



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 3rd 2020

DOC Releases COVID-19 Impact Survey Results

The heightened vulnerability of those working in Canada’s documentary sector as a result of the impacts of COVID-19 is revealed in survey results released today by The Documentary Organization of Canada (DOC).

In the words of one survey respondent: “As COVID has exposed the harsh, and unfair nature of our society in other sectors...so too has it in our industry. So many of us are constantly underpaid for our work – left in a state of constant hustle that is unsustainable”.

Conducted in mid-April, the survey looks at both quantitative and qualitative impacts of COVID 19 on Canadian documentary workers – a sector already suffering from a downturn in production as a result of ongoing market disruption and fragmentation.

“The survey highlights the array of unknowns and uncertainties facing documentary filmmakers around when and how they will be able to move forward with production,” said Michelle van Beusekom, Executive Director of DOC. “While government emergency support measures have to a certain degree helped to staunch the immediate impacts of cancelled contracts and halted productions, it’s clear that COVID will have very long-term impacts for our sector and the way documentary stories are produced.”

DOC will be using the results of the survey to highlight the unique challenges faced by the documentary sector with key funders and decision makers and to inform the kinds of customized supports it provides for its members.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- 172 people completed the survey: 145 people in English and 27 in French.
- Respondents came from 8 of 10 provinces and 2 of the 3 territories.
- Respondents were broadly representative in terms of gender and cultural diversity.
- A large majority (74%) indicated they derive 50% or more of their income from work in the documentary sector and a majority said they have worked in the sector for more than 15 years.

IMPACTS ON PRODUCERS/DIRECTORS:

- Respondents, not surprisingly, expressed a high level of uncertainty around current projects. For the project identified as being most central to their livelihood, 49% indicate that project had been postponed to an unknown date and 51% indicate they can't yet quantify the financial impacts of COVID-19.

IMPACTS ON FREELANCERS

- Respondents to this section of the survey perform a wide range of jobs in the documentary sector. 66 indicate they had between 1 to 5+ contracts in place prior to the start of the pandemic.
- 54 people provided financial information for delayed contracts for the March 15 – June 15 period with a total value of \$806,800.
- 41 people provided financial information for work on those same contracts scheduled for the June 15 – September 30 period with a total value of \$789,000.
- Only 24 people indicated they had signed contracts in place for work scheduled to begin after June 15 which is indicative of the short lead times on contracts in the documentary sector. As one respondent pointed out: “you are only focusing on signed contracts – but I have had many projects in the negotiation phase outright cancelled.”

QUALITATIVE IMPACTS & MOVING FORWARD

- Respondents cited a number of immediate impacts (schedule, budget, cash flow, financing, crew availability, delivery deadlines and release plans) on projects currently underway.
- Travel restrictions, COVID-exclusions on insurance policies and anticipated increases in production and post-production costs owing to new health and safety protocols were all cited as major concerns moving forward.
- Many people cited the uncertainties they are now having to navigate including the continued viability of their projects; the stability of current commitments; and the disruption of distribution plans and strategies.
- Respondents identified a range of concrete financial and funding supports that would help to bridge them over this period. Access to development funds, especially funding that isn't triggered by a broadcaster commitment, was raised by many respondents as a practical measure to ensure meaningful creative work continues at this time.
- Respondents underlined that the loss of new opportunities (which is difficult to quantify) is as important a consideration as losses on existing projects that can be documented. They identified a range of lost networking opportunities related to cancelled markets, festivals and industry events as well as lost work opportunities.
- People described a range of emotional impacts, many of them related to heightened financial stress and anxiety as well as concern for employees, film subjects, colleagues and loved ones.
- Respondents highlighted the need to address the unique challenges and barriers to access faced by racialized groups especially Indigenous and Black filmmakers who are being disproportionately affected by the pandemic
- Respondents highlighted the need for industry stakeholders to work together as we chart a plan forward in order to ensure needs from all sides are understood and addressed.

- They also underlined a desire for DOC to play a leadership role in information sharing, community building and the development of best practices and protocols - specific to the documentary sector - for working in ways that respect public health guidelines and keep everybody safe.

The Documentary Organization of Canada / l'Association des documentaristes du Canada is the collective voice of independent documentary filmmakers across Canada. DOC is a national non-profit association representing over 800 directors, producers and craftspeople in the Canadian documentary community. DOC advocates on behalf of its members to foster an environment conducive to documentary production and strives to strengthen the sector within the broader film production industry.

For additional information please contact:

Vincent LeClair

Communications and Administration Coordinator,
Documentary Organization of Canada
vincent@docorg.ca

Laura Atherton

Communications and Outreach Coordinator,
Documentary Organization of Canada
laura@docorg.ca