are you pounding the pavement trying to find international distribution partners with whom to split your rights? Are you planning an independent screening tour or trying to attend some festival screenings of your creative documentary? Each of these creative distribution activities has its own funding available within Canada.

To help you in your fundraising research, a non-exhaustive list has been included below. The types of projects and documentaries that are eligible for funding will vary significantly, depending on each funder's

mandates and requirements. For example, some funding agencies are typically focused on business growth (therefore offering funds to film producers), while arts councils are typically focused on creative expression (therefore funding directors and their work). And, as is the case with all funding programs, the priorities and requirements can shift and evolve over time. Before applying, be sure to consult the fund's guidelines in detail.

Marketing and Promotion-related Funds

Funds to assist producers in the marketing and promotion of films (often specifically theatrical features), intended to offset the significant promotion costs associated with a film's release.

Canada-wide

Creative Export Canada: Funding for Canadian creative industries (including, but not limited to, film and television production and distribution) to reach audiences around the world. Creative Export Canada is a new program of Canadian Heritage that is aimed at supporting projects that generate export revenues. It focuses on high-potential projects and encourages partnerships and innovation. The flexibility of this fund will be highly attractive to filmmakers who are engaging in creative distribution. This program will fund up to 75% of eligible project expenses, up to a maximum contribution of \$2.5 million. (According to the guidelines, receiving 75% is unlikely and according to the author of this guide, \$2.5 million for the self-distribution and marketing of a documentary is even more unlikely!) More information available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yc3xnrby>

Telefilm Canada's Marketing Program: Funding for the marketing costs associated with the Canadian theatrical release of a feature-length film. Telefilm offers a non-interest bearing repayable advance of up to 75% of eligible marketing costs, to a maximum of \$50,000. Producers, as well as distributors, are eligible to for this funding. If you are planning to engage in self-distribution, then you must have been selected by one

of the Canadian film festivals that are recognized by Telefilm. More information available at: <https://tinyurl.com/ybuzbftp>

Manitoba

Manitoba Film and Music's Feature Film Marketing

Program: This program assists applicants with promotion and marketing of feature film projects at the time of theatrical release, festivals, and markets to either enhance the promotion and marketing of the release theatrically and/or to attract the attention of distributors/sales agents to support the increase in commercial interest in the project. Funding is in the form of a grant, covering 50% of the project costs, to a maximum of \$3,000 - \$7,500, depending on the event's location. Producers can receive a maximum of \$10,000 in support per fiscal year. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/ybqfvd65>

Ontario

Ontario Media Development Corporation's (OMDC) Film Fund – Marketing and Distribution Initiative:

This is a time-limited initiative supporting Ontario-based producers in the marketing and distribution of films that have previously received funding from the OMDC's Film Fund. Up to \$25,000 is available per project, capped at 75% of the total costs for all marketing and distribution activities. These funds are intended to support work that is being done as an extension of traditional marketing and distribution activities. Note that as of September 2018, the OMDC began operating as Ontario Creates. More information available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9rfu5xl>

Quebec

Société de développement des entreprises

culturelles (SODEC): Aide à la mise en marché par projet (Project Marketing Assistance): Funding for the marketing of films, with priority given to films that have previously received production support from SODEC. Assistance can amount to 80% of eligible expenses, up to a maximum of \$50,000. For feature-length films, 25% of the funding is repayable. For short and medium-



All the Time in the World

length films, the full funding amount is offered as a grant. An additional \$3,500 grant is available for films that have received production assistance from the *Jeunes créateurs* (Young Creators) program. More information available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y8z8ebjt>

Société de développement des entreprises

culturelles (SODEC): Aide aux copies numériques et frais de copies virtuelles (Digital and Virtual Copy Fees): Funding available in the form of a repayable contribution to Quebec companies (either traditional distributors or self-distributing producers) holding the majority of a film's distribution rights in the province. Assistance varies depending on the number of copies required and the film's release strategy, but it can add up to \$17,000. Note that it is not necessary for the films themselves to be Quebec productions. More information available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y8z8ebjt>

While the **Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec (CALQ)** does not offer a separate grant for film marketing expenses, it's worth noting that CALQ does allow filmmakers to include these expenses within their production budgets and direct CALQ grant funds towards the promotion and marketing of their projects.

Atlantic Provinces

Newfoundland & Labrador Film Development Corporation's Marketing & Distribution Sub-

Program: Under the Sponsorship Program, this sub-program provides funds to members of the local film and video industry to assist with marketing-related expenses. More information available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y7w5xac9>

Market Access Funding

Funds primarily for travel, living, and participation expenses associated with the work of introducing yourself and your films to new markets.

Canada-wide

Canada Council for the Arts' Creating, Knowing and Sharing: The Arts and Cultures of First Nation's Inuit and Métis Peoples – Travel: A grant of up to \$30,000 for Indigenous artists to travel within Canada or abroad to advance their professional development, enables access to new markets, or build a national or international presence. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/y76hnwca>

Canada Council for the Arts' Arts Across Canada

– Travel: A grant of up to \$30,000 (based on fixed costs) is available to artists who have been invited to travel elsewhere within Canada (at least 300km from their place of departure) to present their work, develop markets and networks, participate in significant events,

or explore future artistic collaborations. Artists may apply only once per fiscal year, but can include more than one trip in their application. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/ybemxr7q>

Canada Council for the Arts' Arts Abroad – Travel:

A grant of up to \$30,000 (based on fixed costs) is available to artists who have been invited to travel outside of Canada (at least 500km from their place of departure) to present their work, develop markets and networks, participate in significant events, or explore future artistic collaborations. Artists may apply only once per fiscal year, but can include more than one trip in their application. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/ycty8rzc>

British Columbia

Creative BC's Passport to Markets: Provides travel support to BC resident film, TV and new media producers and sales agents to attend international markets and conferences. The fund is intended to assist producers develop relationships with broadcasters, distributors, financiers, and potential co-producing partners. Creative BC will contribute between \$1,000 and \$2,000 for each designated market. More information available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y7fragu2>

Alberta

Alberta's Cultural Industry Organizations Project

Grant: This grant offers the full project costs, up to \$20,000, for Alberta-based companies engaged in projects in art production, training, career development, marketing, and research. For our purposes, the marketing supports offered are the most relevant. *Marketing* is defined by this fund as projects that promote, market, and/or distribute the work of Alberta creators. While most of the eligible costs listed align this funding most closely with attending conferences, festivals, and pitching events, it seems as if the fund is open to a broad array of projects, including those seeking to enact strategies to access digital marketplaces and to create supplemental products. More information available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9fvg8xs>

Saskatchewan

Creative Saskatchewan's Market Travel Grant:

This grant provides travel support to individuals and businesses to attend market events as project pitching opportunities. The grant offers 50% of the project budget, up to \$5,000. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9d5hnhn>

Manitoba

Manitoba Arts Council's Travel/Professional Development Grant:

This grant provides support to professional artists, arts administrators, and professional community arts practitioners to attend or participate in activities related to the development of their practice/careers. The maximum grant is \$1,200. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/y86e9fup>

On Screen Manitoba's Access to Markets: Provides travel assistance to independent Manitoban producers, distributors, writers, and creative service professionals attending national and international markets. Payment covers the eligible expenses to a maximum of \$3,500 for North American travel and \$4,500 for international travel. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/y8aurdns>

Ontario

Ontario Arts Council's (OAC) Building Audiences and Markets – Market Development Travel: Northern

Arts: Grants of between \$1,000 and \$2,000 are available for professional artists living in Northern Ontario to attend exhibitions, showcases, festivals, arts networking events, conferences, and symposia. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9gdh8wc>

Ontario Media Development Corporation's (OMDC) Export Fund – Film and Television:

This fund is intended to support the travel of Ontario-based producers to international markets and targeted sales trips. This fund offers a non-recoupable contribution of up to 50% of eligible expenses, up to a maximum of \$15,000. Producers submit a slate of activities to undertake over the course of one year. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/ya5x5txq>

Atlantic Provinces

Newfoundland & Labrador Film Development Corporation's Promotional Travel Sub-Program:

Under the Sponsorship Program, this sub-program provides funds to members of the local film and video industry to assist with travel-related expenses involved in marketing their products globally. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/y7w5xac9>

Nova Scotia's Creative Industries Fund: This fund is intended to support companies from the province that are focused on global exporting. The proposed project must increase the applicant's capacity to export, increase their export sales, expand their global market, and further the objectives of Nova Scotia's Culture Action Plan. A funding allocation of up to 50% of eligible costs is available. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9s2jc32>

Nova Scotia Business Inc.'s (NSBI) Export Growth Program: This program seeks to increase export sales outside of Nova Scotia. The program supports travel to markets, up to 50% of eligible costs, to a maximum of \$15,000. The program will also support the first-time visit of foreign clients, potential partners, and investors to Nova Scotia. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9xvqyrd>

Yukon, Northwest Territories & Nunavut

Government of the Northwest Territories' Support for Entrepreneurs and Economic Development (SEED)

Program: Self-employed film producers in the NWT are eligible to apply for funding. Up to \$5,000 is available for pitch marketing, \$10,000 for product marketing, and \$5,000 for service marketing. Applicants may receive a maximum of \$15,000/year in total. Additionally, recipients can receive one-time funding for the printing and packaging of 100 DVDs. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/y8rfquv2>

Nunavut Film Development Corporation's Market Endowment Program: This initiative awards an individual producer/filmmaker financial assistance of

up to \$5,000 to cover their costs to attend international markets, co-production conferences, or forums. Assistance under this program is also available to producers or directors whose film has been nominated for an award or selected for screening at a major festival. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/yddg33vs>

Yukon Media Development's Enterprise Trade Fund:

This fund works to stimulate and support the growth of Yukon business activity by supporting a range of marketing activities, including promotional material, marketing plans, market research, and participation in trade and investment missions. More information available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y88gqq3k>

Screening Travel & Screening Tours

Significant funding is available for filmmakers who are travelling to screenings of their films—or in some cases, organizing screening tours of their own.

Canada-wide

Canada Council for the Arts' Creating, Knowing and Sharing – Short-Term Projects:

A grant of up to \$100,000 is available for Indigenous artists to create their work, train in their craft, and disseminate their work with audiences (could include a screening tour or other audience outreach & engagement activities). The grant covers up to one year of work in any combination of activities. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/yby3rvr7>

Canada Council for the Arts' Creating, Knowing and Sharing – Long-Term Projects:

A grant of up to \$300,000 is available for Indigenous artists to create their work, train in their craft, and disseminate their work with audiences (could include a screening tour or other audience outreach & engagement activities). The grant covers from one to three years of work in any combination of activities. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/y7f5llbr>

Telefilm's International Marketing Program – Participation in International Festivals and Events:

Funding to support a film's participation in select festivals. This non-recoupable payment can be up to \$40,000, but \$1,500 is the maximum for most of the eligible festivals. Documentary festivals listed include IDFA, CPH:DOX, and Sheffield, as well as many other festivals that screen a significant number of documentaries in their programs. See more at: <https://tinyurl.com/y7e755pc>

British Columbia

British Columbia Arts Council's Project Assistance

– Touring Initiatives: This program supports BC artists and arts organizations undertaking touring activities outside the province that will lead to enhanced professional opportunities. Funding is provided for projects that are scheduled as part of significant national or international cultural events or take advantage of significant market development and audience development and touring opportunities. Priority will be given to professionally organized tours for which artists are receiving fees. Grant amounts will not exceed 50% of eligible project costs. No maximum grant amount has been established, however, applicants requesting \$25,000 or more are asked to contact the program officer in advance of application. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/ybhfjhjb>

Alberta

Alberta Foundation for the Arts – Travel Grant for Individuals and Ensembles: This grant assists artists in the performance or presentation of their original work at showcases, festivals or other events outside the province of Alberta. Up to \$2,500 is available. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9bd2a3r>

Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan Arts Board's Independent Artists Program – Production and Presentation: These grants support the independent production, presentation, exhibition, and touring of new or existing artistic works. Maximum grant amount is \$18,000. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9srm9qz>

Manitoba

On Screen Manitoba's Access to Festivals:

Provides travel assistance to independent Manitoban writers, directors, producers, and distributors whose productions have been selected to screen at recognized national and international festivals. Payment covers the eligible expenses to a maximum of \$3,000 for North American travel and \$3,500 for international travel. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/y77c85x4>

Ontario

Ontario Arts Council's Building Audiences and Markets – Touring:

Grants of up to \$30,000 are available to fund screening tours of films made by Ontario-based artists. Funding can be for tours in Ontario or outside of the province. If touring in Ontario, school screenings tours also qualify for funding. See more information at: <https://tinyurl.com/ycwlohmb>

Quebec

Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec (CALQ)'s Déplacement (Travel) Program:

Grants are offered for the professional travel of artists and writers, allowing them to accept invitations to participate in activities related to the practice of their art or the influence of their career. Travel grant amounts range from \$750-\$2,500, depending on destination. Additionally, a maximum of \$2,000 may be offered for customs, shipping, and other related charges. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/y89mjwf2>

Atlantic Provinces

Arts Nova Scotia's Grants to Individuals –

Presentation Grants: This program supports projects by Nova Scotia's professional, practicing artists in the creation and dissemination of vibrant, interesting artistic work. A grant of up to \$5,000 is available for the direct costs associated with the public presentation of the artist's work. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/y9hay33x>

New Brunswick's Film – Promotional Travel

Assistance: This program provides financial assistance to producers living in New Brunswick to travel to



This Changes Everything

significant festivals and film-related events to which they have been invited—both within and outside of the province. Up to 50% of the total travel budget, to a maximum of \$2,000 is available. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/y879u45c>

Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council's

Professional Artists' Travel Fund (PATF): This funding is available to professional artists and groups invited to take part in unexpected activities that will enhance their careers, including the presentation, development, or celebration of the artist's work. Maximum grant amounts are \$750 for travel within the province, \$1,000 for travel outside the province. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/yaenjazzd>

Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council's School Touring Program (STP):

Available to professional artists, groups, and not-for-profit arts organizations to support significant touring productions to schools throughout the province. The program covers touring costs only, offering a maximum grant of \$20,000. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/y8jkl2ra>

Prince Edward Island's Arts Grant – Dissemination

Grant: The purpose of the dissemination grant is to assist with the presentation of the works of PEI professional artists to the public, ideally in a critical and/or curatorial context. Total maximum annual

dissemination grants are \$2,000 for emerging professional artists and \$2,500 for established professional artists. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/y7jguqu7>

Yukon, Northwest Territories & Nunavut

NWT Arts Council's Public Presentation: This funding assists with the presentation of NWT artist's works to the public. Individual applicants may apply for showcase, touring, or exhibit fees and expenses. Events must benefit public audiences (e.g., a film screening). The maximum funding amount is \$15,000. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/ya4ymdeb>

Yukon Arts Centre's Culture Quest: Amongst other goals, Culture Quest supports the showcasing of work by Yukon artists out of territory. More information available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yclxpu5e>

Yukon Touring Artist Fund: The intended results are increased opportunities for Yukon artists of all disciplines to showcase their work outside of Yukon for their own professional development, to increase their viability as professional artists, and to place Yukon performing, visual, and literary arts in the context of the contemporary arts in Canada. Applicants may apply for up to maximum of \$10,000 per tour. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/yaqmjm26>


Other Potential Canadian Funds

Many public funders set annual funding priorities that are in addition to their regular ongoing funding streams. These are sometimes called strategic funds or initiatives. Keep your eye out for these special funding opportunities, to see if there are possibilities that align with your creative distribution funding needs. There are also often allocations for diversity/equity funding (to offer additional funds to individuals in priority communities) and access support (to help individuals with disabilities to access special supports and services).

Regional and Municipal Arts Councils are another potential source of funding for your self-distribution work. For example, the Edmonton Arts Council offers travel grants for local artists and the Prince Edward County Arts Council offers audience development funding.

Impact Funds

Impact funding is money that is granted to (or invested in) a project that aims to create social change. In Canada, impact funding for documentary films and their distribution is relatively scarce. This is due to many factors, including a culture that prioritizes public funding for the arts over philanthropic funding, a lack of understanding of the impact potential of films amongst foundations and charities, and the current rules of our tax system.

 **Point of Interest:** For a deeper analysis of the issues related to philanthropic funding in Canada, see DOC's 2015 report, *Philanthropic Funding for Documentaries in Canada: Towards an Industry-wide Strategy* at:

<https://www.docorg.ca/research>

Happily, there is no shortage of international funding available to social issues documentaries. Once you have identified your specific distribution strategies, you can comb through the available international funds, seeking out some alignment between pieces of your work and the funders' priorities. A few potential funds

are listed below.

Doc Society's Threshold Fund: This fund is intended to help documentary filmmakers access creative channels for marketing and distribution. Applications are by invitation only. More information at:

<https://tinyurl.com/y9mq2anf>

Fledgling Fund's Outreach and Engagement Fund:

A grant supporting audience engagement planning and implementation. Grants range from \$10K to \$25K. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/ybqxqnsq>

Inspirit's Doc Impact Fund: One of the few impact funds in Canada, this fund supports outreach and engagement campaigns that aim to build inclusion and pluralism in Canada and address issues of racial, ethnic, or religious discrimination through the use of social issues documentaries. It awards four grants of \$25,000 annually, with a special focus on projects that are led by Indigenous or Muslim teams. More information at: <https://tinyurl.com/y8a7ve6v>



Point of Interest: The International Documentary Association (IDA), based in Los Angeles, maintains a comprehensive database of funding opportunities for documentary filmmakers. While the vast majority of the funds listed are for production and post-production funding, by searching key terms like distribution, impact, and marketing, you can locate the funds that might support to your creative distribution project:

<https://tinyurl.com/yaq74ym5>

Creative Fundraising Strategies

Many documentary filmmakers who have had significant distribution success have done so by moving past the traditional film funders and seeking out a variety of additional funding sources for their outreach and distribution work.

An impressive example of creative fundraising for creative distribution comes from the work producer/director Elisa Paloschi did to build financial support for

the Audience Engagement and Impact Campaign for her 2015 feature, ***Driving with Selvi***. While not purely a distribution project, Paloschi's campaign contains many elements of creative distribution. The campaign's main goal is to screen this film about South India's first female taxi driver for 1 million girls in India. And although the main thrust of this work is toward social impact, Paloschi is very clear her film must make money while also making change.

For Paloschi, the outreach and distribution funding was easier to raise than the production funding. "Because the film took ten years to make and was following an open-ended storyline, no one knew what the film would be," Paloschi explains. "But, the potential impact of the film was really clear."

To fundraise for her outreach, impact, and distribution work, Paloschi has created a multi-component campaign. She has secured campaign funding from international impact funders like The Fledgling Fund and Doc Society (formerly BRITDOC). But Paloschi is also carving up the large, multi-year campaign into individual components that can be funded by a variety of potential partners. She looks across the spectrum at all the different types of funders who might be interested in a specific component, including arts councils, government entities (from cultural agencies to consulates and everything in between), charitable foundations, large international NGOs, corporations, and even crowdfunding. Paloschi then tailors her fundraising strategy to the various funders' interests and mandates, pitching only the components that will be of interest to each funder.

Paloschi knew early on that one of the strengths of her film was its main character. Selvi is charismatic and inspiring. So, one campaign component that she envisioned early on was a 25-day bus tour, taking Selvi, the film, and herself to 29 communities across 4 states in India. This tour was conducted in partnership with 17 organizations (including Aga Khan Foundation, Plan India, Magic Bus, and the Indian government's Ministry of Women and Child Development). The screening tour was funded by a range of sources, including Global

Affairs Canada, broadcast sales, a touring grant from the Ontario Arts Council, foundation grants (such as a grant from cosmetics company Lush), and a dynamic crowdfunding campaign held during the North American screening tour.

In the end, the bus tour brought the film to 2,000 girls in India and provided significant data for Paloschi's upcoming impact report. The lessons from the bus tour also helped Paloschi develop a unique community screening model, which brings the film to four different demographics in each community: school girls, their parents, school boys, and community leaders. Paloschi now plans to roll the film out across India, with the help of grassroots partners and the funding of large non-government organizations and governmental departments.



Driving with Selvi

Share the Driving with Others

As documentary filmmakers, we drive our projects through development, production, and post-production. And it often feels like we're driving alone. So, for many of us, it's hard to imagine continuing to work on our project through distribution, too.

But in reality, as we're making our films, we are almost never carrying the entire weight of a project by ourselves. There is a team of people responsible for helping the film come into fruition: creative collaborators, crew members, and service providers. So, when it comes to distribution, we likewise need to assemble a team of people to help us get where we need to go.


Just as you assemble a group of partners and a crew for the production of your film, so should you assemble a team for its creative distribution. You crew up for distribution the same way you crew up for production—through online searches of key terms, researching the entities that have worked on other films you admire, and word-of-mouth recommendations from folks you trust.

Distribution Partners and Team Members

Traditional Distributors

Just because you're engaging in filmmaker-led distribution, that doesn't mean that you will be doing all the distribution yourself. By its very nature, creative distribution is most successful when it is a tailor-made collaboration between traditional distribution partners and yourself.

When choosing to work with traditional distributors, begin by looking for those who have specific expertise that complement your own and will help you to achieve your goals. Maybe you feel you can successfully self-distribute in Canada, but are looking for a traditional distributor to exploit the US rights. Or maybe you are interested in sharing non-exclusive rights in the same market and territory with multiple partners. Whatever your strategy, the key to selecting the right distribution partners is to begin with a frank conversation with them about what they can do well—and what you can do better.

 **Point of Interest:** Looking for a distributor and not sure where to start? The Canadian Association of Film Distributors & Exporters lists its members at <https://tinyurl.com/y6v22fjx>

Before beginning to work with any distributor, be sure to have a comprehensive distribution agreement in place. Working with a lawyer to review and revise the distribution agreement is always advisable, as terminology and best practices can change over time and an experienced entertainment lawyer will be able to quickly identify red flags in the agreement and points for further negotiation.



Point of Interest: The following articles offer a primer on the basics of negotiating a distribution agreement:

- “The Fine Print: How to Understand and Negotiate a Film Distribution Contract” *Filmmaker Magazine*, by Dan Satorius <https://tinyurl.com/y8jkd8v8>
- “How NOT to Negotiate a Distribution Deal”
- *Film Independent*, by Peter Broderick <https://tinyurl.com/ya2gy77w>

Distribution Services

As a clear sign of the times, some entities that were previously working as traditional distributors are now moving towards a fee-for-service model (rather than a revenue-splitting model, as is typical for distributors), in an attempt to keep pace with the changing industry.

Outcast Films, based in New York, is one such company. For founder Vanessa Domico, social issues films have always been a passion. Beginning at Women Make Movies almost two decades ago, Domico founded Outcast Films as a home for LGBTQ film projects in 2004. But in recent years, she has seen the success and energy of passionate filmmakers who are choosing to self-distribute. As such, Outcast is now beginning to offer fee-for-service distribution and consulting services to filmmakers who are doing it themselves, in addition to their work as a traditional distributor.

Distribution Consultants

Distribution consultants will charge you a consulting fee to watch your film and discuss your distribution strategy. They will tell you where they believe your best

revenues will be found and how to tap into that market. They will introduce you to people whom you may be able to hire or partner with and they will share with you stories of other filmmakers who were successful in similar areas. If you are new to creative distribution, these tailor-made consultations can be extremely helpful. Distribution consultants also often share their knowledge with the community through lectures, books, articles, and blog posts. (See the “Resources” section at the end of this guide for links to several consultants’ websites.)

Producer of Marketing and Distribution (PMD)

The term **producer of marketing and distribution** was first coined by Jon Reiss (one of those aforementioned distribution consultants), who felt that a PMD was as necessary to an independent film as a director of photography. While that might be a slight overstatement, Reiss makes the compelling case that independent filmmakers can’t do everything by ourselves. And since you’ve been producing the film, it would obviously be extremely helpful to have someone who is producing its marketing and distribution. A PMD is responsible for planning and overseeing all the tasks associated with marketing and distribution, including identifying your core audience, creating a distribution and marketing plan and budget, rolling out that plan, and creating marketing and publicity materials.



Point of Interest: For more information on the job duties of a PMD, see Reiss’ explanation at <https://tinyurl.com/y8yt97c9>

Impact Producer

Impact producers are specialists in helping filmmakers to take their films into the world in a way that creates social impact. This team member can build a strategy for a successful impact campaign, help you to create meaningful relationships with organizations and individuals who have goals that align with yours, organize or solicit community screenings, and create audience engagement tools (such as post-screening surveys, screening and study guides, email newsletters,

a social media schedule, etc.).

Impact producers can work as consultants, telling you what to do and how to do it. Or they can drive the campaign themselves. Your impact producer might be a freelancer, or a larger company that provides impact producing services. A good impact producer can help you to achieve great heights with your film, but many Canadian documentarians find it challenging to find the money to pay their impact producers. The reason for this is twofold: 1) because their mandate is to create social impact, impact producing is not necessarily a revenue-generating role and 2) as we have seen, impact funding does not flow as freely in Canada as it does in the US.

Distribution Manager and/or Coordinator

Just like production managers and production coordinators respectively manage and coordinate the logistics of your production, **distribution managers and coordinators** manage and coordinate your distribution. You might choose to have people filling one or both of these roles for a significant period during your self-distribution work. Or you might choose to hire these team members during the busiest times, or for specific pieces of work. Perhaps you're organizing a screening tour. In this case, you might hire a tour manager. Or maybe you're wanting to get word of the film out to communities that might be interested in its message, you'd likely hire an outreach coordinator. While there are freelancers who specialize in this kind of work, you could also choose to work with production coordinators who have worked for you in production. While they will need some guidance and education about the distribution world, many of the skills they have developed through production are transferrable—and they are already well versed in your film and your company's unique processes and procedures.

Theatrical Booking Agent

A good **booking agent** will have fulsome contact lists and years of professional relationships with theatre programmers. They pitch your film to their contacts at cinemas and work hard to get your film booked in as

many theatres as possible.

On-demand Theatrical Services

On-demand Theatrical booking is an inventive and fairly risk-free way of scheduling theatrical screenings. Rather than four-walling the theatre and then working to drive audiences to your screening, on-demand theatrical is an audience-driven bookings system. Audience members who want to see your film commit to purchasing a ticket. Once a minimum threshold of ticket sales is reached, the ticket purchases are completed and the venue is booked.

GATHR and Tugg are both examples of entities that facilitate the on-demand theatrical model. GATHR is a curated platform, requiring a 90-day exclusive theatrical window whereas TUGG operates more like a service provider, allowing anyone access to the platform. "Theatrical On-demand" is a term that has been trademarked by GATHR, while Tugg refers to their process as allowing audiences to "pull" a film to their local theatres.

Digital Platforms

Today, audiences expect that all relevant films and television shows will be available on Netflix (or if not on Netflix, then at least on iTunes). But, with Netflix using more and more of its budget to produce their own original content, making an acquisition sale to Netflix has become more challenging and less lucrative. If you do not already have a relationship with Netflix, working with one of their preferred distributors is your best bet for making a sale. And for its part, while iTunes accepts any production that meets its technical specifications, they do not deal directly with individual content creators. Hence, working with a distributor or aggregator is the way to place your project with iTunes—as is the case for many other online platforms.

In addition to VOD platforms aimed at the general public, educational distributors have also been active in the SVOD space for several years. In the rush to create the educational version of Netflix, many educational distributors—from the National Film Board of Canada

to Visual Education Centre—have their own SVOD platforms. However, the educational platform that is most quickly rising in popularity is Kanopy, which currently streams over 30,000 films (60% of which are documentaries) to public libraries and universities. Kanopy's revenue splits are typically 50/50, but some distributors and filmmakers have reportedly negotiated more favourable rates. Kanopy is currently available in over 3,000 colleges and universities and more than 200 public library systems, including the Toronto Public Library, Calgary Public Library, and New York Public Library. Earlier this year, Kanopy announced that all of Frederick Wiseman's 41 films would be available on their service.



Point of Interest: In 2016, DOC released two publications on impact producing. Check them out at:

- *Charting a Course for Impact Producing In Canada: Trends, Best Practices and Future Directions* <https://tinyurl.com/yajne8tk>
- *Making Documentaries with Impact: A Toolkit* <https://tinyurl.com/yajne8tk>

Online Aggregators

As explained above, in order to gain access to many online platforms, it's necessary to place your film with an **online aggregator**. Unlike distributors, most aggregators do not take a percentage of your sales, but rather require a service fee upfront. You pay an aggregator to license your film to any number of online platforms (often times on a non-exclusive basis) and also collect the royalties your film generates on your behalf. Many aggregators also function as a lab, prepping your digital files to the required specs of each platform.

Juice Worldwide and Distribber are both well-known aggregators. Juice is based in Toronto, whereas Distribber is based in Los Angeles. Acting as both a lab and an aggregator, both companies will encode your film into the appropriate digital specification and place



The Dinosaur Echo

them with the various online platforms, such as iTunes, GooglePlay, and AmazonPrime. For an additional fee, Juice will also pitch your film to curated platforms, such as Netflix. (Furthermore, members of DOC may be interested to note that Juice is currently planning to offer discounts for their services as a DOC membership benefit.)


DIY Publishing and Sales

There is a wide array of **DIY publishing and sales** sites for film and video projects. A few of these services (like Amazon CreateSpace) are for the creation and sale of DVDs. In the case of this service, you author the disc and Amazon will print it individually to fulfill customer orders as the orders are placed. Another method would be to do a larger run of 200-1,000 discs at a disc replication facility and sell discs directly from your website using PayPal or a similar service.

Many other services (like Amazon Prime Video Direct) are available for VOD sales and rentals. The most well-known DIY VOD platforms are certainly YouTube and Vimeo on Demand. Both of these platforms allow individual filmmakers to post high-quality streaming video content.

YouTube operates on an ad-supported model, where the owner of the content is paid a percentage of a small fee by advertisers, based on the total number of video views (payments are calculated based on every 1,000 views). If your video is very popular, you can make a

lot of money, but for most documentary filmmakers who work in niche spaces, YouTube makes sense only as a platform for promoting our work by posting trailers, etc. Vimeo on Demand operates on a transactional model, whereby the viewer pays a small rental or purchase fee. In order to set this up, filmmakers must pay a monthly membership fee to Vimeo, but then keep 90% of the revenues from the platform (minus some transaction fees). While Vimeo is less popular with viewers than YouTube, its revenue model is much more favourable on a per-view basis. It is also more customizable, offering filmmakers control over their pricing, territories, etc.

 **Point of Interest:** In 2017, PBS' documentary strand, POV, published an online guide to DIY digital distribution platforms. While digital business models are constantly evolving and changing, this resource provides a useful starting point for filmmakers who are engaging in creative digital distribution. It can be found at: <https://tinyurl.com/y8ogaa43>

Fulfillment Houses

If you are selling physical items (such as DVDs, t-shirts, or books), you might choose to store and ship the items yourself, or you could store the discs with a **fulfillment house**, which would automatically send the shipments to your customers as the orders are placed.

Whenever possible, whether you use a fulfillment house or not, consider finding ways to set up systems and automate processes. For example, the on-demand distribution services described above will allow you to set up the process once, and after that, it will happen automatically. And even service providers that don't usually operate as fulfillment houses might be willing to set something up for you.

For example, producer/director Suzanne Crocker devised a money- and time-saving print-traffic system this way for her 2014 documentary *All the Time in the World*. Living in Dawson City, Yukon, Crocker knew that she couldn't ship DCPs and posters to film festivals and indie theatres with the same ease and speed as a

Toronto-based filmmaker. Sending something Express Post through Canada Post from Dawson City takes 8 days and there are no courier companies that service that part of the country. So, Crocker developed a simple spreadsheet to track the movements of her DCPs. Each DCP was assigned to a region and circulated within that area. Each festival was instructed to forward it on to the next in the screening schedule. Crocker enlisted the help of her poster printer to send posters directly from their production facility in Toronto to the various festivals and also asked her post-production house to do the same as DCPs and other deliverables were produced. In this way, she delivered materials efficiently and cost-effectively to more than twenty-five indie cinemas and fifty film festivals around the world.

Marketing Team Members

Publicist

Just like the booking agent, the **publicist's** strength is in their contacts. Your publicist will write a press release for your film, distribute it to their media contacts, and follow up with targeted pitches. They will try to get reviews of your film, special interest articles, blog posts, and more. Working with a publicist is something that most independent filmmakers do, regardless of whether they are engaging in creative distribution. But for those of us who are selling our work ourselves, the expertise of a publicist becomes even more important in getting the word out to the wider world.

Social Media Manager

Most of us are also engaging social media managers at some point during the release of our films. A **social media manager** typically runs a film's social media across the most popular platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram). They create appropriate content for your film's social media channels, create a calendar of scheduled posts, build your social media following, interact with followers, and respond in real time to news and events that are relevant to your film.

Audience/Community Partners

Some of the most important members of your team are not to be found within the distribution industry at all. In order to truly be successful in your self-distribution efforts, it's critical that you engage your audience and the wider communities where your core audience is found.

The audience and community partners with whom you work will be keen to help because your film means something to them. They will spread the word for free. They will talk about it to their friends and family, they will post about it on social media, they will organize screenings in their schools, business, and communities. They will become advisors and ambassadors for your film, simply because they care.

Seek out these people when you're still in production—or even development—on your film. Running a crowdfunding campaign, for example, is a way to spread the word about your film before you've even shot a frame. It helps you to build a committed and connected audience. Asking subject matter experts for letters of support while you're working to raise funding for production is a way to prove the quality and interest in your film to potential funders, but it's also a way to introduce your film to important people within

the community you wish to engage. Holding a test screening for folks who might later become advocates for your film is a good way to encourage them to have a feeling of ownership in the process.

Unlike all of the other entities that will help drive your film to success, these fellow travellers will likely not know very much about the film industry or documentary distribution. So, there will be times when you might need to educate them. You can do so with one-on-one conversations, or by creating a guide for people who are using your film, or by adding information to your website that explains things in an incredibly clear way (like explaining why an educational version costs \$300, instead of \$15).

Once the film is ready to launch, continue engaging the people you reached out to initially, but build your potential audience rapidly, by engaging people at screenings, at other special events, and on social media.

Don't Ignore the Well-Worn Routes

Yes, the world of self-distribution can often feel new, exciting, and empowering. But don't skip the old-school distribution, marketing, and outreach techniques. They are still in use for a reason.

Andrew Nisker has been making and self-distributing entertaining environmental docs for almost 20 years. Nisker firmly believes that creative distribution techniques need to be used hand in hand with the more conventional approaches. For example, in 2007, Nisker used traditional media to spread the word about his film ***Garbage! The Revolution Starts at Home***. The film told the story of an average family that collected all their garbage for three months, learning along the way where our garbage goes once it leaves our curb and how it affects our wider world. In the promotion of that film, Nisker was invited to appear on most traditional media outlets—including Fox News, where he performed an on-air garbage audit. These appearances led to a significant number of educational sales, with everyone from small waste management companies to iconic Tim Hortons purchasing copies and screening rights to the film.

Marketing

Discoverability is the buzz-word these days. But, while the word might be new, the concept isn't new at all. Simply put, discoverability is all about how people are

going to find your film. You must bring information about your film to them, rather than waiting for them to find you. Make your film easier to discover—whether that's through targeted Facebook ads or through a flyer on a community bulletin board.

Websites

Set up a website for your film with a simple URL. Make sure to include the url in your tail credits and mention it whenever talking about your film—to media, at screenings, and to friends and family. Put as much info as possible on the website, in a well laid-out way, and be sure to include a list of public screenings and info about where customers can purchase the film or request their own screenings. Having a section on your website with resources for the media (perhaps password-protected or at an unlinked URL) will save you time in dealing with media requests for photos and clips. You may also wish to grant screening organizers access to this page so they can share the content with local press or use it in their own promotions.

Social Media

Social media platforms help to spread the word to your family, friends, and colleagues—and then to *their* family, friends, and colleagues—until news of your film is spreading to all the people who care about it. The most popular social media platforms for documentary promotion are Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The golden rule on social media is to use 1/3 of your posts to talk about yourself (or, in this case, your film) and 2/3 to talk about other topics connected to your film (the subject matter of the film, people involved in the creation of the film, other works that are similar in content to your film, etc.).



Québécoisie

Traditional and Online Media

Television, radio, newspapers, and online publications reach a larger and broader audience than social media. They bring in people who know nothing about your work or the subject matter of your film. Reaching beyond our networks is necessary for getting past the echo chambers that have developed in society. A decent review in larger publications, like *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *the Toronto Star*, or *The Huffington Post* carries far more weight than a rave review in a smaller local paper. Hiring a film publicist to do media outreach in advance of a big screening or release is still the best way to ensure good traditional media coverage of your film.

Niche publications are more targeted than the larger general media. They have smaller followings, but those who consume niche media are dedicated to and knowledgeable about the topics covered therein. You will often find your core audience through publications that serve their specific niche.

Paper-based Publicity Materials

The traditional paper publicity tools, like flyers, posters, and postcards are still expected and useful.

Email Lists and Newsletters

By collecting email addresses, you grow your fanbase and your audience. Fans of your work want to know when your work is screening close to them. And they want to know what impact it's having. When possible, be sure to include value-added content in your newsletters. Tell interesting stories, share beautiful pictures, communicate information about upcoming events, and suggestion actions your fans can take. As much as possible, move past a simple promotional tool to something that will engage and delight your audience.

When inviting people to sign up for your email list, be sure to invite them to sign up for all your company's email lists, as opposed to a single email list for your current film. If they sign up for your film alone, you will not be able to legally transfer their email address to your next film.



Point of Interest: In 2015, Canada passed into law the *Canada's Anti-Spam Legislation (CASL)*, creating stricter rules for commercial electronic messages and their senders. To confirm that your email list communications are in alignment with CASL, visit The Canadian Chamber of Commerce's website for an overview of the legislation at <https://tinyurl.com/ybj5uz2m> or the CRTC's (less user-friendly) overview at <https://tinyurl.com/y7g8wmmw>.



Chemical

Distribution

As we have seen in “Dividing Your Rights,” it’s not necessarily advisable to keep all your distribution rights. Some partners are better equipped to handle certain markets. But beyond that, working in tandem with more mainstream routes of distribution can exponentially increase your self-distribution revenues.

For example, during the 18 months when Andrew Nisker’s 2009 doc ***Chemical*** was streaming on Netflix, Nisker was selling multiple copies of his self-published green clean guide, *The Chemical Cookbook*, on a daily basis. Viewers would see the film on Netflix, visit the film’s website to learn more, and ultimately buy the cookbook—increasing Nisker’s sales in the self-distribution realm.

Or, Choose a Simpler Path

As discussed in the intro to this guide, 75% of survey respondents had previously engaged in the self-distribution of at least one of their projects. Some of these filmmakers took on significant and sustained creative distribution projects that required their full-time attention over a period of months—or even years (Annabel Loyola's *La Folle entreprise* and Elisa Paloschi's *Driving with Selvi* are both excellent examples of multi-year, high-yield creative distribution projects).

And while this guide focuses primarily on how to dig into creative distribution in a significant way, it's important to know that creative distribution does not necessarily need to be a multi-year, intensive commitment. So, if you'd like to choose a simpler path, below are some less energy-intensive ways to approach creative distribution.

Use Creative Distribution to Sustain Your Business

Creative distribution can be approached as just another task that you do on a regular basis to bring in revenues and to keep your production company running smoothly.

Brandy Yanchyk does just that. Yanchyk makes it a practice to keep as many of the Canadian rights to her film and television productions as possible. She produces her projects for Canadian and international television broadcast, but then works hard to exploit

the remaining rights herself. All of her projects are available for sale on DVD and, where possible, as VOD from Vimeo on Demand. While Yanchyk began her career focusing on social-issues documentaries, she has since broadened her scope and has more recently been making documentaries about science and travel. She has been surprised—and delighted—to see the significant sales potential of her most recent work. The two biggest sellers in Yanchyk's slate have been **Seeing Canada** (2017), a six-part travel series about Canada's signature travel experiences and **The Dinosaur Echo** (2017), a one-hour documentary about a new generation of palaeontologists and their exciting discoveries.

Yanchyk's main sales have come from libraries and schools. Her DVDs are all uniformly priced: \$20 for home use, \$80 for library use, \$250 for public performance use. Vimeo on Demand pricing is similarly standardized at \$2.99 USD for a streaming rental and \$8.99 USD for digital download purchase. All her

projects are conveniently available directly from her website and according to Yanchyk, having her work on Vimeo on Demand feels like “making money in your sleep.” But for the higher ticket educational rights, Yanchyk’s work is largely relationship-based—just like all other aspects of documentary filmmaking. She develops relationships with purchasing librarians and reaches out to them via phone, rather than email. She has found that calling the libraries as the filmmaker also yields better results than hiring someone to make the calls on her behalf. For Yanchyk, it’s all about the personal relationship.

In the end, Yanchyk explains her approach to creative distribution in the following way: “You have to work out what’s in your best interest. Some people don’t want to do the DVDs, it’s a lot of work. But for me, it keeps my documentary company motoring along between productions, and I don’t feel like I’m panicking, because there’s always a bit of money trickling in. I don’t have all my eggs in one basket. I have many baskets.”

Do Whatever You Can Manage

In 2007, Sylvia Hamilton released her one-hour film, ***Little Black Schoolhouse*** about racially segregated schools in Canada. As with her other films, Hamilton was working with a distributor, yet doing a lot of the publicity and outreach herself: organizing screenings and giving talks. But whenever someone would want to purchase the film, she would direct them to her distributor. At some point, Hamilton decided that it would make more sense to sell her films herself. It meant more work for her, but the revenues would also increase dramatically.

But Hamilton has chosen to keep it simple. She has a paper order form that she asks customers to complete. Customers return the completed order form along with a cheque. Then Hamilton sends them the DVD, which she takes to her local post office and mails herself. If requested, she can also create a digital file for schools, with a higher price for a 3-5 year educational license. But she is not set up for online ordering and has not yet waded into the digital world in a big way. Sales of *Little*

Black Schoolhouse are relatively steady, even eleven years after its release. And the way Hamilton is doing her distribution is what she is comfortable with and can manage. Besides, it seems to be working for her.



Little Black Schoolhouse

Join a Distribution Co-operative

If you want to self-direct your distribution, but you don’t want to go it alone, a distribution co-operative might be an option for you.

For example, New Day Films is an educational distribution cooperative based in the US. New Day was founded in 1971 by a group of filmmakers who could not find traditional distribution for their feminist films, and wanted to support each other in the work of self-distribution. Since then, New Day has grown into a co-op with more than 100 members, residing in the US and Canada. Co-op members agree to volunteer a certain number of hours to the running of the co-op every week, in addition to the time they will spend self-promoting their films. The filmmakers in New Day receive 70-75% of the profits from their film sales (with the remainder being earmarked for the business expenses of the co-op). The benefits of this model are significant, as New Day offers a wider reach than most individual filmmakers can attain alone, professional development opportunities, and a real sense of community with other independent filmmakers.

Know How to Get Back Home

In paraphrasing French poet Paul Valéry, George Lucas once said, “A film is never finished, only abandoned.”

Eventually, we’ve done as much as we have energy for on our film and we stop the work of making it and begin the work of releasing it. Some documentary filmmakers go on to spend years on the distribution of their films. And at some point, we just have to stop. So the work is abandoned and a new project begins. A better approach would be to have an exit strategy. How will you wrap up your involvement in the project and is it possible to set up a system so that the work you began can continue on its own? Will you empower others to carry the work forward, as Noemi Weis is working to do with *MILK*? Or approach you’re the process as Suzanne Crocker did with *All the Time in the World*, by automating your systems to make the process as simple as possible?

Give yourself a time limit for completing the work. Identify the ways that distribution of your film can continue on without your active day-to-day involvement. Then, put your plan into place before you are too tired from your trip.

The journey of creative distribution is one that can take you in many directions. Its goal is to create revenues for your business and to build an audience for your films. As we have seen throughout *The Roadmap*, creative

distribution involves planning, fundraising, relationship building, and a lot of hard work. This journey is not for the faint of heart—but neither is documentary filmmaking. Whichever route you choose to take, may your travels be financially successful and full of opportunities for both learning and adventure.

Message from DOC

The Documentary Organization of Canada (DOC) serves as a professional membership organization, helping documentary filmmakers get their work made and seen. DOC is celebrating its 35th anniversary as the collective voice of independent documentary filmmakers across Canada.

We represent 800 members and 2,100 affiliates across Canada through six regional chapters. Through our members' insights, DOC continues to be the premier organization for Canadian documentary advocacy, policy, and research.

Some of our leading initiatives include founding Hot Docs, North America's largest documentary film festival and launching *Point of View (POV) magazine*, Canada's longest running magazine about documentary culture. DOC also conducts research into the social, cultural, and economic impact of the documentary genre. Every day, we work to create conditions that will ensure that documentaries—and their creators—thrive.

We are proud to support the vital research that contributed to *The Roadmap to Creative Distribution*. This document will allow DOC to share accurate information on the realities of our members as documentary filmmakers in Canada. The challenges and current processes have been researched and presented in a way that provides practical actions for our members and the wider documentary community.

Digital Distribution Resources

The resources offered below are intended to provide a glimpse into some of the entities that are currently operating in the digital distribution space. Please note that this world is shifting and changing rapidly, with pricing, urls, and business models evolving continually. As such, this list is intended simply as a starting point for your own up-to-the-minute research.

VOD Platforms

Amazon Prime Video

Formerly Amazon Instant Video, Amazon Prime Video is an SVOD platform available to all Amazon Prime members. <https://www.primevideo.com/>

FLM.TV

An On-Demand video platform for independent films. Users pay to purchase the films and 100% of the purchase price goes to the filmmaker (the running of the site is supported by ad content). <http://flm.tv/>

GooglePlay

A digital distribution service run by Google, serving as an app store for Android devices (Google's version of iTunes, in other words). <https://play.google.com/store?hl=en>

ICI Tou.tv

French-Canadian VOD platform run by Radio-Canada. <https://ici.tou.tv>

Illico

An SVOD platform, offering French-language films and television. <https://illicoweb.videotron.com/>

iTunes

A digital distribution service run by Apple, selling music, movies, television programming, and apps. <https://www.apple.com/ca/itunes/>

Kanopy

An educational streaming platform, which is rapidly growing and gaining in popularity. For detailed information this platform's model, visit: <https://tinyurl.com/yctqgann>

Microsoft Films & TV

A digital distribution service run by Microsoft for use across all Microsoft devices, including the Xbox (i.e., Microsoft's version of iTunes). Formerly Xbox Video and Zune Video. <https://www.microsoft.com/en-ca/movies-and-tv>

Playstation Video

A digital distribution service run by PlayStation (i.e., PlayStation's version of iTunes). <https://www.playstation.com/en-gb/explore/playstation-video>

Netflix

An SVOD service, streaming a significant collection of films acquired from third parties and also producing and streaming its own original content.

<https://www.netflix.com>

National Film Board of Canada (NFB) / Office national du film (ONF)

The NFB has more than 3,000 titles available for free online viewing. In addition, they also offer a subscription service for educators, called Campus. www.nfb.ca

Vudu

A TVOD platform offering a wide selection of films and television shows. <https://www.vudu.com>

Online Aggregators

Distribber: US-based content aggregator that also acts as a lab, preparing digital files to the required specs of each platform, working with Netflix, iTunes, Amazon, Playstation, Vudu, Kanopy, etc. Flat fee of \$1595 USD. <https://www.distribber.com/story>

Film Hub: US-based content aggregator, working with Netflix, Amazon, iTunes, Hulu, Hoopla, Flixfing, Vimeo On Demand, YouTubeRed, IndieFlix, Kanopy, etc. 80% of revenues to filmmaker, no additional fees. <http://filmhub.com>

Juice Worldwide: Canada-based content aggregator that also acts as a lab, preparing digital files to the required specs of each platform and working with most platforms, including Netflix, iTunes, GooglePlay, Hulu, Amazon, Microsoft, etc. Flat fees based on number of platforms and running time of your film. (For example, placing your feature on one platform will cost \$945

CAD, with each additional platform costing \$195 CAD.) See an overview of the fees here: <http://juiceworldwide.com/distribution>

Quiver: US-based content aggregator that encodes and delivers your digital files to various VOD platforms, including Netflix, iTunes, GooglePlay, Amazon, etc. Flat fees based on the types and number of platforms. (For example, placing your feature on iTunes will cost \$1,395 USD, with additional platforms increasing the price.) See an overview of pricing at: <https://www.quiverdigital.com/quiver-digital-aggregator-pricing>

DIY-Publishing & Sales Services

Amazon CreateSpace

Self-publishing of DVDs and online video sales through an on-demand service on Amazon. Based in the US. Amazon's fees: \$4.95 USD per DVD + 15% of sale (for sales on the filmmaker's own eStore) or + 45% of sale (for sales on Amazon.com). <https://www.createspace.com>

Amazon Prime Video Direct

Self-publishing of digital video for SVOD on Amazon Prime and/or for sale or rent via Amazon's regular marketplace. Filmmaker receives 50% of the revenues from rentals and purchases. Filmmaker's share for SVOD on Amazon Prime range from \$0.06 USD to \$0.15 USD, per hour streamed, based on the popularity of the title. Based in the US. <https://videodirect.amazon.com/home/landing>

FetchApp

Application that allows you to store downloadable files in their cloud storage system, integrating with eCommerce tools like PayPal and Shopify. When your customer purchases a download off your website, FetchApp sends them a download link. Based in the US. FetchApp's Fees: Ranging from \$5 USD/month for up to 50MB storage to \$500 USD/month for up to 150 GB of storage. <https://www.fetchapp.com>

Gumroad

Online platform that allows artists and content creators to sell their work directly from their websites. You can sell rentals, downloads, subscriptions, etc. Gumroad's Fees: \$10 USD/month + \$0.30 USD/charge + 3.5% of all sales. <https://gumroad.com>

Intelivideo

Online platform that allows content producers to create their own SVOD service. They work with you to create your own branded channel and apps across all major platforms, so your content can be viewed on Roku, Smartphones, Apple TV, etc. Intelivideo's Fees: \$5,000 USD/year + 15% of total revenues. <https://www.intelivideo.com>

Pivotshare

An SVOD service that offers thousands of channels of content, allowing content creators to self-publish on the platform and contribute to one another's channels. Pivotshare's Fees: 30% <https://www.pivotshare.com/>

Vimeo on Demand

A user-friendly service offered to anyone who would like to make their content available for transactional viewing online. This platform is becoming increasingly popular with Canadian documentary filmmakers. Vimeo's Fees: 4% to 17% of sales (depending on a range of factors including your price and the purchaser's method of payment) + 10% of revenue share. To learn more, visit: <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/>

YouTube

We all know—and use—this AVOD platform. But for a better understanding on earning ad revenues, visit: <https://tinyurl.com/karglph> and <https://tinyurl.com/y7s2nlvr>

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About The Roadmap

The Roadmap to Creative Distribution is a project of the Documentary Organization of Canada (DOC). The research for this project occurred in the first half of 2018 and was grounded in DOC's mandate of helping Canadian documentary makers get their work made and seen. The data collection involved the following three phases:

1. Environmental Scan and Literature Review, through which key players, strategies, terminologies, and best practices were identified and explored. Over 50 articles in industry publications and websites were consulted.
2. Online Survey of Documentary Filmmakers, through which respondents provided insight into their individual self-distribution practices, experiences, knowledge, and needs. 127 responses were received (109 in English and 18 in French). A compilation of the survey results can be found at <https://docorg.ca/research>.
3. Targeted Research Interviews, through which interview subjects provided a range of expert knowledge and experience. Interviews in both English and French were conducted with filmmakers, funders, service providers, and distribution consultants. A list of interview subjects can be found in the "Report Contributors" section below.

The best practices and case studies that appear throughout *The Roadmap* were identified through the literature review and the targeted research interviews. The online survey offered a clear window into the current needs and knowledge of the Canadian documentary filmmaking community—which helped us to identify which best practices required more depth of exploration.

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About DOC

The Documentary Organization of Canada / l'Association des documentaristes du Canada (DOC) is the collective voice of independent documentary makers across Canada. DOC is the premier organization for Canadian documentary advocacy, policy analysis, and insightful research. Guided by a mandate to promote and protect documentary and the people who produce them, DOC helps Canadian documentarians get their work made and seen. Our membership is comprised of over 800 Canadian documentary professionals, working from coast to coast to coast. www.docorg.ca

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We would like to express our gratitude to all those who helped with *The Roadmap to Creative Distribution*. Thanks to the staff at DOC for their assistance in the guide's creation and promotion.

In addition to the contributors above, we are thankful to all the documentary filmmakers who took the time to respond to our survey and offer their ideas, experiences, and knowledge. More than two dozen filmmakers, funders, and distribution professionals offered their time and advice to this project, including: filmmakers Ed Barreveld, Mélanie Carrier, Suzanne Crocker, Sylvain L'Espérance, Ina Fichman, Johanne Fournier, Sylvia Hamilton, George Hargrave, Joanne Jackson, Christine Kleckner, Annabel Loyola, Liz Marshall, Andrew Nisker, Elisa Paloschi, Nathalie Perreault, Noemi Weis, Brandy Yanchyk; Peter Broderick of Paradigm Consulting; Sean Farnel of SeaFar North; JoAnne Fishburn of Good Influence Films; Jonathan Skurnik of New Day Films; Erin Creasey, Sherri Hills and Ariana Moscote-Freire of Ontario Creates; and James Finlay, Carolina Bondioli, and Patrick McCrudden of Juice Worldwide. The team at Juice was helpful in offering insights into the world of digital distribution; Ontario Creates provided astute feedback and suggestions on the content of the guide; and Elisa Paloschi generously acted as a sounding board throughout the research and writing process.

Guide Funders

The Documentary Organization of Canada (DOC) is grateful to our project funders: Ontario Creates, Rogers Group of Funds, and Ring Five Impact Docs.

The opinions, findings, and recommendations expressed in this guide are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Ontario Creates, Rogers, or Ring Five. The Government of Ontario and its agencies and the funders of this guide are in no way bound by the recommendations contained in this document.

