



DOCUMENTARY
ORGANIZATION OF CANADA
DOCUMENTARISTES
DU CANADA

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August 11, 2008

Mr. Wayne Clarkson
Executive Director
Telefilm Canada
474 Bathurst Street, Suite 100
Toronto, ON M5T 2S6

Dear Mr. Clarkson,

The Documentary Organization of Canada / Documentaristes du Canada is a national non-profit organization dedicated to supporting the art of independent documentary filmmaking and filmmakers in Canada. Representing over 800 directors, producers, and craftspeople in eight regional chapters (Newfoundland and Labrador, Atlantic, Québec, Ottawa-Gatineau, Toronto, Winnipeg, Alberta and British-Columbia), DOC is the national voice of the independent documentary filmmaking community.

DOC was pleased when, in 2006, Telefilm awarded *Big Picture Media Corporation*, the makers of **The Corporation**, a “performance envelope” as one of the top films grossing over one million dollars in 2004. This domestic box-office return and the awarding of a “performance envelope” was a first for a documentary and is an indicator of the Canadian documentary industry’s increasing maturity.

We are now concerned with the treatment of *Big Picture Media Corporation*’s envelope and, as a whole, the future of the envelopes for qualifying high domestic box-office documentaries.

Due to the time restraints imposed by CFFF rules requiring that 90% of spending be undertaken during the first fiscal year (a rule that needs rethinking as it reflects the time lines of drama but certainly not documentary), *Big Picture Media Corporation* made the decision to underwrite a number of theatrical documentaries.

As a result, we understand that a total of \$ 2.38 million was invested into ten feature documentaries, which attracted \$ 270,000 of development financing and \$ 5.85 million of production financing. Three of these productions are million-dollar-plus feature documentaries in various stages of post-production, a fourth is in production, and six others are in development.

It is also our understanding that Telefilm indicated that *Big Picture Media Corporation*’s “performance envelope” would be \$ 1,383,187 per year for two years. But without explanation, the company received \$ 383,187 less than promised in the second year; and further to that, every other qualifying film before and after **The Corporation** – all dramas – received three-year envelopes. Those two deductions represent AN IMMENSE LOSS to the feature documentary filmmaking community.

What is of deep concern to DOC and indeed, all Canadian documentary filmmakers, is the apparent undervaluing of theatrical documentaries despite their success at the box office and the application of more favourable conditions to fiction films. In the case of **The Corporation's** "performance envelope", Telefilm has the opportunity to enhance feature documentary filmmaking in Canada and yet has chosen to limit that support.

Similarly, Telefilm's decision to cap documentary-generated envelopes at one million dollars, while drama receives three times more than that sum is deeply concerning. Past efficiencies of doc makers utilizing fewer of Telefilm's resources than drama makers to return the same or higher profit margins seems to be held against successful documentary filmmakers.

We understand that the rules regarding **The Corporation's** envelope are open to Telefilm's discretion as to how they are applied "on an exceptional basis." As Telefilm has confirmed, eligibility for performance envelopes technically lasts for three years; we therefore encourage you to seriously reconsider Telefilm's present position on the performance envelope for **The Corporation**.

In closing, we would like the opportunity to discuss with you a more equitable policy towards feature documentaries in the future. Other documentaries are set to follow **The Corporation's** box office success and we would like to see them treated in the same manner as drama productions are.

We look forward to your reply.

Best regards,

Lisa Fitzgibbons
Interim Executive Director

Cc: Mark Achbar
Big Picture Media Corporation