



Writers Guild
of Canada

Best Practices for Producers Working With Diverse Writers

Film and television have the power to reflect society and shape the world. The stories we craft are made richer when they include experiences from a wide diversity of voices. This guide is for producers who are looking to hire diverse creators and build respectful partnerships with them.

**I'd Like to
Hire Some
Diverse Writers,
Now What?**

1 Where to find diverse writers

The Writers Guild of Canada (WGC) has an [online Member Directory](#) with free registration for producers. Users can access writer profiles and agent contact information, search by diversity category, save searches, create shortlists, and share lists with others.

Contact the WGC directly at diversity@wgc.ca for help finding diverse writers.

The CMPA has equity, diversity and inclusion resources on its [Production Toolkit page](#), including [Out on Set](#), which contains a database for LGBTQ2S creatives, and [Black is now](#), which showcases Black talent. The Indigenous Screen Office also has a talent database at [this link](#). Other industry databases include [Access Reelworld](#), [HireBipoc](#) and [Film in Colour](#).

There are several programs created for emerging and mid-level diverse writers. Look through past and present participants of recognized industry programs, such as BIPOC TV & Film's programs, the Muslim Episodic Writers' Lab, ReelAbilities Screenwriting Mentorship Program, Reelworld E20, Respectability's Entertainment Lab, Rogers-BSO Script Development Fund, and the WBD Access x Canadian Academy Writers' Program.

2 Working with Diverse Showrunners

- Hire a diverse showrunner. Every showrunner had to be given that first opportunity.
- In assessing a potential showrunner, consider the following: their past work experience; responsibilities on set and in production meetings; involvement in post-production; their ability to lead and maintain the vision and tone of the series. Transferable skills also play a role. Writers with directing, editing, or producing experience can use those skills as showrunners.

- Consider hiring a strong second-in-command (“Number Two”) instead of a co-showrunner. A showrunner is the foremost authority on the vision of the series, and having two people in that authorial position can be challenging. An EP-level writer as the Number Two can provide the necessary experience and support to help the showrunner achieve their vision.
- If you think you need a co-showrunner, consult your diverse showrunner first. If everyone agrees that this is in the best interest of the series, include the diverse showrunner in the hiring process. They should approve of anyone selected. Non-diverse co-showrunners should understand that their main job is to support, uplift, and prepare the diverse showrunner to do the job on their own in subsequent seasons.

- Recognize that people are not used to seeing diversity at the top and can default to finding the nearest able-bodied, white person as the authority. When the producer or a co-showrunner also assume that authority, it makes it more difficult for a diverse writer to lead. Make sure it is clear to the entire production that the diverse showrunner is in an authority position.
- Include the diverse showrunner in early meetings with the broadcaster. Breaking down these barriers as early as possible will make the noting process much smoother.
- Empower the showrunner to assemble and maintain a diverse writing team.
- Ask the showrunner how you can support them and their creative vision.

3 Assembling Diverse Writers' Rooms

- A diverse writers' room ensures a variety of perspectives, enriches the storytelling, and will resonate with wider audiences.
- Hire more than one diverse writer. This adds to the wealth of experiences for characters and stories.
- Hire a range of emerging and experienced writers. This ensures you have the necessary experience but also fresh ideas, while training new talent.

- Be thoughtful and respectful when inquiring about a person's identity and lived experience. Avoid invasive questions. Allow the writer to volunteer the information if it is relevant. Educate yourself in advance, so you are equipped to have these conversations.
- Requests for proof of Indigenous ancestry from a screenwriter should be approached with sensitivity, respect, and a clear understanding of the reasons for such a request. Some situations when it might be appropriate are to meet funding requirements or if requested by Indigenous communities collaborating closely with the production.

- The request for proof of Indigenous ancestry should be made at a stage in the hiring process that respects the candidate's privacy and dignity while still allowing the company to assess their qualifications effectively. It is advisable to make such requests only after initial interviews or discussions have taken place and the production has expressed a genuine interest in hiring the individual. Involve Indigenous advisors or organizations when developing processes to ensure cultural sensitivity, fairness, and compliance with all relevant laws and guidelines. Ensure that such requests are only made by persons in appropriate authority—it should not be tasked to PAs or assistants.

4 Working with Diverse Writers

- Don't treat your diverse writers as consultants. Be mindful that writers aren't trained professionals ready to educate others on Black anti-racism or accessibility.
- Consider disability and accessibility from the beginning, not as an afterthought. Plan and budget for access needs and ensure writers' rooms are hosted in accessible locations. If you are producing a Deaf-led series, directly ask about the access needs of deaf/HoH writers.

- Some writers won't feel comfortable disclosing they have access needs in the application, interview or immediately at hiring; some won't realize what their access needs are until they start working on the room/project. All writers should have the opportunity to state their access needs throughout their time on the project. Assign a clear point-person and process to handle accommodation requests, and ensure the writers are informed about this.

- Recognize that anyone may have access needs: a parent with child-care concerns or who is breast-feeding, someone caring for an ailing partner, or someone who has a temporary injury.
- Access needs may include a request for notetakers, recordings, etc. Discuss who may be appropriate to fulfil these tasks. Assigning a PA, or someone inexperienced with writers may not be appropriate.

5 Diverse Writing Rooms that Work

- The writers' room is where writers share personal experiences, explore ideas, and have candid discussions. In many cases, it isn't appropriate for the employer to participate in these conversations or have access to them through daily notes. Writers require a safe and private space to be vulnerable and creative.

- A producer's extended presence in the writers' room can be disruptive and inhibit creativity and discussion. Trust the showrunner to manage the flow of good ideas into the scripts. Rather than requesting access to daily notes, give your feedback on the delivered material. Attend sessions in the story room when invited by the showrunner. Avoid comments that suggest ideas are being approved and evaluated on the spot.
- Diverse writers want to generate ideas and writing of their own. It is uncomfortable and disingenuous to use them as a token to approve ideas.

- Let writers volunteer what they want to share; do not put them on the spot to disclose past trauma, disability status or personal life story.
- Listen and believe writers when they speak about their lived experiences, about what does and doesn't make sense. The end result will be better if writers can honestly share their views, even if they contradict the notes or the views of others.

- Diverse writers can fully contribute to stories in any writers' room. Their diversity doesn't mean they can only write about one thing, or that they should only be hired on a project that celebrates their particular diversity.
- When giving notes, consider how your lived experiences might be different from the experiences of the writers you are giving notes to. If you think something won't sit right with the audience, it might be because it doesn't sit right with you.

- Trust the showrunner and writers in your room. If a creative note is not taken, be prepared to move forward in solidarity.
- If the broadcaster gives a problematic note (ableist/sexist/racist, etc.), be an ally to your showrunner and writer by raising the issue with the broadcaster. Recognize it is not the diverse writer's job to defend a "diverse story position" against a problematic note.

- Bring the writer into the production phase for prep, principal photography and post production of their episode. Writers can help address problems during production. Production experience is critical to the development of writers into showrunners. This ensures there will be a pool of diverse showrunners in the years to come.
- Story coordinator positions are often an entryway for diverse writers. Any creative work assigned in addition to their administrative tasks should be properly contracted under the WGC as a Story Editor or Writer.

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