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Yes! #gendermatters in Canada!



From left: Sharon McGowan, Rina Fraticelli of Women in View, Claude Joli-Coeur, Karen Day, Susan Brinton

The Canadian National Film Board chairperson and film commissioner, Claude Joli-Coeur, has announced that at least half of the board's productions will now be directed by women, and half of its funding will go toward films directed by women. The plan will be rolled out over the next three years, and the board will remain completely transparent in its budgetary allocations by making all production spending information publicly available online. For the current fiscal year, 43.4 percent of the board's production spending will go toward projects directed by women, and 43.5 percent will go toward projects directed by men, 11.3 percent of the board's production spending will go toward projects directed by mixed teams, and 1.8 percent hasn't been allocated yet.

Claude Jolie-Coeur made the announcement at a panel at the [Vancouver International Women In Film Festival](#) (just ended), saying that the board 'has always taken a leadership role in women's filmmaking'. The board's makeup reflects that commitment: 55 percent of the board's producers and executive producers are women, and 66 percent of the upper management positions are filled by women. The NFB funds a lot of films directed by women every year, but Joli-Coeur acknowledged that numbers can fluctuate if no firm measures are put into place. 'There have been good years and lean years for women's filmmaking at the NFB. No more,' he said. 'Today, I'm making a firm, ongoing commitment to full gender parity,

which I hope will help to lead the way for the industry as a whole.'

The NFB produces and distributes documentary films, animation, web documentaries and alternative dramas. It was the home of the famous women's studios – Studio D 1974-1996, including New Initiatives in Film 1989-1996; and Studio B Regards de Femmes 1986-1996. And it has produced many award-winning films. But it isn't responsible for fostering 'the commercial, cultural and industrial success of Canadian productions and to stimulate demand for those productions both at home and abroad': that's Telefilm Canada and as far as I know there's no gender policy there (yet). But this is such good news. How has it happened?

I'm sceptical that the board's makeup made much difference to the decision. The Swedish Film Institute's Anna Serner [believes that leadership is an essential component of best gender equity practice](#) and it's much more likely that, [as in Ireland](#), leadership has made the difference. And not only leadership from the head of the organisation, like Annie Doona's when she became Acting Chair of the Irish Film Board and Claude Joli-Coeur's here at the National Film Board.

Again, as in Ireland, there's been leadership from outside the organisation. [In Ireland](#), it came from three women supported by two guilds. In Canada, it's come from *Women in View*, founded in 2010 as a 'national not-for-profit organization dedicated to strengthening gender and cultural diversity in Canadian media, both on screen and behind the scenes'.

Women in View, led by Rina Fraticelli, produces an annual statistical report and late in 2014 it released the *St John's Summit on Women in Media Communique*, signed by representatives of a wide range of organisations like some Canadian women's film festivals, the Association of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists, Canadian Unions for Equality on Screen and three branches of Women in Film & Television. The communique stated that–

- 1) Government policy should explicitly promote the principle that the equitable employment of women and racialized minorities in audiovisual products benefits both genders and all cultural groups, and is vital to achieving genuine diversity.
- 2) Government policy and regulations, at all levels, should explicitly seek to promote the equitable employment of women at all levels, behind the camera and onscreen, in the creation of Canadian media works.
- 3) Public spending should demonstrably benefit Canadian women as well as Canadian men.
- 4) Public investment in media industries should be tied to a requirement to

demonstrate gender balance.

5) Since federal and provincial funding agencies routinely offer a range of incentives in the form of tax-credits, streamed funding and other benefits to advance specific goals or production strategies, similar incentives to accelerate gender and racial parity behind the camera and on screen should be implemented.

6) Recording, and annual public reporting on, gender and racial representation should become a part of applications and delivery requirements for public funding.

7) Government media funding agencies and production institutions should report annually to the Canadian public on gender and racial representation in government spending, including tax incentives.

Since then, Women in View and its allies have kept working. In February, it announced the **2x More** strategy, in partnership with the Directors Guild of Canada and CBC, Bell Media, the Canadian Media Production Association, Creative BC and Telefilm. That's impressive and the advisory group is impressive, too.

2 x More is not a deficit-based initiative. It's not a training programme and it's not about internships or mentorships. It aims to create 'the momentum and resources that will help propel trained, experienced, talented women directors into paid professional employment in episodic television'. And to do this within two years. The initiative **was piloted** with Sinking Ship Entertainment, which hired three women directors for its live-action kids series *Odd Squad*. Each shadowed a director for three of the four episodes in a four-episode shooting block, then directed a fourth episode herself.



Director Mars Horodyski, who participated in a pilot version of the 2xMore program, on set at *Sinking Ship Entertainment*.

Bingo, those women now have a credit to help them move forward to more work. The initiative will now expand to other companies.