

# **Yukon Film and Sound Commission Funding Programs Discussion**

## **What We Heard Report**



**Spring, 2016**

## Yukon Film and Sound Commission Funding Programs Discussions

The Yukon Film and Sound Commission is a branch of the Department of Economic Development. The Commission provides funding, incentives and other supports to Yukon film and sound related companies and industry members, and to productions using Yukon as a location.

### Funding Programs of the Yukon Film and Sound Commission

- The Yukon Film and Sound Commission administers a suite of programs which, together, are called the “Yukon Film and Sound Incentive Program” and are currently budgeted at \$715K per year.
- There are six components to this program, five dealing specifically with film and one dealing with sound recording:
  - Yukon Film Production Fund       \$380K
  - Yukon Film Development Fund     \$50K
  - Yukon Film Locations Incentive   \$140K
  - Yukon Filmmakers Fund           \$40K
  - Yukon Film Training Incentive   \$50K
  - Yukon Sound Recording Program   \$50K
- The funds have been in place for over ten years. From April 1, 2003 to August 14, 2015, the Yukon Film and Sound Incentive programs have provided \$8.33M to 428 projects.
- Uptake on each fund varies from year to year, but approximately 22 projects from Yukon based filmmakers, film organizations and outside film companies qualify for the funds per year, with budgets that have ranged from \$939 to \$3,068,200 with up to 100 Yukon workers employed on larger projects.

## Yukon Film and Sound Commission Funding Programs Discussions

### Film and Sound Funding Program Discussions

- In May 2015, a number of letters were sent to elected officials regarding the mandate of the Commission's funding programs.
- In the fall and winter of 2015, officials met with 10 groups and individuals representing over 100 stakeholders in the Yukon film and sound industry:
  - Yukoners who have accessed the Commission's programs to fund their projects/productions (*due to the collaborative nature of the industry, some individuals were represented in one or more groups*):
    - A. Independent film producers;
    - B. Screen Production Yukon Association (SPYA);
    - C. Yukon media industry producers;
    - D. Yukon Film Society (YFS);
    - E. MusicYukon; and
    - F. Musicians group
  - Outside Production companies who have accessed the Commission's programs to receive a rebate on their Yukon spend:
    - G. Yukon Location Manager and Unit Manager, and
    - H. Production executives

Departmental staff recorded the meetings and submitted the notes for approval to the individual stakeholders.

### **The Five Themes Arising from the Discussions**

#### **1. Process**

Some participants were happy with the Commission's process for discussing the funding review and some were not.

#### **2. Funding Programs**

Some participants are happy with the suite of funding programs; all had suggestions for how to improve them.

#### **3. Government Body or Standalone**

Some participants suggested that Commission should be relocated within Yukon government or that it should be a standalone organization.

#### **4. Mandate**

Some participants raised the issue of whether the Commission's funding programs should focus on either economic development or artistic expression.

#### **5. Satisfaction with the Commission**

Participants shared remarks about their experience working with the Commission.

*Notes from the Minutes now follow, in order of the five Themes.*

*The previously identified groups are indicated by letter (A through H).*

### **Theme 1: Process**

**Some participants were happy with the Commission's process for providing feedback to the film funding review and some were not.**

#### **A. Independent film producers:**

- were satisfied with the way that the process had been communicated; and
- felt that they had been given ample opportunity to provide feedback.

#### **B. Screen Production Yukon Association members:**

- were satisfied with the work undertaken to discuss the film funding programs;
- said that there was ample opportunity for producers to provide feedback and want any review to proceed promptly;
- strongly encouraged the department to complete a review as soon as possible; and
- stated that the writing of letters to elected officials was not productive and was slowing down the process, frustrating industry stakeholders.

#### **C. Yukon media industry producers:**

- felt that the existing consultation process was not meeting the needs of this group;
- said there was confusion about the timelines, the process for the consultation, and survey at the Shared Vision discussion stage;
- want wider discussions across all Yukon organizations and communities regarding the Commission and the funding review, similar to the Arts branch 1994/95 process used to establish the Yukon Government Arts Policy; and
- want the department to find resources to fund groups to fully participate in any consultation process.

#### **D. Yukon Film Society:**

- felt that the existing consultation process was not meeting the needs of their membership
- said there was confusion about the timelines, process for the consultation ,and survey at the Shared Vision discussion stage;
- want wider discussions across all Yukon organizations and communities regarding the Commission and the funding review, similar to the Arts branch 1994/95 process used to establish the Yukon Government Arts Policy; and
- want the department to find resources to fund groups to fully participate in any consultation process.

### **Theme 2: Funding Programs**

**Some participants are happy with the suite of film and sound funding programs; all had suggestions for how to improve them.**

#### **A. Independent film producers:**

- the majority felt that the current suite of programs offered by YFSC were working well for them but needed to be “tweaked” to bring them into line with current realities i.e. to include funding for digital media;
- some felt that there was not enough support for artistically focused films within YG but thought that the Yukon Filmmakers Fund was meeting the needs of emerging producers, and wanted funding to this program increased.

#### **B. Screen Production Yukon Association:**

- said that the programs that currently exist are working (“I’ve never seen it so good or so busy / We are in an amazing hay day of film production / We are all too busy working on projects”), but
- could benefit from updating, such as:
  - the programs should allow for funding of digital media projects;
  - members need funding for prototyping in order to explore the digital media side of media production;
  - programs should include funding for Convergent Digital Media, which should not be based on a percentage of Yukon spend, because the resources are not in Yukon yet;
  - funding should be developed to attract the talent that is needed but is not in Yukon now;
  - the department should focus resources where jobs are being created now;
  - programs need to be responsive to industry needs and flexible enough to accommodate changes in technology, while being accountable for government funding;
- encouraged the Commission to focus on helping Yukon producers build capacity through a multi-year plan for growth in the industry; and
- said the Yukon Film Locations Incentive Fund is important for providing work for Yukoners, building skills for Yukoners, and helping to pay the bills.

## Yukon Film and Sound Commission Funding Programs Discussions

### D. Yukon Film Society:

- current Commission funding programs are not working for its membership:
  - the requirement for a market trigger to qualify for the program limits funding to projects over a \$50,000 threshold;
  - tying funding amounts to money spent in Yukon leaves filmmakers struggling to fully finance their projects;
  - Yukon filmmakers should not need to obtain third party funding to close the financing gap; funding from Commission and market trigger should fully fund development;
- requested that Canada Council for the Arts funding be considered a trigger for any Yukon Film Funding program;
- new and emerging filmmakers need mentorship and support to develop their projects; they need knowledge and assistance to develop their first feature films and digital media projects:
  - holding year round talent labs in Yukon with Yukoners instructing is important;
  - the Available Light Film Festival Media Industry program master classes and workshops allow local filmmakers to make connections and build important relationships in order to advance their projects;
- requested support for the Available Light Film Festival—currently, funding (via the Film Training Initiative) is only available for the Media Industry Forum
  - want recognition that:
    - there is a promotional value to the festival;
    - it brings visitors to the festival;
    - it encourages an enthusiasm and inspiration for the development of film projects in Yukon that is demonstrable;
    - it increases Yukon’s visibility for industry tourism as a destination;
    - it provides an opportunity for participants to have access to festival guests and noted that feedback from festival guests has shown great enthusiasm for Yukon and Yukon projects;
  - want a First Feature program developed in Yukon:
  - should be adjudicated in Yukon by a peer jury; and
  - be merit based; and
  - aimed at allowing Yukoners to make their first feature film at approximately the \$500,000 level;

## **Yukon Film and Sound Commission Funding Programs Discussions**

- questions the Commission requirement that applicants be incorporated to match federal funding programs i.e. Telefilm Canada, Canada Media Fund;
  - suggests each filmmaker should assess their own risk in applying for funding;
  - suggests filmmakers should make the decision to apply as an individual or as a corporation.

### **E. MusicYukon:**

- some MusicYukon members sent a letter to elected officials;
- MusicYukon representatives took no position regarding the letter;
- MusicYukon representatives proposed hosting a facilitated discussion for feedback and recommendations for changes to sound funding programs;
- representatives also proposed a survey, similar to the film survey done by the Yukon Bureau of Statistics, in order to capture feedback;
- agreed to get back to the Commission regarding film survey questions;
- committed to working with the Commission to undertake more strategic work going forward; and
- agreed to meet more often to share information.

### **G. Yukon Location Manager and Unit Manager:**

- recognize that local filmmakers would like better access to film funding, but that local filmmakers have difficulty matching the level of success/funding achieved by outside film productions;
- stated that in order to access the Yukon Film Location Incentive Fund, it meant that the visiting production company had to hire 26 to 30 Yukoners in full time positions for up to seven months (because of the 50 percent local hire requirement to access the fund);
- the hiring requirement resulted in adding additional people to the film crew, which in turn meant that the production may be, for example, the #2 employer in Dawson.
- high gasoline costs for the production were mitigated by the incentive funding, which made Yukon more viable as a filming location;
- local benefits of a production in Dawson are:
  - a current production disburses approximately \$14,000 per week in per diems which is spent in the local community;
  - a current production obtains all its car repairs in Dawson - a local company remains open 7 days a week to service the vehicles of the production, which

## Yukon Film and Sound Commission Funding Programs Discussions

- reportedly brings in as much work for the local business as all other customers combined; and
- a current production makes an effort to direct all flight traffic to Air North.
- there is a lack of capacity locally for technical positions which:
  - requires hiring from out of territory;
  - require specific sound experience and requirements; and
  - a current production could employ four people from Yukon at up to \$600 a day if they had the skills required.
- hiring Yukon staff means adjusting the production schedule in response to Yukoners' seasonal activities, whereas imported staff are here only to work;
- it is challenging for Yukoners to gain tech experience with high level productions, but recognizes there is no direct solution for Yukoners to gain more experience at the moment;
- regarding the Film Location Incentive Fund:
  - fund appears to be open ended, and to service/publish that there is no end to the fund is extremely positive;
  - Yukon is doing the right thing by having an open fund;
  - having a 50% Yukon crew base may quickly exhaust the few people who are able to fill those positions;
  - the funding requirements are fair and the process is open—for example, a major production has not had difficulty fulfilling the requirements for the incentive fund; and
  - the incentive program has made a huge impact on current productions:
    - it alleviates stress on the budget; and
    - it is a buffer for unexpected expenses that arise during production.

### H. Production Executive:

- the rebate program is a huge incentive for a production and its broadcaster to film in Yukon and return to film in Yukon again;
- staff enjoy the mentoring opportunities and all that comes with it— it helps Yukon hired employees rise within the ranks and gain valuable experience;
- pay rates for local Yukon employees are higher than for some non-Yukon employees, but the rebate helps to offset those costs and does provide incentive to hire locals;
- the incentive program has been efficient and they have felt supported by the Commission—having the incentive funds is very important for the production;

## **Yukon Film and Sound Commission Funding Programs Discussions**

- the rebate helps Yukon remain competitive because Yukon is not the cheapest location for filming, food and accommodation etc.—European locations are half the price; and
- the size of the rebate is helpful considering that just over \$9 million has been spent by one production in Dawson over the last five years.

### **Theme 3: Government Body or Standalone**

**Discussions were undertaken about where the Commission should be located within Yukon government or if it should be a standalone organization.**

#### **A. Independent film producers:**

- the majority want YFSC to remain within the Department of Economic Development.

#### **B. Screen Production Yukon Association:**

- wants YFSC to remain within the Department of Economic Development.

#### **C. Yukon media industry producers:**

- want YFSC moved completely outside of government or returned to the Arts Branch of Tourism and Culture; and
- are willing to postpone the request to move the Commission until after the funding programs review is complete.

#### **D. Yukon Film Society:**

- at its AGM, the membership asked the board to begin work on having the Commission moved out of government or back to the Department of Tourism and Culture; and
- wants to meet with elected officials regarding moving the Commission.

#### **E. MusicYukon:**

- took no position.

### **Theme 4: Mandate**

**Discussions were undertaken about whether the Commission's funding programs should focus on economic development or on artistic expression.**

#### **A. Independent film producers:**

- felt the positions taken by the Yukon Film Society and the Screen Production Yukon Association regarding the Commission did not represent their views; and
- majority felt that YFSC funding should remain economically focused and triggered by economic interests;
- some felt that Yukon government should "nurture small local producers";
- some felt that Yukon government does not support art films, but argue that they are key to developing a filmmaker's craft in order to attract the level of investment needed for bigger productions; and
- others thought that art films are a genre of films that are not devoid of economic elements but that many funds exist specifically for funding art projects, such as those at the Department of Tourism and Culture.

#### **B. Screen Production Yukon Association:**

- felt that the programs of YFSC should continue to support projects that have third party economic interests;
- felt that the other groups should be focusing on increasing the funding available to media projects via the Arts Branch rather than trying to remove or reduce the economically focused programs;
- stressed that at the national level, there is funding for economically driven projects (Canada Media Fund and Telefilm Canada) and for artistically driven projects (Canada Council)—Yukon should focus its resources the same way, separating economic development projects from arts projects support; and
- said the Commission should provide clarity regarding the funds of the Arts Branch and of the Commission to help applicant understand what funding exists and how to focus their applications for funding.

#### **C. Yukon media industry producers:**

- want the government to recognize the importance of funding the creative side of the film and media industry, as "it all starts with a good story or idea".

## **Yukon Film and Sound Commission Funding Programs Discussions**

### **D. Yukon Film Society:**

- questioned the requirement of the Commission funding programs that a project must have an economic interest to qualify for funding, as opposed to funding artistic merit;
- wondered why applications are not reviewed by a jury of peers to recommend funding (example given was Telefilm Micro Budget program); and
- stated that having filmmakers sit on jury is helpful in knowing how to apply for funding, as they can then see what a jury is looking for in an application.

### **E. MusicYukon**

- Took no position.

### **Theme 5: Satisfaction with the Commission**

#### **Participants share remarks about their experience working with the Commission.**

##### **A. Independent film producers:**

- majority had applied to YFSC funding programs with varying degrees of success; and
- stated the staff at YFSC were very knowledgeable about film funding in general and have been extremely helpful in developing their projects.

##### **B. Screen Production Yukon Association:**

- were satisfied with the way the film funds were administered.

##### **C. Yukon media industry producers:**

- suggested an Advisory Board that allows stake-holders to regularly consult and guide the strategies to support the sector and bring concerns to the department in a formal process;
- feel the role of the Film Commissioner is to be a strong advocate for the local film industry within Yukon government, and at the national and international level;
- have concerns regarding Yukon government's ability to recruit and retain staff.
- felt that a broader discussion of the mandate of YFSC is important to consider before a film funding review can take place; and
- committed to participate in such a discussion.

##### **D. Yukon Film Society:**

- the President of the society sent a letter to elected officials on behalf of the board outlining concerns with the mandate, staffing and programming of the Commission.

##### **G. Yukon Location Manager and Unit Manager:**

- stated that having a good relationship with the Commission has been very helpful;
- noted that if the company has any struggles, they are able to call Commission staff for a prompt solution;
- said the administration of the fund is great; and
- said the goodwill the funding programs generate with producers is a great way to get the information out, as opposed to advertising.

## **Yukon Film and Sound Commission Funding Programs Discussions**

### **H. Production Executive:**

- said that it has always been an absolute pleasure dealing with the staff at the Commission.

## Yukon Film and Sound Commission Funding Programs Discussions

### Appendix "A" List of Meetings

various dates	Individual film producers
July 31, 2015	Yukon media industry producers
Sept. 8, 2015	Screen Production Yukon Association
Sept. 14, 2015	Yukon Location Manager and Unit Manager
Sept. 17, 2015	Production Executive
Nov. 2, 2015	MusicYukon
Nov. 3, 2015	Musicians groups
Nov. 6, 2015	Yukon Film Society