



Modernizing the Diversity and Inclusion Framework for Canadian TV, Canadian Radio, and Online Streaming

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1. Representation and Barriers

(a) How well does content on Canadian TV, Canadian radio, and online streaming services reflect the diversity of our population? Are there communities or experiences that are underrepresented or misrepresented?

The diversity of Canada's population is not reflected adequately on Canadian TV, radio, or online streaming services. Black communities, in particular, remain underrepresented or misrepresented. While a handful of groundbreaking productions like [The Porter](#) and [Bria Mack Gets a Life](#) have showcased what is possible, these examples are the exceptions rather than the norm. Too often, Black characters appear in ensemble casts as secondary figures or exist within limited storylines that fail to explore the breadth of Black experiences. Rarely are Black-led narratives celebrated or given the resources they deserve, and when they are, they often lack regional, generational, or cultural diversity. For instance, stories about Black rural communities, Afro-Indigenous narratives, or those centring on intergenerational Canadian-born Black families are almost entirely absent.

(b) How do factors like ethnicity, gender, income level, or ability combine to create barriers to fair representation on Canadian TV, Canadian radio, and online streaming services? Can you provide examples of how underrepresentation or stereotypes have affected your communities?

This lack of representation is not merely a shortcoming of creativity but a systemic barrier to societal progress. Representation matters not only for those consuming the content but also for those aspiring to create it. As highlighted in the [Being Seen: Black Communities Report](#), when people see characters who reflect their realities—such as a Black woman engineer or an Asian female pilot—they can envision those possibilities for themselves. However, the lack of representation limits these aspirations, making the journey toward achievement unnecessarily difficult. This issue is compounded by the fact that most Black narratives are filtered through non-Black creators, resulting in portrayals that lack authenticity or perpetuate harmful stereotypes.

The systemic barriers preventing fair representation are multifaceted. Black women, for example, are often hypersexualized in media or confined to supporting roles, while Black creators with disabilities are virtually invisible. Socio-economic barriers further entrench underrepresentation, as many Black creatives lack access to the resources, mentorship, and networks necessary to thrive in the industry.

Even when we dedicate significant effort to designing and delivering initiatives like the [BSO-DGC Black Women Directors' Accelerator](#), systemic resistance to change remains a formidable challenge. Producers and broadcasters are often willing to support observerships, where Black women directors can shadow professionals on set, but when it comes to giving these fully qualified women the opportunity to direct an episode of a network show, the conversation shifts. The rationale? They claim they “can’t take the risk.”

This reasoning is deeply flawed and reveals a troubling double standard. Why is the industry willing to take chances on others but unwilling to extend the same opportunities to Black women? These barriers are not theoretical; they are tangible and measurable. According to [Women in View's 2023 On Screen Report](#), Black women are significantly underrepresented in Canadian television directing roles. The report highlights that Black women held only **0.2%** of directing positions in Canadian television during the period studied – a staggering statistic that underscores the systemic inequities entrenched in the industry.

This reluctance to provide Black women with meaningful opportunities highlights how deeply ingrained biases and risk-averse practices perpetuate exclusion, even when the talent and readiness are undeniable. Change cannot happen without a deliberate commitment to breaking through these barriers and holding broadcasters and producers accountable for equitable representation.

Without intervention, these barriers will continue to exclude talented voices from shaping Canada’s cultural landscape.

To address these challenges, there must be a commitment to both representation and ownership. Authentic Black narratives require the involvement of Black writers,

directors, producers, and crew members who can tell their stories with nuance and integrity. Broadcasters and streaming platforms must take responsibility by commissioning content from Black creatives and ensuring that regional and cultural diversity is prioritized. This cannot be left to goodwill alone; regulatory frameworks and incentive structures are essential to create systemic accountability and drive meaningful change.

2. Participation, Influence, and Cultural Respect in Content Creation

(a) *Are you aware of how involved people from diverse backgrounds are in content creation decisions? What steps could increase their influence?*

BSO's [Being Heard](#) report highlights that fewer than 3% of study participants reported occupying some of the most powerful decision-making roles, such as Showrunner and Executive Producer. The near absence of Black decision-makers in leadership roles across Canada's media ecosystem perpetuates the exclusion of Black voices from shaping narratives. Producers, network executives, and commissioning editors are predominantly white, and their lack of lived experience with Black communities often results in Black stories being overlooked or mishandled. While programs like the [BSO's Mid-Career Accelerator](#) are beginning to address these gaps by training and mentoring Black talent, other specific goals include training and employing Black development, production and programming executives, and funding slate development for Black-led and owned production companies to ensure sustainability.

(b) *What challenges do content creators face in avoiding cultural stereotypes or misrepresentation? What guidelines or support would help ensure culturally respectful portrayals?*

Authentic representation is impossible without Black creatives in key decision-making positions. Content that avoids cultural stereotypes and celebrates the full spectrum of Black experiences requires lived experience and creative autonomy.

BSO's [Being Seen](#) report highlights several challenges content creators face in avoiding cultural stereotypes and misrepresentation. Participants emphasized the need for authentic representation, noting that "*people are going for a diversity that you can see, even if it's not authentic.*"

Participants recommended engaging directly with the communities being represented to support culturally respectful portrayals. One participant suggested that the "*first step is to*

open dialogue with the various underrepresented communities either through grassroots organizations or, if they do not exist, through individuals working in the industry."

The report also underscores the importance of including diverse voices in decision-making roles. A participant stated, *"We need people who look like us at the decision-making level who can have the necessary conversations with their colleagues so that we can go about the business of telling the stories."*

By addressing these challenges and implementing these guidelines, content creators can work towards more authentic and inclusive media representations.

Guides like *Being Seen* offer valuable tools for fostering understanding, but they are insufficient on their own. Broadcasters and streamers must prioritize hiring Black creatives, not just in junior roles but as leaders with the authority to shape narratives.

To ensure culturally respectful portrayals, broadcasters and streaming platforms must actively collaborate with equity organizations and embed Black creatives in all stages of content production. Regulatory frameworks could encourage this by creating incentives through bonus CPE for Black-led and owned content or through quotas.

(c) What resources or opportunities (e.g., funding, mentorship) would help diverse individuals play a larger role in content creation?

To support Black producers and creatives, funding programs must go beyond development to include opportunities for market access, leadership training, and mentorship. The BSO's [Being Heard](#) report emphasizes the necessity of targeted resources and opportunities to enhance the participation of Black professionals in content creation. It highlights the importance of *"Black-owned, Black-led policies, spaces, development and funding"* to support Black creatives.

The report also underscores the need for mentorship and networking opportunities, stating that *"mentorship and networking opportunities are essential to support Black creatives in navigating the industry and advancing their careers."*

Black creators must be supported through every stage of the production process, reducing the high rate of projects that fail to move from concept to completion.

Leadership fellowships and internships will also prepare Black professionals for decision-making, ensuring long-term change in the industry's power structures.

3. Representation of Equity-Deserving Communities

(a) How well are Equity-Deserving communities represented on Canadian TV, Canadian radio, and online streaming services? What changes could improve this?

Black representation in Canadian media remains limited and tokenistic, often confined to narrow narratives that fail to reflect the diversity of Black experiences. Authentic representation requires not only increasing the number of Black characters on screen but also addressing who tells these stories and how they are created. Without Black creatives in key creative and leadership roles, representation will remain superficial, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and excluding stories that resonate with Black communities. Participants in the BSO's *Being Seen* report stated:

"We are tired of being seen only in times of pain, trauma, and struggle. We want to see ourselves thriving, loving, and simply living life onscreen."

"Hire us at all levels and listen to us. Include us in decision-making. This is the only way to ensure authenticity and respect in representation."

"The problem is not just that we are underrepresented, but that when we are represented, it's often inaccurate or plays to harmful stereotypes."

A systemic approach is needed to address this disparity. Annual reporting on representation metrics, both on-screen and behind the scenes, would provide transparency and accountability. Broadcasters and streaming platforms should also commit to producing a minimum percentage of content led by Black creatives. These measures would ensure that Black voices are not only included, but also given the resources and support to thrive.

4. Geographic and Community Representation

- (a) ***How well does content on Canadian TV, Canadian radio, and online streaming services reflect smaller or rural communities? How can broadcasters work with community organizations to enhance the reflection of the diversity in these areas?***

The portrayal of smaller or rural communities on Canadian media platforms is severely lacking, and Black communities in these areas are often invisible. Black Canadians exist in every part of the country, yet their stories remain largely untold, reinforcing a Toronto-centric view of Black life. This exclusion is not only a missed creative opportunity but also a disservice to the Black Canadians who deserve to see their realities reflected on screen.

The [BSO's National Tour](#) in fall 2024 highlighted the richness of talent and stories in regions like Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Halifax and St. John's. Local creatives expressed frustration at being overlooked by the industry and their desire for platforms to share their narratives. Here is some of what we heard:

Attendees emphasized the need to *"delve into the unique challenges and opportunities of working in your region," underscoring the importance of addressing specific local issues.*

"We feel overlooked and invisible. There needs to be more frequent gatherings like this and a stronger relationship with BSO from an Alberta perspective. Children's programming, in particular, is a crucial area for representation."

"There is a lack of visibility for Black stories here. We need platforms and opportunities to showcase our talent and tell our stories."

"Black creators here are doing incredible work, but we need more access to funding and networks to break into national and international markets."

To address this gap, broadcasters and streaming platforms must invest in regional initiatives prioritizing diverse voices nationwide. Assisting the BSO in establishing regional hubs that could provide training, mentorship, and funding for Black creators in smaller communities, ensuring their stories are not left out of the national narrative.

5. Measuring Progress and Final Thoughts

(a) How should Canadian TV, Canadian radio, and online streaming services measure progress on diversity and inclusion (e.g., content diversity, leadership representation)? What benchmarks should be prioritized?

Progress on diversity and inclusion can only be achieved through clear benchmarks and accountability. To measure success, broadcasters and streaming platforms must collect and publish data on representation across all levels of production, from key creatives to leadership roles. This data would provide a baseline for setting ambitious yet achievable benchmarks, ensuring that progress is transparent and measurable.

Without data, it is impossible to identify gaps or set meaningful goals. Annual reporting on the diversity of staff and key creatives would create accountability and highlight areas for improvement.

Improving diversity and inclusion in Canadian broadcasting requires bold action. Supporting equity organizations like the Black Screen Office, which understands the unique challenges facing Black creatives, is essential. Regular engagement with these organizations would ensure that strategies remain responsive to the evolving needs of equity-deserving communities.

The key issue is that systemic change cannot be left to broadcasters and streamers alone. They have shown limited initiative in increasing Black representation without incentives or regulatory requirements. Quotas or other enforceable measures may be necessary to

ensure that Black voices are included and given the opportunity to lead. The Canadian broadcasting industry has an opportunity to become a global leader in representation and inclusion. With sustained commitment and bold action, it can reflect the richness and diversity of the nation it serves.

(b) Do you have any additional thoughts on improving diversity and inclusion in Canadian broadcasting?

Improving diversity and inclusion in Canadian broadcasting requires a fundamental shift in how the industry operates, ensuring that representation is not only seen but deeply integrated at all levels. The journey begins with setting clear and measurable goals. For content on-screen, this means reflecting Canada's diverse population authentically and meaningfully, moving beyond tokenism to capture the richness of the country's demographic realities. At the same time, addressing who holds power behind the scenes is essential. Increasing the presence of underrepresented groups in decision-making roles—such as executives, producers, and commissioning editors—will ensure that diverse voices are embedded in the creative and strategic processes. Transparency in these efforts, through public diversity reports, will keep organizations accountable for their goals.

Equally important is supporting creators from equity-deserving communities with the tools and resources they need to thrive. Dedicated funding streams, mentorship programs, and access to professional development can help level the playing field. However, these resources must also consider regional disparities, ensuring that creators outside of major hubs like Toronto are not left behind. The industry can address systemic inequities that often leave creators in smaller markets isolated by tailoring support to local needs and providing region-specific networking opportunities.

To truly shift the narrative, those in gatekeeping positions must be equipped with the knowledge and sensitivity to recognize the value of diverse storytelling. Anti-Black racism training and cultural competency programs for executives and decision-makers can dismantle entrenched stereotypes and open the door to projects that reflect a broader range of experiences—for example, BSO's [Anti-Black Racism Training for Mentors and Leaders](#). Including the hiring of Black talent at every stage of production—from development to marketing—can ensure authenticity and respect in representation.

Audiences play a vital role in this transformation. Regular research, like the findings from BSO's [Being Seen](#) and [Being Counted](#) reports, reveals a hunger for programming that resonates with the lived experiences of equity-deserving communities. Listening to these audiences can inspire programming that not only entertains but also connects meaningfully with viewers across all demographics. Stories that reflect intersectional

identities and explore the complexities of diverse communities are not just a moral imperative—they are a creative and commercial opportunity.

For content to resonate authentically, collaboration with the communities being portrayed is key. This extends to casting, where hiring actors who share the same backgrounds as their characters is vital. It also involves fostering relationships with grassroots organizations, local creators, and regional and municipal film commissions to co-create stories that are true to life. Empowering independent production companies owned by underrepresented creators can further amplify voices that are too often marginalized while providing equitable access to distribution ensures these stories reach audiences both domestically and internationally. And, of course, marketing and promoting programs to targeted and general audiences is essential.

Accountability must be a cornerstone of these efforts. Regulatory bodies like the CRTC have an important role to play in holding broadcasters and streaming services to diversity and inclusion commitments. These measures must be accompanied by ongoing engagement with creators and communities to refine policies and practices.

Showcasing successful projects from underrepresented creators can also serve as a beacon, illustrating the potential and profitability of diverse programming. By including global Black talent and collaborating with international creatives, Canada can position itself as a leader in inclusive storytelling, bringing its unique narratives to the world stage.

Ultimately, the industry must see diversity and inclusion not as a passing trend but as a central pillar of its mission. Policies should be revisited regularly to stay relevant and effective in addressing emerging challenges. With sustained commitment, Canadian broadcasting can evolve into a truly equitable landscape, reflecting the vibrancy and complexity of its communities while unleashing its creative talent's full potential.

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