SHINE NETWORK INSTITUTE

THE GIKENDAMOWIN

INITIATIVE REPORT

2026

An Indigenous Woman's Analysis of the Compounding Barriers to Career Progression for Indigenous Women in Canada's Screen Sector

The SHINE Network Institute's (TSNI) Gikendamowin report explores the systemic barriers that limit career advancement for Indigenous women in Canada's screen sector.

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A comprehensive analysis of the barriers facing Indigenous women in the screen sector, and a roadmap for systemic change.

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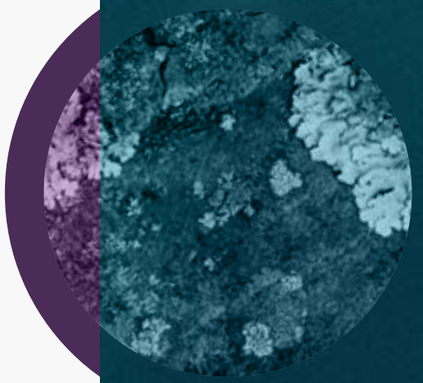
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Canada

Introduction

The SHINE Network Institute (TSNI) is a national not-for-profit organization dedicated to supporting Indigenous women in the screen sector through professional development, advocacy, and sector-specific resources.



While services, courses, and mentorship are effective ways of supporting and advancing the careers of Indigenous women, there remain significant barriers to their success and wellbeing beyond that.

This report identifies the intersectional nature of barriers faced by Indigenous women and outlines a strategy that can be used to strengthen their recruitment, retention, and advancement in the screen sector.

Backgrounder

The On Screen Report 2023 by Women in View, issues Calls to Action for decision makers in the Canadian screen sector.

The report outlines **"eight urgent and necessary steps that must be made to see substantive movement toward an equitable industry" (Women in View, 2023). The report finds that "the screen sector continues to suffer from a lack of consistent data collection, access, and transparency, which significantly inhibits our collective ability to identify and address the structural barriers affecting underrepresented creatives."** The Gikendamowin Initiative is a response to this call to action.

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About Gikendamowin

The Gikendamowin Initiative, which translates to ‘knowledge’ in Anishinabemowin, is a comprehensive capacity-building strategy designed to empower TSNI. This initiative will help identify the needs and various barriers affecting Indigenous women in the sector. It includes developing a strategic roadmap to address these barriers, implementing a pedagogy policy and framework to guide our approach to Indigenous-centred training and professional development, and creating a pathway to deliver services that effectively meet the needs of the community we serve.

The Gikendamowin Initiative focuses on three key objectives to understand and address the unique needs of Indigenous women, 2-spirit, and gender-diverse people in the Canadian screen sector. These objectives are designed to enhance our organization’s effectiveness in providing tailored training and resources.

“Rather than a trap, the web symbolizes the connections and supports essential for wellbeing.”

THE OBJECTIVES

01 IDENTIFY
Identify the needs and various barriers affecting Indigenous women in the sector.

02 STRATEGIZE
Develop a strategic roadmap to address these barriers.

03 IMPLEMENT
Implement an Indigenous-centred pedagogy and framework for training and professional development.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The Gikendamowin Iniative Report addresses the following questions:

- **What barriers do Indigenous women in TV and Film face?**
- **How do these barriers impact their careers, wellbeing, and relationships?**
- **What can be done about it?**

RESEARCH DESIGN

This intersectional needs assessment gathered input from Indigenous women in the Canadian screen sector through:

- **An online survey**
- **A roundtable discussion**

Theoretical Framework

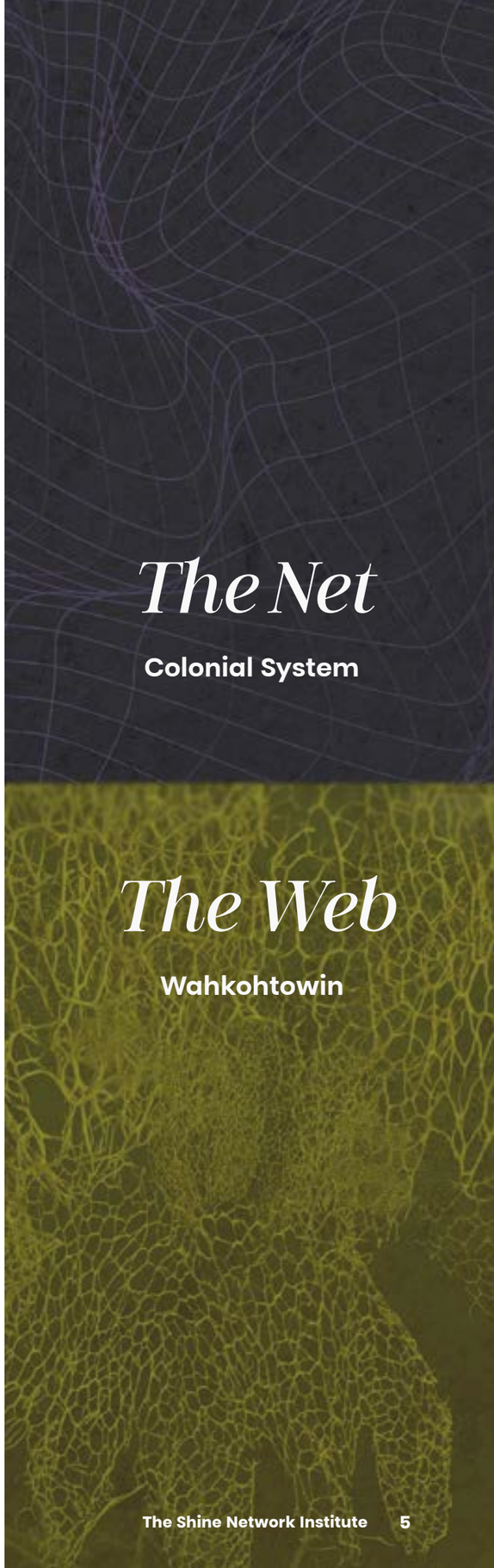
The Colonial Net vs. The Cultural Web

Systemic barriers function like a net, with interlocking systems of power creating a mesh that traps people based on their social identities. This net is woven from laws, policies, and cultural narratives that shape access to power, resources, and recognition based on gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, age, and cultural background. Indigenous women are most affected, as these intersecting barriers create compounded challenges.

In contrast, Wahkohtowin, the Cree concept of relationality is based on interconnected relationships and mutual support, similar to a spider web. Rather than a trap, the web symbolizes the connections and supports essential for wellbeing, including kinship systems, community, cultural practices, resources, and institutional accountability.

Intersectionality and Relationality

This research applies Kimberlé Crenshaw’s intersectional framework to analyze how overlapping identities result in unique and compounded forms of discrimination as a result of ongoing colonialism, racism, sexism and socio-economic marginalization. Guided by Wahkohtowin, this research situated Indigenous women within their families and communities, recognizing that barriers impact not only individual trajectories but also relationships and holistic life outcomes across generations.



Analytical Approach

The analysis recognizes that these barriers affect Indigenous women differently depending on their intersecting social identities and circumstances. While each barrier is analyzed independently, they operate simultaneously and reinforce one another. For instance, barrier 1 (economic instability), exacerbates barrier 4 (mental health and wellbeing) which is further complicated by barrier 2 (lack of mentorship). These intersections are noted throughout the analysis. This is not exhaustive. There are more barriers that Indigenous women face within society and the screen sector. The barriers begin before birth. For the purpose of this report, we focused on the ones that are most pressing to the participants who informed this research.



Centring Lived Experience

The Indigenous women who informed this research are professionals working in the screen sector. They represent a rare group of people who were able to overcome structural barriers and are aware of how they are directly impacting Indigenous women.

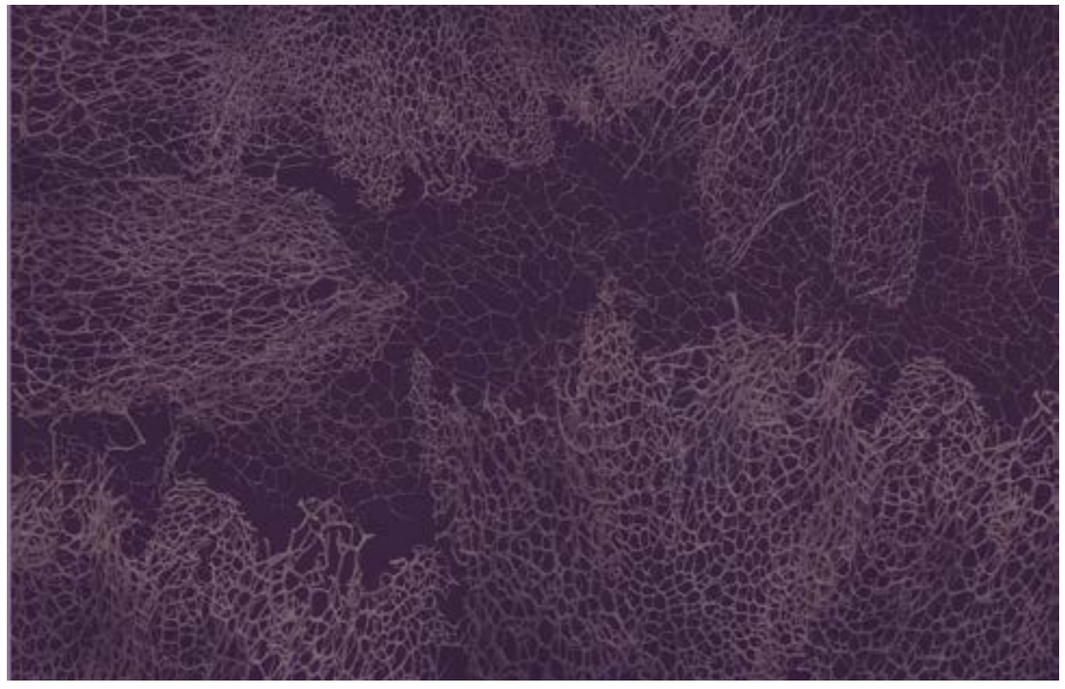
Through a relational lens, Indigenous women are the future of Indigenous nations. Dismantling the foundation of Indigenous women means dismantling the future of Indigenous nations, entirely. Aggregated data often conceals disparities and perpetuates marginalization. By centring lived experiences, this research reveals how overlapping systemic disparities interconnect and accumulate in the lives of Indigenous women, how it impacts them holistically and how the consequences are distributed. This approach makes visible the strands of the colonial net while simultaneously identifying the elements needed to build a supportive web of institutional accountability and cultural restoration. Are the perceived benefits really worth it?

“Are the perceived benefits really worth it?“

PART II: FINDINGS

Where there is a problem, there is a solution.

The barriers each conclude with identifying actionable entry points for stakeholders to dismantle oppressive systems and actively weave comprehensive support structures that honour Indigenous kinship systems and enable Indigenous women to thrive in the Canadian screen sector. Given the intersectional nature of this complex net/web dichotomy, this report concludes with recommendations for best practices relevant to stakeholders in the Canadian screen sector.



"This report concludes with recommendations for best practices relevant to stakeholders in the Canadian screen sector."

Barrier 1: Economic Instability

"I would like to get to a place where I don't need a side job to supplement my acting income to pay my bills–solely making my living off of my creative endeavours."

Indigenous women continue to face challenges in their careers because of gatekeeping and the unstable nature of the industry. In the screen sector, established gatekeepers manage relationships and control access to funding and opportunities. Existing advocacy efforts are not enough. About 34% of these women are not in a union, and 20% say they have trouble joining one. Without mentorship or union support, many Indigenous women in the screen sector go unnoticed and are at greater risk of being marginalized.

Economic data highlight this instability: only 42% earn over 75% of their income from the screen sector, 32% barely cover basic needs, and 22% struggle to pay bills despite 67% working above-the-line. Additionally, 30% cannot manage unexpected expenses. Most are self-employed (55%) or work on a gig basis (38%), lacking job security and benefits. Those with economic stability often rely on income from other sectors, indicating the screen industry alone does not provide sustainable livelihoods for Indigenous women. Addressing these challenges requires systemic change rather than relying on the resilience of marginalized women.

42% Rely on screen sector for primary income

30% Could not handle one unexpected expense

32% Make enough to make ends meet

55% Are self-employed

22% Struggle to pay bills

38% Work gig to gig

Barrier 2: Lack of Mentorship

"As an Indigenous person working in the industry, I find it difficult to gain mentorship, grow my network, or work full-time in the industry and be able to sustain my life financially. Because of these factors, I am not where I want to be in my career in film..."

Indigenous women encounter significant barriers to mentorship and financial sustainability in the screen industry. Although 30% have multiple mentors, 33% lack mentorship despite actively seeking it, and 15% report that access to mentorship is a challenge. Training programs often do not lead to opportunities without industry connections, requiring Indigenous women to build networks independently in a competitive and exclusive environment. The data highlights a paradox: 88% aim to uplift their community, 85% pursue socially conscious work, and 82% hope to mentor other Indigenous creatives. However, industry perceptions reveal systemic challenges: 78% describe the industry as White, 75% cite gatekeeping, 47% consider it toxic, and only 44% view it as diverse. Without mentorship, stable income, and equitable access, Indigenous women struggle to sustain full-time creative careers. This scarcity-driven exclusion perpetuates marginalization and hinders structural progress.

Relevant Data

15% Access to mentorship is a problem

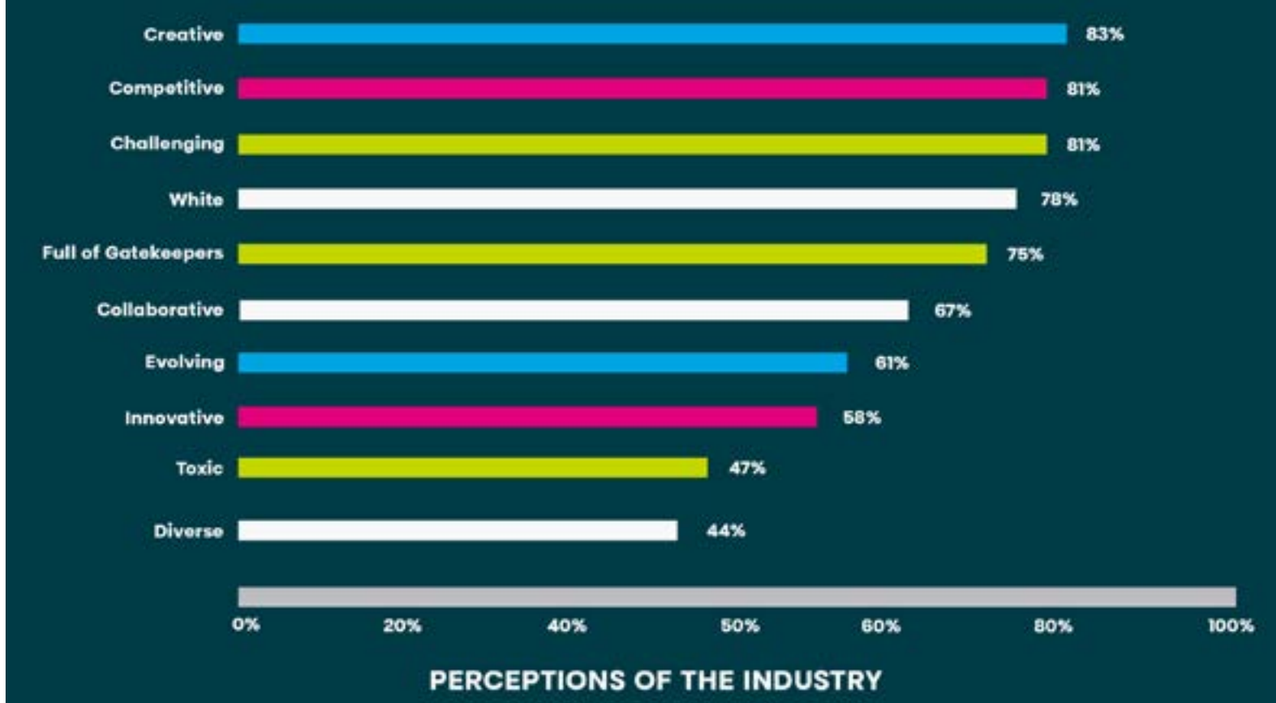
33% Do not have a mentor but are looking for one

30% Have two or more mentors

88% Want to use the skills they learn to uplift their community

85% Want to work on projects that contribute to social change

82% Want to mentor other Indigenous creatives to help them succeed



"I have benefited immensely from the Indigenous Matriarchs in the industry who have taken the time to listen to me and allowed me to listen to their knowledge. "

Barrier 3: Misinterpretations of Caregiving

"I think one of the main challenges for Indigenous women is that there's a lot on their plate. So they don't get the same resources. Burn out comes fast."

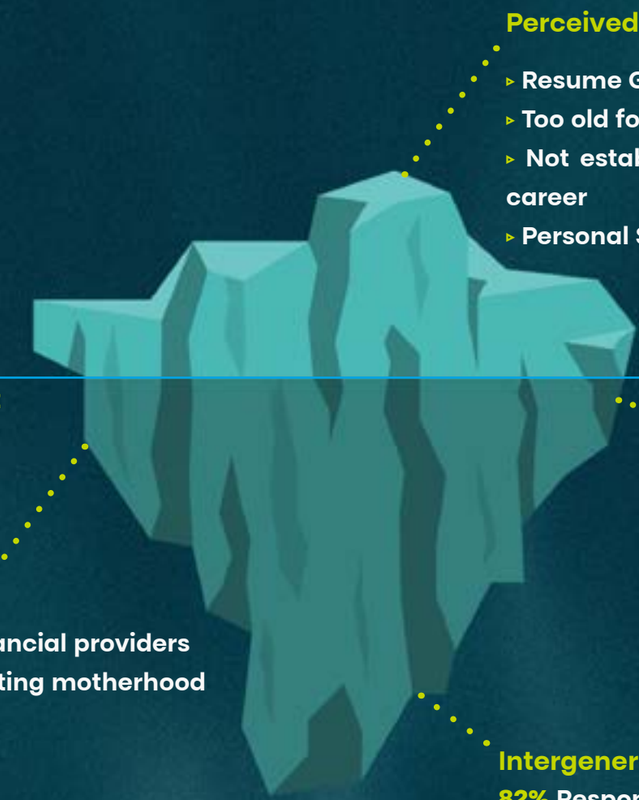
Motherhood is essential to healthy families, yet Indigenous mothers who prioritize parenting before joining the workforce often face structural barriers at the entry level. When Indigenous women enter the field after caregiving, they contribute valuable experience. Yet caregiving is often treated as a personal shortcoming rather than seeing the barriers as a systemic issue. Furthermore, 28% served as primary financial providers while also meeting high caregiving demands. This shows that economic and emotional labour are seen as gender-based obligations rather than structural burdens. This perspective wrongly equates resilience with inadequacy and hides systemic barriers. Such misinterpretations can lead to ageism.

"I wish resources weren't just focused on training. I would love for there to be more show-runner training programs and shadowing producers. We can't make films/tv if we have no one in those positions"

There is a correlation between the desire to pursue passions while raising families and the experience of tumultuous relationships during upbringing. While 61% had educated mothers, 63% still reported poor childhood relationships, showing that education alone does not resolve intergenerational trauma. Instability was common: 49% moved often, 27% were raised by single mothers. Despite these challenges, 82% felt responsible for breaking cycles and 63% for household wellbeing, which frames survival strategies as individual weaknesses among Indigenous women.

The participants, who represent an existing Indigenous workforce in the sector, reported that 78% found their work in the sector satisfying and fulfilling, and 68% said they believe they are in a career where they can grow. Funding and training programs often exclude those who begin their careers later due to caregiving, trauma, or limited access, creating structural barriers for Indigenous women. When they are ready to advance, they are frequently considered too old for entry-level funding or training and not established enough for mid-career support.

The Illusion of Inadequacy



Perceived Ineligibility

- Resume Gaps
- Too old for entry-level funding
- Not established enough for mid-career
- Personal Shortcomings

The Hidden Weight

Financial & Care Labour

28% are Primary financial providers

51% Actively navigating motherhood and caregiving

Systemic Geographic Instability

0% of Toronto Participants have children

Intergenerational Trauma

82% Responsibility of Breaking Family Cycles

63% Manage the emotional labour of household wellbeing.

Relevant Data

Upbringing & Stability

61% Mother completed university/ college

24% Father completed university/ college

27% Raised by a single mother

49% Moved 5+ times by age 13

Relationship & Trauma

63% Poor relationship with mother growing up

57% Good relationship with mom right now

63% Feel responsible for household wellbeing

82% Feel responsible for breaking family cycles

Career & Economic Reality

28% Primary financial provider in household

51% of participants have children

0% of participants in Toronto have children

41% Would like training in TV/Film

Barrier 4: Mental Health and Wellbeing

Mental health challenges are widespread in Canada, and Indigenous women working in the screen sector often struggle to access support that is both consistent and culturally appropriate. The legacy of residential schools shows how government policies have shaped the experiences of Indigenous people.

"The data indicates that residential schools continue to impact Indigenous families."

About 40% of respondents said their grandparents attended these schools, leading to widespread family trauma. Although 82% feel responsible for breaking this cycle, many still face challenges. For example, 68% report family mental health issues, 66% experience ongoing trauma, and 58% have unresolved trauma. 47% find it difficult to advocate for themselves, 58% struggle with perfectionism, and 45% feel pressure to please others.

On a positive note, 66% have trusted relationships that support them. Half use writing and 42% use exercise to cope, though 34% struggle to access psychological support. As Canada works toward reconciliation, Indigenous people are also working to restore wellbeing for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Relevant Data:

82% Feel responsible for breaking the cycle of their family.
68% Families struggle with their mental health.
66% Are coping with ongoing trauma.
66% Said they have people in their lives they can trust.
63% Feel responsible for maintaining a sense of wellbeing in their home.
58% Identified unresolved trauma in their lives.
58% Have a hard time keeping up with their own expectations.
50% Write to cope with their mental health.
50% Are overwhelmed with their responsibilities.
47%Find it challenging to advocate for themselves.
47% Take on more than they can handle to make ends meet.
45% Struggle with people-pleasing behaviours.
42% Exercise to cope with their mental health.
39% Struggle with accomplishing tasks.
34% Struggle with accessing psychological supports.

Residential School Legacy

45% maternal grandmother went to a residential school

32% maternal grandfather went to a residential school

42% paternal grandmother went to a residential school

32% paternal grandfather went to a residential school

The Resilience Balance



"34% struggle to access psychological supports."

Barrier 5: Unwelcome and Hostile Work Environments

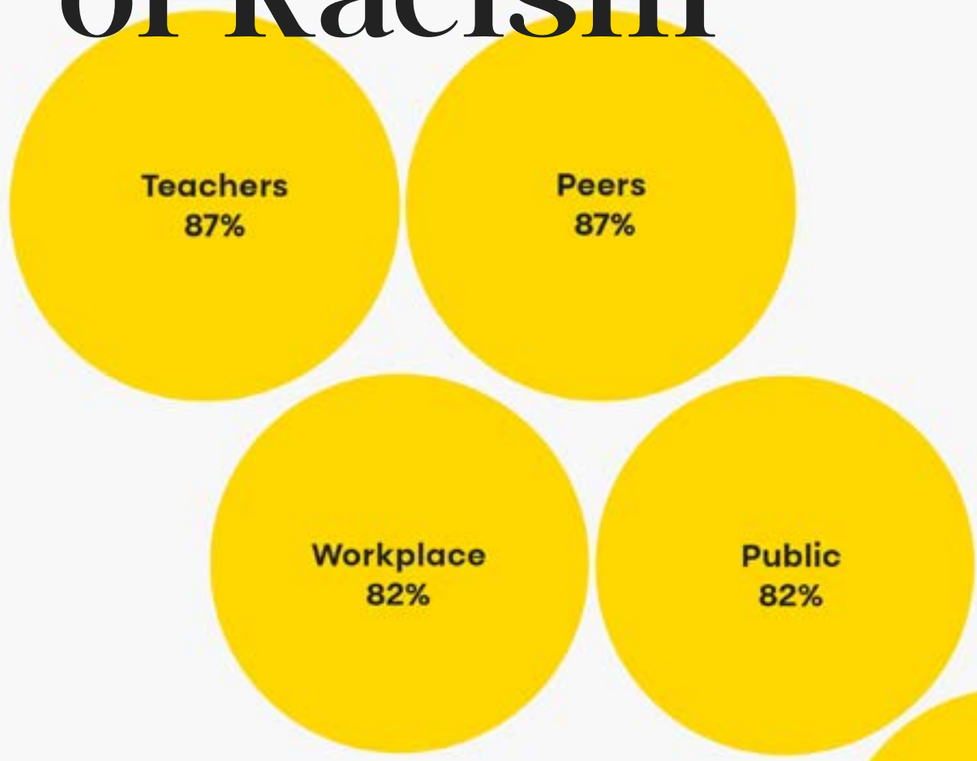
"I'm constantly struggling with the ignorance of others and white fragility in the workplace. That can show up as bullying or degrading me into being the 'problem' for speaking up. I am exhausted and burnt out beyond measure."

Indigenous women often encounter hostile work environments that lack inclusive policies and effective recourse. Racism is pervasive within the entire Canadian landscape. Only 3% of participants reported not having experienced racism whereas 87% experienced racism and discrimination by their teachers and peers, 82% in the workplace and in public, 74% in local stores and 55% in their local communities. Without formal protections, speaking up can lead to ostracization, termination, or blacklisting, which silences victims and normalizes abuse. Data shows that 46% faced backlash for self-advocacy, 43% for supporting others, and 38% struggle to address microaggressions. Workplace competitiveness (38%) and microaggressions from supervisors and peers (35% each) contribute to toxic dynamics. Notably, 32% were fired, and 24% blackballed for speaking up, highlighting the real risks of advocacy. In the absence of due process, minor issues can escalate, further marginalizing Indigenous women in the sector entirely. The lack of accountability enables systemic discrimination and places the burden of silence on victims.

By implementing clear anti-discrimination policies and transparent grievance procedures, organizations can move closer to creating equitable environments that protect Indigenous women and foster truly inclusive workplaces.

"Anti-blackness within the indigenous world is still upsettingly high, and has repeatedly REPEATEDLY impacted my career and my wellbeing."

The Landscape of Racism



The Cost of Advocacy





Barrier 6: Geographic Limitations

The concentration of the screen industry in major economic centres limits career opportunities.

While participants represent 46 communities across Canada, 65% now live in cities, and 62% have left their home communities. This creates a significant barrier, as 35% cannot afford to travel home regularly. With half of Indigenous populations in Western Canada, many living in rural or remote areas, and a large portion of Inuit in the far north, an urban-centric industry that presents high costs of living and competitive entry-points, and a lack of structural support discourages youth from pursuing these careers.

Expanding educational opportunities in rural and remote communities will help the screen sector build a more diverse Indigenous workforce. Our study found education rates above the Canadian average, indicating the need for higher levels of education among Indigenous women to be competitive in the industry. Increasing college entry points in all communities would make education and career development more accessible, reduce displacement, and support community-based career growth.

"The participants are from 46 unique communities across Canada and represent Indigenous women actively working within the screen sector now."

Relevant Data

65% Live in a city
56% Were raised in a city
62% Do not live close to their home community
35% Say it's too expensive to travel to their home community regularly
50% of Indigenous people live in western Canada

71% High School/GED
59% Have completed University/ College
46% Certificate Program
34% Professional Training Program
15% Trade School

Industry Centralization



A visual representation of the displacement required to access centralized industry hubs.

Qualification vs. Access



"High qualification does not bridge the gap created by geographic isolation and industry centralization."

Barrier 7: Lack of Indigenous Leadership

"I wish resources weren't just focused on training. I would love for there to be more showrunner training programs and shadowing producers. We can't make films/tv if we have no one in those positions."

Indigenous women remain underrepresented in leadership roles in the screen sector and are often limited to entry-level or intern positions, restricting their influence and capacity to drive systemic change. The absence of Indigenous leaders perpetuates exclusion and marginalizes Indigenous voices. Although 82% of survey participants identified leadership as a top skillset, pathways to leadership remain limited.

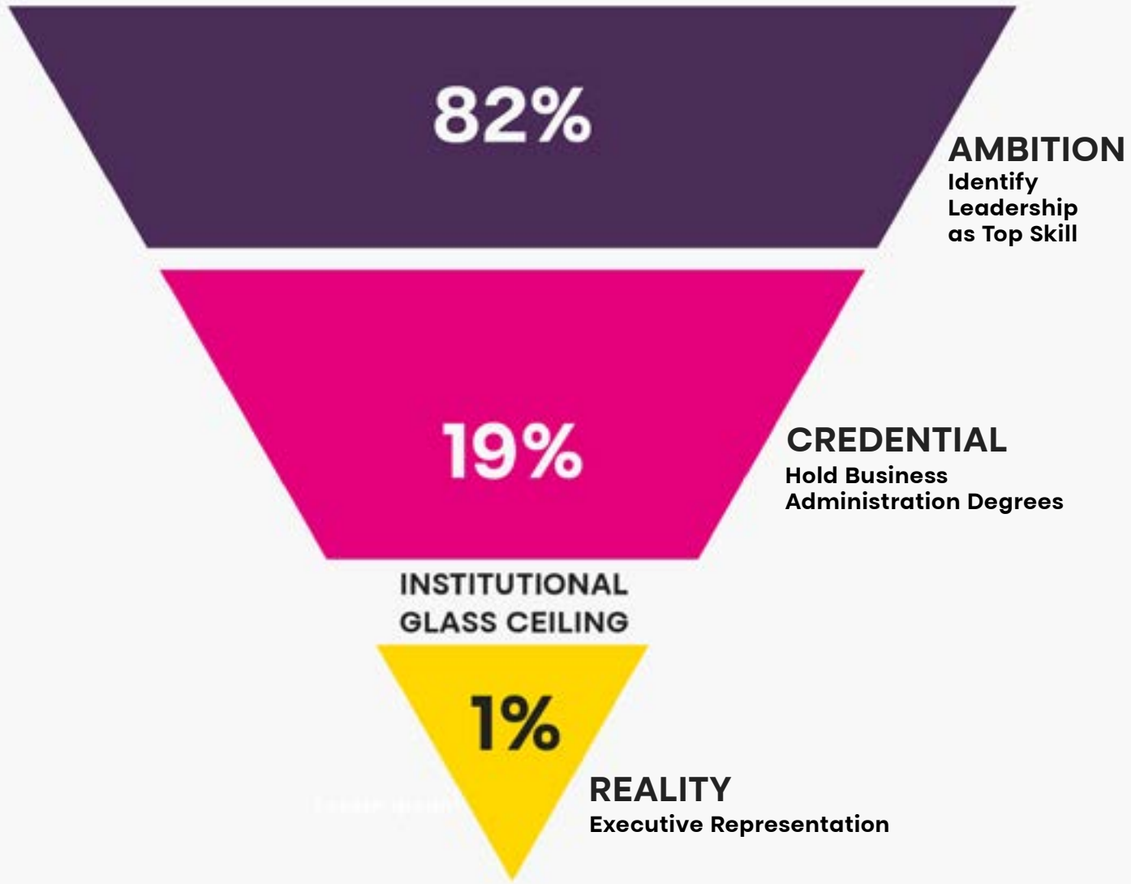
The issue is not a shortage of qualified Indigenous women, but limited career progression due to existing barriers. On average, 19% of Indigenous women graduating from Canadian universities hold a Bachelor of Administration. Addressing the leadership gap requires strategies that go beyond training and funding, ensuring Indigenous values and perspectives inform institutional decisions. Without visible leadership and support, Indigenous women cannot embrace Indigenous communities as part of the industry scope. Prioritizing Indigenous women in leadership is essential to transforming the culture of the screen sector and the Canadian media landscape entirely.

Relevant Data

19% of Indigenous women who graduated in the 2023 - 2024 academic year completed a Bachelor in Business Administration

82% participants in our survey identified leading as one of their top skillsets

The Leadership Pipeline Gap



Indigenous women are prepared to lead. The industry must now be prepared to follow.

PART III: STRATEGY

Analysis

These barriers do not exist in isolation. For Indigenous women, these overlaps often deepen and their impact increases over time. For example, a woman facing racism at work may also manage unresolved trauma, struggle financially, and lack mentorship due to restricted access. Achieving equity in the screen sector requires addressing all these barriers together.

The challenges described in this report reflect those faced by Indigenous women across Canada.

"Achieving equity in the screen sector requires addressing all these barriers together"

It is clear that EDI frameworks are insufficient for taking the appropriate steps to achieve reconciliation within the screen sector.

In addition to EDI frameworks, Canadian institutions and organizations in many sectors are now using Reconciliation Action Plans. These plans help meet the needs of Indigenous peoples, promote transparency and accountability, and work toward better relationships.

What's the difference between a RAP and an EDI Framework?

A **Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)** is tailored to Indigenous communities. Its goals are to build trust, acknowledge past injustices, and support Indigenous rights through collaboration. RAPs may include land acknowledgments, hiring Indigenous staff, and supporting Indigenous-led initiatives. In contrast, an **Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)** framework addresses a wider range of marginalized groups and aims to remove barriers for all. EDI promotes representation, belonging, and equal opportunity, but may not fully address issues unique to Indigenous peoples or their histories. Both RAP and EDI are essential. EDI establishes a foundation for fairness, while RAP fosters meaningful engagement and reconciliation with Indigenous communities. Implementing both approaches enables organizations to create more inclusive and equitable environments.

EDI addresses a wider range of marginalized groups and aims to remove barriers for all.

A RAP is tailored to Indigenous communities. Its goals are to build trust, acknowledge past injustices, and support rights.

EDI establishes a foundation for fairness.

RAP fosters meaningful reconciliation.

A Culturally Relevant Framework for Systemic Intervention

As Reconciliation Action Plans become more established in Canadian institutions and organizations, implementation will be streamlined through partnerships and collaborations. The ten principles in the Truth and Reconcilliation Report (TRC) offer a collective vision. Three principles are especially relevant to the screen sector:

> ***Principle #6:*** ***Addressing Colonial Legacies: Taking constructive action to repair the ongoing harms of colonialism (education, health, justice, etc.).***
>
> ***Principle #7:*** ***Closing Gaps: Creating a more equitable society by closing socio-economic gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians.***
>
> ***Principle #10:*** ***Political Will & Resources: Requiring sustained investment, transparency, accountability, and leadership from all parties.***

These principles form the foundation for a Reconciliation Action Plan to remove barriers that prevent Indigenous people from reaching their potential in the screen sector.

Organizations can increase Indigenous representation at all levels by reviewing current frameworks, policies, and hiring practices; documenting historical harms and exclusionary practices; understanding Indigenous employee and participant experiences; and identifying specific gatekeeping mechanisms and barriers.



A Restorative Action Plan requires concrete commitments, transparent progress reporting, and culturally relevant guidance, often provided by an Indigenous advisory and leadership committee. Examples include mentorship and training programs to foster relationships between industry leaders and Indigenous women in entry-level roles; transparent hiring practices; funding mechanisms that reflect the geographic distribution of Indigenous populations; equitable support for training program participants, such as transportation and childcare assistance; anti-discrimination policies with clear grievance procedures; trauma-informed training for all staff; diversified entry points by geography and age; and partnerships with Indigenous organizations and institutions committed to reconciliation.

A Restorative Action Plan should be led by a team of decision-makers who track progress through measurable metrics and report publicly on outcomes and challenges. This approach allows for strategy adjustments based on feedback and trends.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Disclaimer

The Canadian media landscape is changing fast. We have an opportunity to change Canadian culture by advocating for Canadian content that reflects the shared interest of meaningful Indigenous inclusion that goes beyond the current EDI frameworks through establishing Reconciliation Action Plans that adhere to the TRC Principles and relevant Calls to Action.

These best practice recommendations are based on initial survey findings from the SHINE Network Institute. They may not reflect the views of all Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people in the screen sector. Please consult those with lived experience in your network to ensure your practices are effective and respectful.

"Our goal is to create sustainable career opportunities for Indigenous women and to ensure cultural integrity in the representation of Indigenous people in productions. While there may be concerns about making mistakes, we are all navigating new territory and must work together to achieve equity in the sector."

Each stakeholder is provided with recommendations targeted at three stages of career progression**: recruitment, retention,** and **advancement. Recruitment strategies include: building awareness, facilitating outreach initiatives, lowering barriers to entry and establishing pathways through community based and institutional partnerships. Retention strategies include: fostering a sense of belonging, community building initiatives, supporting mental health and wellbeing, professional development initiatives, and economic support. Advancement strategies include: developing pathways for leadership, initiating project support, industry access and advocacy, increasing overall visibility and capacity, and creating mechanisms for mentorship and knowledge transfer.**

This approach moves beyond tokenism toward genuine power-sharing, better reflecting the communities served and helping to dismantle systemic barriers.

Funding Agencies

Indigenous producers face systemic, financial, and cultural barriers that limit content creation and distribution. Although representation has improved, complex challenges remain.

Current funding frameworks and lack of diversity amongst Funding Agencies within the screen sector contribute to the marginalization of Indigenous women.

A Reconciliation Action Plan initiated by funding agencies can increase cultural integrity and Indigenous representation in the screen sector by taking the following actions:

RECRUITMENT

- Ensure Indigenous peoples have decision-making authority on funding committees, advisory boards, and in policy development to address systemic barriers at their source.
- Implement a standardized process to confirm Indigenous identity for roles designated as Indigenous-specific.
- Develop targeted outreach and marketing campaigns within Indigenous communities and networks.
- Establish mentorship and apprenticeship programs that connect emerging Indigenous producers with established industry leaders.
- Fund accessibility initiatives, such as travel grants and virtual participation options, to reduce geographic barriers to application and event attendance.
- Offer free application support services and funding literacy workshops for Indigenous producers.

RETENTION

- Require funding agreements that protect Indigenous intellectual property rights by ensuring producers retain story rights and control over cultural content, with clear IP ownership clauses.
- Establish dedicated funding streams for cultural protocols, explicitly including Elder engagement, ceremonies, and community consent as core production costs rather than optional expenses.
- Develop community-building initiatives and professional networks to reduce isolation.
- Support Indigenous language production infrastructure, including translator networks, language-specific tools, and technical support, to reduce costs associated with language revitalization in film and television.
- Offer wraparound support services, such as childcare subsidies, mental health resources, and peer support networks.
- Provide flexible funding timelines and payment structures to accommodate caregiving responsibilities.

ADVANCEMENT

- Provide large-scale production support for Indigenous producers with complex needs, moving beyond entry-level funding to adequately support high-budget, culturally grounded projects.
- Establish interprovincial mobility funding to remove provincial tax credit barriers, enabling producers to work across regions and hire crew from their own communities.
- Support leadership development programs, including show-runner training, producer shadowing, and executive coaching.
- Create pathways to decision-making roles within funding agencies and industry bodies.
- Develop co-production and partnership opportunities with established producers and international markets.
- Acknowledge caregiving and community leadership experience as valuable professional credentials in advancement evaluations.

Production Companies

Hiring in the production sector relies on networking, referrals, personal connections, and word of mouth. Attending industry events and film festivals, and joining online communities helps build visibility.

These practices, according to our research, contribute to the marginalization of Indigenous women due to geographical complexity, a lack of social capital, limited funding opportunities, limited childcare support, and the implications of poverty.

A Reconciliation Action Plan initiated by production companies can increase cultural integrity and Indigenous representation in the screen sector by taking the following actions:

RECRUITEMENT

- When hiring freelancers, use accessreelworld.com to find Indigenous creatives, crew, production staff, and executives in your area.
- Partner with local Indigenous communities and organizations in the region you're working in.
- Attend Indigenous film festivals and cultural events to learn about Indigenous cultures, understand important stories, and identify talent.
- Share job opportunities with Indigenous student associations.
- Advertise through Indigenous media networks as well as mainstream job boards.
- When posting a job, indicate that Indigenous candidates are preferred.
- If hiring an Indigenous person for a role involving traumatic content, provide trauma-informed support, wellness programs, and a de-stress plan. Awareness of the role's impact demonstrates a commitment to safety.
- Offer equitable pay to Indigenous women, considering barriers such as transportation and childcare, which contribute to structural marginalization.
- Acknowledge that career paths are not linear. Older Indigenous women bring specialized knowledge and skills that can uniquely benefit your production.
- Provide a comprehensive benefits package that includes health, dental, mental health, and cultural continuity care.

RETENTION

- Offer paid internships and apprenticeships to ensure opportunities are accessible to those without financial safety nets.
- Provide childcare support during training and the initial stages of employment.
- Offer flexible scheduling for breastfeeding caregivers.
- Be open to a support person joining the Indigenous woman if she is a caregiver, as long as it is not distracting.
- Offer relocation support for women traveling from rural or remote communities.
- Cover the costs of training programs and necessary equipment.
- Implement a trauma-informed anti-racism and anti-discrimination policy with an anonymous reporting protocol.
- Hire multiple Indigenous women to foster peer support.
- Hire Indigenous department heads Acknowledge the systemic need for code-switching and foster an environment of acceptance.
- Support Indigenous women in building lines of credit as producers to help them access unions and guilds.
- Develop a policy to support the emotional labour involved in educating staff and networking on anti-racism and the effects of colonialism on Indigenous women.
- With guidance from a respected Indigenous knowledge keeper, develop a trauma-informed policy to support crisis management for staff at higher risk of violence due to intergenerational trauma.

ADVANCEMENT

- Recommend Indigenous women within your professional networks.
- Share networking opportunities with Indigenous women on your team.
- Highlight the contributions of Indigenous women working for your company.
- Appoint Indigenous women as department heads.
- Provide ongoing mentorship to Indigenous women in your network to support their access to leadership roles.
- Ensure Indigenous leadership is visible within your organization.
- Support Indigenous women in developing their own projects.
- Sponsor training programs for Indigenous women.
- Provide assistance with funding applications.
- To ensure authentic representation, hire cultural advisors from the relevant locations and establish an Indigenous advisory team to review scripts and productions.

Networks and Streaming Companies

The Canadian media landscape is evolving, and networks and streaming companies play a crucial role in this cultural shift. Investing in Indigenous stories, communities, creatives, and leadership is essential to integrating Indigenous people into the media landscape while respecting their cultural context and self-determination.

As the media landscape shifts from traditional TV to streaming platforms, there is an opportunity to define the role of Indigenous women in shaping Canadian media.

Networks and streaming companies have significant influence over policy and, by meaningfully engaging Indigenous women, can help transform the media experience for Indigenous communities in Canada.

A Reconciliation Action Plan initiated by Networks and Streaming Companies can increase cultural integrity and Indigenous representation in the screen sector by taking the following actions:

RECRUITMENT

- Launch an "Indigenous Women Creators" campaign and feature their films on your platform.
- Co-develop training programs with Indigenous organizations and institutions.
- Invest in film and executive leadership programs offered by Indigenous organizations.
- Establish scholarships for Indigenous women pursuing film and leadership programs.
- Launch an Indigenous Women in Media fellowship program with mentorship.
- Offer paid internships and apprenticeships in all departments.
- Adopt an equity-focused hiring policy that provides relocation and childcare support.
- Host recruitment events at Indigenous film festivals and educational institutions.
- Develop a structured mentorship framework for new, emerging, and mid-career professionals.
- Provide equitable and competitive compensation with transparent pay scales and profit-sharing options.
- Offer comprehensive benefits, including health, dental, mental health, and cultural continuity care.

RETENTION

- Create a dedicated position to manage Indigenous content and ensure it is filled by an Indigenous professional.
- Establish an Indigenous advisory board.
  Invest in films made by Indigenous women.
- Invest in skill development and leadership programs.
- Implement a trauma-informed anti-racism and discrimination policy with anonymous reporting.
- Commit to a minimum quota for showcasing Indigenous-made content.
- Establish a policy that recognizes and supports the emotional labour involved in anti-racism education.
- Implement a trauma-informed crisis management policy for staff.

ADVANCEMENT

- Provide long-term funding for new, emerging, and mid-career Indigenous women professionals.
- Create an "Indigenous Women in Media" fund to support development and production.
- Support Indigenous women-led production companies and development deals through investment.
- Expand mentorship programs to include mid-career professionals and support their leadership development.
- Pursue international co-production opportunities with Indigenous-led companies.
- Adopt revenue-sharing models, equity stakes, and backend deals.
- Set an annual quota to greenlight films created by Indigenous women.
- Commission documentaries by Indigenous women and provide support for experimental projects.

Educational Institutions and Training Programs

Educational Institutions and Training Programs play a fundamental role in setting the trajectory for Indigenous women in the media sector.

By addressing gaps in the existing framework, Indigenous women can gain an equitable opportunity to pursue careers in media.

A Reconciliation Action Plan led by educational institutions and training programs can strengthen cultural integrity and Indigenous representation in the screen sector through the following actions:

RECRUITMENT

- Participate in career fairs in elementary and high school programs.
- Promote educational programs in local Indigenous communities and through partnerships with Indigenous organizations.
- Work with local high schools to introduce a curriculum featuring stories by Indigenous creatives.
- Partner with local high schools to offer bridge programs for students at risk of being overlooked.
- Support community-based Indigenous-filmmaking mentorships through local partnerships that promote narrative sovereignty and language revitalization through media.
- Reduce barriers for Indigenous women entering as mature students by providing scholarships and flexible transition options.
- Hire an Indigenous advisor or liaison to enhance targeted recruitment efforts.

RETENTION

- Establish Indigenous-specific positions and require Indigenous representation.
- Adopt a trauma-informed anti-racism and discrimination policy that includes anonymous reporting.
- Develop career pathways to help Indigenous women attain leadership positions.
- Adopt a culturally relevant, trauma-informed, and holistic pedagogical framework.
- Designate space within the school for Indigenous students and provide cultural support services.
- Offer financial support through grants, bursaries, and emergency funds.
- Develop a trauma-informed policy to support crisis management for students and staff.
- Hire Indigenous staff in leadership, as teachers, counsellors, facilitators and in culturally relevant support positions.

ADVANCEMENT

- Offer career development support, including paid internships and apprenticeships.
- Assist students in developing projects that help them earn credentials for union and guild membership.
- Invite Indigenous women professionals to serve as guest speakers and share their industry experiences.
- Organize networking events to connect students with industry leaders.
- Collaborate with unions and guilds to ensure graduates receive appropriate representation.
- Establish partnerships with local production and streaming companies.
- Negotiate hiring commitments with media companies at the local, regional, national, and international levels.
- Create a film festival to showcase Indigenous talent and raise awareness of Indigenous stories.
- Provide training in essential business and leadership skills, including pitching, project management, budgeting, contracts, negotiation, teamwork, and resilience.
- Establish a production space within the school to encourage collaboration between graduates and students on productions.
- Form partnerships with provincial, federal, and sector-specific funding organizations and agencies, to support and sustain programming.

Community-Based Organizations

Most community-based organizations in the Canadian screen sector are non-profit cooperatives or associations run by their members. They provide training, equipment access, advocacy, and networking for independent filmmakers.

These groups often help with regional growth, support underrepresented voices, or focus on unique artistic areas.

A Reconciliation Action Plan initiated by community-based organizations can increase cultural integrity and Indigenous representation in the screen sector by taking the following actions:

RECRUITMENT

- Form partnerships with Indigenous schools, colleges, and community centres to deliver early exposure programs.
- Create visible mentorship networks that showcase successful Indigenous women filmmakers.
- Launch recruitment campaigns in Indigenous languages on relevant media platforms.
- Provide free introductory workshops in remote and rural Indigenous communities.
- Provide scholarships and bursaries specifically for Indigenous women.
- Create internship pipelines that offer paid positions.
- Provide transportation assistance for workshops and industry events.

RETENTION

- Create networking and peer support groups exclusively for Indigenous women.
- Develop mentorship circles that connect experienced and emerging Indigenous women.
- Provide culturally informed mental health resources that address racism and trauma.
- Create safe spaces for discussing experiences of racism.
- Offer ongoing workshops in technical and soft skills.
- Provide business training in budgeting, grant writing, and project management.
- Create micro-grant programs to support independent projects.
- Establish emergency funds to assist members experiencing financial hardship.

ADVANCEMENT

- Support women in transitioning from crew positions to leadership roles.
- Actively promote financial literacy
- Provide production funding for projects led by Indigenous women.
- Provide production support, including crew coordination, location scouting, and post-production services.
- Arrange introductions to major broadcasters, studios, and production companies.
- Promote hiring quotas and equity requirements within the sector.
- Host showcases and film festivals featuring the work of Indigenous women.
- Support pitching and funding applications.
- Create formal mentorship programs that connect experienced and emerging filmmakers.
- Create a masterclass series featuring successful Indigenous women filmmakers.

Indigenous-Serving Organizations

Indigenous-serving organizations in Canada's screen sector primarily support narrative sovereignty, increase representation, and provide funding, training, and development for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis creators. Indigenous-serving organizations are often Indigenous-led and help connect creators with resources and audiences.

Due to the collective nature of Indigenous support systems, this list includes community-based initiatives that can be implemented in support of advancing Indigenous women in the screen sector and fostering kinship within Indigenous communities.

A Reconciliation Action Plan initiated by Indigenous-serving organizations can increase cultural integrity and Indigenous representation in the screen sector by taking the following actions:

RECRUITMENT

- Start youth programs in elementary and middle schools.
- Create scholarships for Indigenous women in post-secondary film programs.
- Offer free or low-cost programs with no prerequisites.
- Pay participants stipends or honouraria.
- Cover transportation and accommodation for remote/rural participants.
- Provide programs in Indigenous languages.
- Feature successful Indigenous women filmmakers sharing their stories.
- Leverage Indigenous social media and community networks.
- Conduct outreach in cities, reserves, Métis settlements, and online.

RETENTION

- Offer micro-grants for Indigenous women-led projects.
- Provide low/no-cost equipment access.
- Teach technical skills (cinematography, editing, directing, producing, sound).
- Provide grant-writing and fundraising training.
- Integrate Indigenous knowledge throughout all programs.
- Teach decolonial approaches to storytelling and filmmaking.
- Provide culturally-informed support for managing racism.
- Connect members with Indigenous counselors and mental health professionals.
- Create peer mentorship groups led by Indigenous women.
- Celebrate member achievements in community-centred ways.
- Integrate cultural ceremonies and land-based practices into programming.

ADVANCEMENT

- Create producer and director development programs.
- Offer executive training for leadership positions.
- Ensure Indigenous women lead the organization and its key programs.
- Support women transitioning from crew to leadership roles.
- Develop training on Indigenous governance and decision-making.
- Provide script development and story consulting.
- Offer production funding for Indigenous women-led projects.
- Provide production support (crew coordination, locations, post-production).
- Establish development funds for early-stage project ideas.
- Support distribution and audience development.
- Advocate for dedicated funding streams for Indigenous women filmmakers.
- Create showcases and film festivals featuring Indigenous women's work.
- Develop online platforms for portfolios and demo reels.
- Build relationships with broadcasters, studios, and production companies.
- Advocate for hiring quotas and equity requirements for Indigenous women.
- Support projects advancing Indigenous self-determination.
- Ensure Indigenous women maintain creative and intellectual property control.
- Build platforms for Indigenous women's voices and perspectives.

Unions and Guilds

In Canada's screen industry, unions and guilds support workers by negotiating contracts and ensuring that professionals in film, TV, and digital media receive fair pay, safe working conditions, and benefits.

These groups are organized by job type, like performers, directors, technicians, or writers, and often have regional branches.

A Reconciliation Action Plan initiated by unions and guilds can increase cultural integrity and Indigenous representation in the screen sector by taking the following actions:

RECRUITMENT

- Establish partnerships with Indigenous organizations, youth centres, and schools.
- Sponsor film programs for Indigenous youth in rural and remote communities.
- Recruit new talent at Indigenous film festivals and community gatherings.
- Highlight Indigenous women members in recruitment campaigns.
- Waive or reduce initiation fees for exceptional circumstances.
- Offer scholarships and stipends for unpaid internships.
- Develop entry-level pathways that don't require prior industry experience.
- Offer mentorship during the onboarding process.
- Establish mentorship programs pairing Indigenous women with established members.
- Share member success stories through newsletters and social media.
- Ensure visible Indigenous representation on union and guild leadership teams.

RETENTION

- Negotiate contracts, ensuring equal pay for Indigenous women.
- Ensure transparency in pay scales and contract terms.
- Conduct wage audits to identify and address pay gaps.
- Establish clear protocols addressing racism, discrimination, and harassment.
- Provide confidential reporting mechanisms for workplace incidents.
- Require anti-racism and cultural competency training for all industry professionals.
- Provide legal and emotional support to members experiencing harassment.
- Ensure access to health, dental, and mental health benefits.
- Do not penalize members for parental leave and childcare support.
- Include coverage for Indigenous healing practices and mental health services.
- Ensure accessible pension and retirement benefits.
- Establish Indigenous women's committees or caucuses within unions and guilds.
- Organize regular gatherings and social events for Indigenous members.
- Develop online communities to connect geographically dispersed members.
- Incorporate cultural practices into union and guild events.

ADVANCEMENT

- Lobby for government funding dedicated to Indigenous screen content.
- Advocate for equity requirements in public funding and broadcasting.
- Advocate for Indigenous representation in union and guild governance.
- Document and publicize barriers facing Indigenous women in the industry.
- Leverage collective bargaining to negotiate improved terms for Indigenous women.
- Establish solidarity networks with other unions and Indigenous organizations.
- Advocate for industry-wide standards protecting Indigenous women.
- Allocate union and guild resources to support Indigenous-led projects and initiatives.

Closing

The Gikendamowin Report finds Indigenous women in Canada's screen sector encounter seven interconnected barriers, related to economic instability, lack of mentorship, hostile work environments, and geographic constraints all in which contribute to the reduced presence of Indigenous women in the sector.

This research shows these are systemic issues, not personal ones, and collective action can help solve them.

88%

Indigenous women want to support their communities.

85%

Indigenous women seek socially conscious work.

82%

Indigenous women hope to mentor others.

The data shows promise: 88% of Indigenous women want to support their communities, 85% seek socially conscious work, and 82% hope to mentor others. Their passion is clear, but they still lack the structural support they need from staying and advancing within the sector.

What is most profound is that the barriers the Indigenous women are facing in the screen sector are the same barriers Indigenous girls are facing in Canada's public schools. There is a ripple effect of disparities that are disproportionately impacting Indigenous women and girls. As stakeholders within the screen sector will need to take immediate action to address the structural barriers, all Canadian sectors have to commit to systemic change or we will all continue heading in the direction we are going.

Systemic change is mandatory.

Meaningful change happens when everyone works together. Indigenous women need to be in decision-making roles, as they are best positioned to bring the widest lens to promoting equity. Funding agencies, production companies, streaming companies and networks, educational institutions and training programs, indigenous-serving organizations, community-based organizations, and unions and guilds each have unique opportunities to move the needle organizationally and within the sector.

This is not about charity or token gestures. Indigenous women contribute vital perspectives, creativity, and cultural integrity to Canadian media. Without Indigenous vitality and knowledge systems, Canada risks losing its identity. By removing barriers, ensuring economic stability, providing trauma-informed support, and promoting visible leadership, the industry becomes stronger, and the Canadian screen sector grows.

Every commitment matters. Together, we can build a screen industry where Indigenous women can reach their potential, thrive, lead, and help shape the future of Canada.

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