



Quebec English-Language
Production Council

Conseil québécois de la
production de langue anglaise

OUTREACH SURVEY of the **OFFICIAL LANGUAGE MINORITY FILM AND TELEVISION PRODUCTION INDUSTRY**

**A Report of the
QEPC SECTOR DEVELOPMENT
MENTORSHIP PROJECT**

JANUARY 2024

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1. Mandate

Part of the Quebec English-language Production Council's "Sector Development Mentorship Project for 2022-23" includes this Outreach Survey which had the following mandate:

- Organize and identify the list of producers to be interviewed;
- Design the survey questions to be used in the interviews;
- Interview a sample of OLMC producers that we have identified, including QEPC members,
- non-members, underrepresented groups, and if possible, members of I.M.P.A.C.T;
- Write a progress report by July 31, 2023, to be included in the Interim Report to CMF; and
- Write a final report by Jan. 24, 2024, based on the results of the interviews, to be included in the Final Report to CMF.

This Final Outreach Survey Report is based on interviews with 21 producers or others representing a wide cross-section of the English-language film and TV industry in Quebec. For more information, see the Methodology below.

These interviews were undertaken, analyzed, and summarized by Kirwan Cox, who alone is responsible for the contents of this Report. Researcher Koichi Sato created the master interview list, and scheduled the interviews in November and December, 2023. We found these interviews to have been extremely valuable in helping identify the challenges and the needs of the English-Quebec production industry in 2023, especially those elements outside QEPC's membership.

The opinions included in this Report are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily represent the opinions of QEPC or CMF.

We wish to thank the Canada Media Fund for their generous funding of QEPC's 2022-23 OLMC Sector Development Mentorship Project, including this Outreach Report.

2. Methodology

To develop our master list, we reviewed production company data available from the following sources: ACTRA, Telefilm, CMF's Anglophone Minority Incentive (AMI) Fund, Canadian Media Producers Association (CMPA), Independent Media Producers Association of Creative Talent (I.M.P.A.C.T), Rendez-vous Canada, and QEPC. From these sources, we created a master list from 2013 to 2023 with the following information: the names of Quebec production companies, English-language production titles, genre, producer, date of production, and email address.

We identified 565 English-language Quebec projects. From this master list, we tried to contact about 30 producers or others, and finally interviewed 21 individuals.

We took notes during these phone interviews, and they were not recorded. We sent the draft report to the interviewees, and some added comments or clarified points they wanted to make.

These interviewees included one Indigenous producer, 4 mother-tongue Francophone producers, and 16 OLMC producers. These 21 individuals produced 103 projects from our 565 project master list, or 18% of the total.

Four of these 21 are QEPC members, and the rest are not. In addition, other QEPC members produced 156 of these 565 projects, or 28%. So, QEPC members or others whom we interviewed produced approximately half, or 46% of all English-Quebec projects we identified over these ten years. All interviewees, whether OLMC or not, produced at least half of their slate in English.

Nearly all interviewees are producers, two are QEPC mentees, and two are primarily writers or directors who also produce. The range of their projects is immense. One is currently producing a \$12 million feature film, and one is looking for work. Most are veteran producers of documentaries and feature or series drama. One produces animation.

In order to get candid interviews, we promised these interviewees strict confidentiality. This means the interviewees are identified by name, but nothing they said is attributed to them. For that reason, the report is organized by subject and not by interviewee.

3. Interview List

The majority of these interviewees are veteran producers with successful track records. A few are small producers or writer-directors, or emerging producers trying to break into the industry or move from short films to longform productions. Most do French production to a greater or lesser degree to improve their chances of survival, or because they believe some projects work better in French.

Trying to categorize the language of these interviewees is not easy. All 21 spoke excellent and fluent English. Fourteen spoke fluent French including 3 francophones (who are not OLMC but at least 50% of their slate are English-language projects). Several also spoke fluent Spanish as well as English and French. There were six anglophones who spoke less than fluent French. They said their French was “not fluent”, “good”, “solid”, or “verbal, not written”. Only one producer didn’t speak French, and that was because he had recently been head-hunted by a large production company from outside Quebec. He is taking French lessons.

Eighteen live in the Montreal area, and three live full time outside of Montreal in Gatineau, Val David, and Hudson. Eight of the 21 are female, at least one is LGBTQ2, and at least 5 are BIPOC.

Fred Bohbot	<i>Bunbury Films</i>
Jason Brennan	<i>Nish Media</i>
Patricia Chica	<i>Flirt Films</i>
Petro Duszara	<i>WAM Group</i>
Ina Fichman	<i>Intuitive Pictures</i>
Anne-Marie G�linas	<i>EMA Films</i>
Robbie Hart	<i>Adobe Productions International</i>
Karl R. Hearne	<i>KRH Film</i>
Sergeo Kirby	<i>Loaded Pictures</i>
Yanick Letourneau	<i>Peripheria Films</i>
Graham Ludlow	<i>Incendo Productions</i>
Bob Moore	<i>Eyesteelfilm</i>
Daniel Morin	<i>Rezolution Pictures</i>
Emily Page	<i>E.D. Films</i>
Diana Roldan	<i>QEPC Mentee</i>
Pietro Serapiglia	<i>The Stephen Low Company</i>
Dan Shannon	<i>ID Communications</i>
Katia Shannon	<i>Flyer Films</i>
Caitlyn Sponheimer	<i>Coukuma Productions</i>
Kathy Ann Thomas	<i>QEPC Mentee</i>
Jonathan Vanger	<i>Wishing Tree Productions</i>

4. Crisis

Nearly everyone commented on an industry in upheaval, and the increasing difficulty making a living as an independent producer. One said the TV industry is in crisis. There was consensus that the disruption of the Canadian broadcasters by the American streamers is having a severe knock-on impact on independent producers.

Many pointed out there are not enough broadcast windows, and competition for those windows is severe.

With increased labour costs, inflation, and higher interest rates, budgets are up. Broadcasters delay or cancel decisions and reduce funding. The producer needs to mix and match various funding deadlines, and if possible, find funding abroad. As a result, the producer has to carry projects in development over years. Development funding is inadequate. For example, CMF's POV and AMI do not offer development funding. A CMF-SODEC predevelopment fund is not available for English-Quebec projects.

The production environment is increasingly precarious. One producer had a project funded and ready to go- then Corus pulled out. The same producer had a FR drama series ready to go until Quebecor laid off its staff. One producer had a major feature accepted at Berlin, but the festival closed because of COVID. In addition, this film did not have an appropriate theatrical release because of COVID.

**“...the TV industry
is in crisis.”**

One interviewee wondered if there is a future for independent producers. Some asked how they could survive. One said the industry was in upheaval. One said they were OK, but most said they were not OK.

Some hoped the C-11 changes to the *Broadcasting Act* would re-establish a functional Canadian production system, but wondered if a CRTC solution would come fast enough. Others hoped the Quebec Government would make the provincial tax credits more competitive with other jurisdictions, especially the regional bonus.

5. Problems

There was consensus that it is harder to do Cancon. The broadcast market continues to decline and the financial system, some said, is dysfunctional.

One person complained private investors are missing, and the industry is over-reliant on public funding. Another said they needed to go to the US equity market to raise money. International co-pros are an option, but expensive and need the right partner. A number of people criticized the CMF's POV Fund and the broadcast trigger.

One said American streamers have decapitated the market for all producers, but only want to talk to the big production companies. Generally speaking, veteran producers said the Americans aren't interested in English-Quebec production¹.

Development is time-consuming and arduous. The producer may have to carry a project for years, and is inadequately compensated.

Many interviewees pointed out that the talent base they work with is small.

Some OLMC producers felt it difficult to compete against Toronto producers who have the advantage of proximity to Toronto broadcasters which, in any event, do not seem interested in Quebec projects. Another interviewee said it is easier to find an American walking the streets of Montreal than an English Canadian broadcaster. One Toronto broadcaster told an interviewee that English pitches from Quebec are different compared to the rest of English Canada. It is unclear if that was a criticism.

Another said FR producers have a competitive advantage with SODEC and Quebec tax credit for French production that allows them to keep staff and cross-subsidize their English production.

Many said it was difficult to make EN programming in Quebec. As an anglo, one interviewee said there were no paths to influence, and they felt isolated. Another said, "I feel alone. I need a network of fiction producers. I have more filmmaker friends in the US than here." Another said the English-Quebec industry is complicated, and that, "we are not organized." One said we need to work together or be swallowed by the American companies.

¹ We have noted elsewhere that OLMC producers have had a minority of funding from AMI over the last ten years compared to non-OLMC producers.

6. Needs

It will come as no surprise that the biggest need is money. Some said they need sustainable support, like the CMF Broadcast Performance Envelope, and not project by project funding. Most said they needed development money.

Another said the biggest need is for the Quebec Govt. to change the regional tax credit bonus to support regional productions rather than regional producers, like other provinces do.

“Most said they needed development money.”

7. Diversity

Some interviewees are Black, Indigenous or otherwise diverse. However we did not prompt on those concerns, and focussed on linguistic issues. For that reason, this subject should not be considered complete.

One interviewee said they felt doors were not open to them because they were anglophones. Another said they felt discrimination by Toronto broadcasters against English projects and Montreal broadcasters against French projects.

One interviewee said they began working on American shoots in 1999, but had trouble getting work. When they did work, they were the only BIPOC. On their next project, Eddie Murphy demanded as many Blacks on his Pluto Nash set as possible. This person got their break, proved they could do the job, and had regular employment afterward, usually on American service productions.

One interviewee said producers often want to pay BIPOC crews more, but there's also a sense that BIPOC crews will do more with less; less prep or shoot time, fewer resources, taking on more than one role because a production is “low budget”, when often their white counterparts aren't asked to do that. Some other more established producers (often American productions) can afford to pay healthy union rates to their crews, and large producers are often helming mostly white, and male, crews.

Another interviewee has a “diverse” family, but said they thought identity politics was not good and created silos.

A veteran producer said funders wanted diversity, but this producer had difficulty finding BIPOCs who wanted to be an editor. They wanted to be a producer or director. However, in the opinion of this producer, they weren't yet ready.

8. Talent

In general, interviewees thought talent in Quebec was great, but the talent pool was too small for English productions.

One producer said crew and staff are in short supply. One said the Govt. slashed the 2012-13 Quebec tax credit and talent left. Thus access to key creatives is a problem. Another said there was a massive loss of great people. A producer noted the small pool of English writers was a problem, as was the cost of flying in cast. On the bright side, they said actors in Montreal are not overexposed. One said it is impossible to find talented editors or DOPs.

Another said animation talent is here, but 7-8 years ago Quebec recruited foreign companies to come here. They hired local talent, and created a shortage for local companies.

Some veteran producers had crews that they worked with regularly. One said “I have my crowd. We are super special in Quebec.” Another said quality of techs is best here.

One said there seems to be an expectation for less experienced and/or BIPOC crew members to do more with less and it might be contributing to people burning out more, leaving the industry or not accepting the jobs because they rightfully don't want to work in conditions in which they're not adequately paid for the work they're doing.

While tech talent was praised, there were some complaints about unions. One said unions were not helpful and treated you like a US production company.

“...interviewees thought talent in Quebec was great, but the talent pool was too small for English productions.”

9. Training

One interviewee commented on the problem of getting English-language training in Quebec. They used as an example “On tourne vert”, the sustainability initiative to make greener sets in Quebec. Similar programs exist in BC and Ontario, and this interviewee has taken the same course for all three provinces. The ones in BC and ON, which were nearly identical, were in English, and roughly 3 hours. At the end, they offered a certification option for residents of that province. In Quebec, it was only offered in French and was less than an hour. This has been a consistent experience for this person with training programs in Quebec. They don't want to use the existing programs or curriculum, likely because they're in English, but what they come up with is far less than what is needed.

A lot of the quality training and mentorship is being done in BIPOC spaces (eg. Black on Black Films, Main Film's PRISME Program, NAWAL, BSO, Reelworld, BIPOC TV & Film). The Quebec programs are almost exclusively in French, that focus mostly on French projects (with no English equivalent). The ones in English operate outside of Quebec and don't take into consideration the very specific challenges of trying to make English content in Quebec.

Another said in Ontario, unions train people, but not here. Another said smaller producers don't have the leeway in their budgets to train people.

One said training needed to be done by apprenticeship or mentoring, and when funders cut back budgets, training programs are the first to go. This producer tried to develop a female writer in the first year of a major drama series, but the second year was not renewed. That writer then moved to LA where she gets regular work.

10. Funding Strategies

Producers must be innovative to fund their projects. One said they diversify funding between public funding in Canada, equity in the US, and international co-pros. One said producing in one language is hard. Another said they had always produced only in English, and were now trying to produce some projects in French. An anglophone co-produced with a francophone producer to access the latter's SODEC envelope to help fund a very large project.

One said risk-taking was better in Montreal because Toronto is more expensive. Another said they preferred making docs, but they are harder to do than drama. To make a living, some take on multiple roles, like writer and/or director as well as producer.

11. Tax Credits

The Quebec tax credit system disadvantages English Cancon. One producer (who lives outside Montreal) said that they got 40%, plus the regional bonus of 20% for labour, for French projects (features, docs, and kids). They got only 32% plus the 20% regional bonus for English projects. In their case, they found the AMI helped offset the lower English differential.

The Quebec regional bonus is a major problem for Montreal-based producers. Unlike other provinces which give the bonus or shooting in regions, Quebec gives the bonus to producers who live in the regions. One veteran OLMC producer said that they lost three productions to Vancouver, Toronto, and Ireland because they could not access a regional bonus.

“The Quebec tax credit system disadvantages English Cancon.”

12. SODEC

Unlike Federal funders, SODEC is not subject to the *Official Languages Act*. In addition, SODEC requires that at least 80% of its funding go to French projects. For those reasons, we asked all the interviewees for their experience with SODEC.

The majority of producers said they had a problem with SODEC, and believed it was not supportive of English-language projects. A minority said they did not have a problem and found SODEC a good partner. To be specific, out of 17 producers who had experience with SODEC, six said they had no problems. Three of those six were anglophones and three were francophones.

Eleven said they did have problems, or believed English projects had problems. For example, one said they had once applied to the *Jeune Créateur* program, were told they were not likely to get anything, and haven't bothered applying since. A francophone said that getting money from SODEC for English projects is almost impossible. Another francophone producer said SODEC doesn't invest in English production. One producer said they tried a few times and were unsuccessful. He said a lot of OLMC producers don't apply.

Another producer said an analyst told him he would get over \$500,000 if he hired a female director. He reminded the analyst he was the director of the project. A SODEC jury was enthusiastic about the project, but it was turned down.

A producer said they benefit a lot from SODEC, but projects that reflect the anglo community have more trouble. Ten years ago, a producer was "grilled" by an analyst who asked if his/her child spoke French. A veteran producer said they have applied every year for twenty years and were turned down every year. Another said they won't apply to SODEC.

A writer-director-producer applied three times for English projects and was never funded. They said the juries' notes showed they did not understand English scripts.

One interviewee said they missed Harry Gulkin².

13. CMF-AMI

There was a consensus among these producers that AMI helps them and is extremely important. The major problem is that AMI is underfunded. One producer said he had never actually received 15% because it was always oversubscribed. It has been stuck at \$4.7 million for a number of years.

One producer said AMI has helped French companies build themselves. Others have said it makes projects work. It is fantastic, and a huge benefit. One producer said he uses both the Indigenous Fund and AMI a lot.

² The late Harry Gulkin was a prominent producer of films like "Lies My Father Told Me". He was hired by SODEC in 1987 to liaise with the English-language production community. Gulkin was subsequently fired by SODEC. He sued for wrongful dismissal, won, and was rehired. He spent twenty years at SODEC.

14. CMF-POV

There was a great deal of criticism of the POV documentary fund. The reason, according to one veteran producer, is that the broadcast trigger for POV makes no sense. Others simply said POV doesn't work. No one thought the POV fund did work.

15. Telefilm

Fewer interviewees had experience with Telefilm than with CMF. A veteran producer depends on Telefilm and said the Government cut to Telefilm's budget is a disaster.

One said Telefilm usually cuts 15-20% from a budget whether justified or not. They said Telefilm wants to increase the number of projects in their press release. One said "Talent to Watch" doesn't make sense. It asks directors to produce themselves. Producers in Toronto can get 40% of their budget from Telefilm, but Montreal producers can only get 25% because of SODEC funding.

Another said Telefilm needs two development deadlines per year and not one. Another said Telefilm helped with development funding.

16. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation/Société Radio-Canada

One veteran producer said the CBC was hard to work with and are slashing their budget. Several had positive comments about working with Carrie Haber, CBC's Montreal producer. However, they said she didn't have the resources she needs. Her maximum fee is only \$25,000.

One interviewee said it was a challenge getting a feature doc on the main channel. Another said the main channel doesn't come to Montreal.

Another said SRC discouraged (French) feature docs.

17. Streamers

Some had good experiences working with Crave, but generally speaking there was nothing positive to say about the American streamers. One veteran producer said there are no Canadian docs on Netflix. Another said they never received a commission for original production. They got a sale through a US distributor, but only acquisitions, never a commission for original production. Another said Netflix doesn't want to work in Montreal, only Amazon was interested.

Several hoped C-11 would make a difference, but one said it was a very slow process.

18. National Film Board

I did not prompt interviewees about the NFB, and it did not come up on their part with one exception. One producer said the NFB was still important. They pointed to the Board's ACIC program as being very helpful.

19. IMAX

Sadly, Stephen Low is retiring and his company will stop producing IMAX films, though it will continue distributing their library. Their interviewee said IMAX Corp. is not interested in the traditional IMAX doc, and he believed IMAX is dead. There will only be one IMAX producer in Canada and two in the US after they close shop. There remains a "giant screen" tax credit in Quebec, but Telefilm never recognized the IMAX format. Lack of Federal funding outside the normal tax credit was mentioned several times in this interview.

20. Stay in Quebec?

Given all the problems OLMC producers face, we asked if they planned to stay in Quebec or leave to improve their chances. The overwhelming answer is that they would stay, but not for professional reasons.

Most said they loved Montreal. Many said they have family here. Some said they might leave if they were younger without family commitments. Four said they might leave if the situation doesn't improve. Two would go to LA, one to Toronto, and one to B.C. where they have roots.

GLOSSARY

ACIC - NFB's French Language Independent Filmmaker Assistance Program

AMI - CMF's Anglophone Minority Incentive fund

BIPOC - Black, Indigenous, and People of colour

BSO - Black Screen Office

C-11 - The Online Streaming Act became law in 2023 and amended the *Broadcasting Act* to bring the streaming industry, especially the American streamers like Netflix, Disney+, Amazon Prime, Meta, and so on, within Canadian sovereignty and broadcasting regulation.

C-13 - Amends the Official Languages Act (OLA) and became law in 2023. It makes a number of important changes to modernize and strengthen the OLA, especially for the French OLMC.

CMF - Canada Media Fund

LGBTQ2 - Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and two spirit.

Main Film PRISME Program - Long term training program for racialized and Afro-descendant producers in Montreal.

NAWAL Association - A Quebec organization that helps media artists with roots in North Africa and West Asia create “authentic content, gain skills, confidence, and carve out their place in the Canadian industry”.

OLMC - Official language minority communities, i.e. English in Quebec and French outside Quebec

POV - CMF's Point of View Documentary Fund

QEPC - Quebec English-language Production Council which represents the Quebec official language minority in the media production industry.

Reelworld - Reelworld Screen Institute, a Toronto non-profit, provides training programs and presents the Reelworld Film Festival, which “celebrates stories by racialized Canadians”.

SODEC - Société de développement des entreprises culturelles is the cultural development agency of the Quebec Government

