



Evaluation Report on  
International Outreach Activities  
(festivals)

National Film Board

April 2014

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## 1. Introduction and context

### Introduction

**This evaluation report focuses on the international outreach activities of the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), examined from the point of view of the main activity of this component – the participation of the institution and its productions in the international festival circuit.**

The NFB is a departmental organization established under the *National Film Act*. It is listed in Schedule I.1 of the *Financial Administration Act* and reports to Parliament through the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages.

As set forth in its enabling statute, the NFB is a public producer and distributor of audiovisual works. It seeks to reflect the great variety of Canadian perspectives and stories via audiovisual media and to make these works accessible to Canadians and the world. For 75 years, the NFB has documented the history of Canada for Canadian and international audiences.

The NFB fulfills its role as a distributor by ensuring that audiences in Canada and around the world have access to its Canadian content and are able to interact with it on all available media platforms. It carries out this responsibility through the following activities:

- conserving and preserving its heritage film collection
- distributing and marketing its works in consumer markets
- distributing and promoting its works in Canadian and international educational markets and institutional markets
- promoting its works to the national and international audiovisual industry

Like all federal departments and agencies, the NFB has drawn up its *Program Alignment Architecture* (PAA), an inventory of all its programs and activities, described in terms of the logical relationships among them and the strategic outcomes to which they contribute. The PAA is the document that serves as a basis for developing the Management Resources and Results Structure (MRRS).

In pursuing its mandate, the NFB aims to achieve the following strategic outcome: “Canadian stories and perspectives are reflected in audiovisual media and accessible to Canadians and the world.”

The table below illustrates the NFB programs and sub-programs that contribute to this strategic outcome.

**The NFB Program Alignment Architecture (PAA)**



**The National and International Industry Outreach sub-program**

In its 2011–2016 five-year evaluation plan, the NFB committed to evaluate the *National and International Industry Outreach* sub-program of its *Accessibility and Audience Engagement* program in 2013–2014.

The approach taken in this evaluation is to focus on the main activity of this component: participation of the institution and its productions in the international festival circuit.

Canadian festivals provide a platform to reach the NFB’s primary audience, the Canadian public, and to maintain its role as a leading producer and distributor of animated films, documentaries and interactive works. Festivals are also wonderful places to launch certain films nationally.

Foreign festivals help raise the NFB’s profile and enhance its corporate image, while furthering its mandate to promote Canadian culture abroad. They also help position films in the international market. The more prestigious ones offer the chance of winning significant industry awards, which can have an impact on sales.

Every year, NFB productions are screened at some 250 major festivals around the world. New films are submitted to prestigious festivals such as Sundance, Berlin, Cannes, Annecy, Venice, Toronto (Toronto International Film Festival and Hot Docs) and Amsterdam.

The NFB has created over 13,000 productions and won over 5,000 awards, including 9 Canadian Screen Awards, 8 Webbys, 12 Oscars and more than 90 Genies. The NFB's acclaimed content can be accessed online at NFB.ca or by downloading its apps for smartphones, tablets and connected TV.

## Stakeholders and governance structure

### *Roles and responsibilities at the NFB*

During the period covered by this evaluation, senior management of the **Accessibility and Digital Enterprises (ADE)** division had the main responsibility for outreach activities, both in Canada and overseas.

This responsibility is shared with the executive producers and senior management of the English and French Programs – the two language-based divisions in charge of production at the NFB – and the Commissioner. They each play a key role in representing the NFB at festivals, markets and international events and are also responsible for promoting NFB programming and developing strategic alliances for future partnerships (e.g. co-production agreements) or initiatives.

### *Within the ADE division*

**Institutional Partnerships** management<sup>1</sup> coordinates the NFB's participation in international festivals, expositions and conferences. It is responsible for all outreach development or non-commercial distribution activities (e.g. connecting to Canadians and maximizing the NFB's reach abroad). Staff showcase and promote NFB programming via various domestic and international outreach initiatives. Domestic initiatives include community/commercial screenings, partnerships with Canadian libraries, etc.

### National and International Industry Outreach sub-program

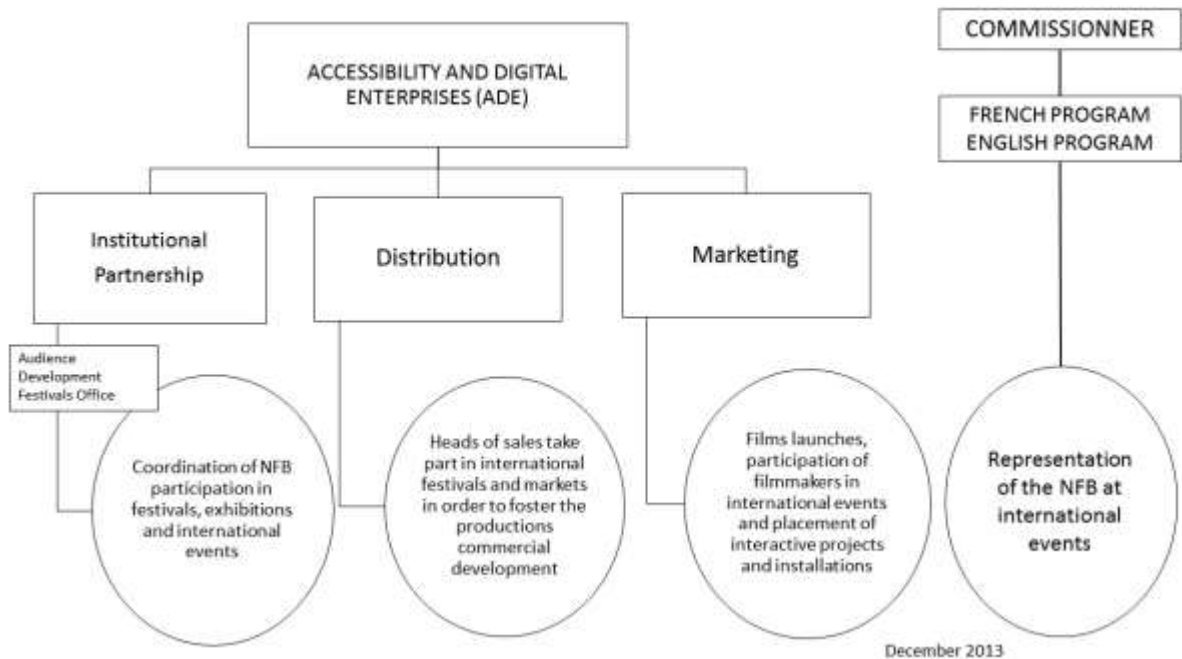
Through this sub-program, the NFB enables the Canadian and international audiovisual industry to participate in the promotion of Canadian culture and heritage via private- and public-sector partnerships. These partnerships facilitate the exchange of knowledge and talent, foster close collaboration with industry at the major festivals and markets (e.g. MIP, Banff, Hot Docs, Sunny Side of the Doc) through panel discussions, Q&As, competitions, awards, etc. Activities also include marketing and promotion of NFB audiovisual works and thematic compilations at the major national and international festivals/markets and other significant events (e.g. Oscar nominations, world expositions, Quebec City's 400th anniversary), as well as marketing and promotion of retrospectives of the NFB's works and notable filmmakers (e.g. Norman McLaren, Pierre Perrault, Alanis Obomsawin).

<sup>1</sup> In February 2014, this was transferred to the new Marketing and Communications division so as to favour a comprehensive and consistent approach to NFB promotion efforts. Within the ADE division, a new Distribution sector was created and given responsibility for audience development and festivals.

Management of **Distribution** and the **Audience Development** sector are responsible for commercial distribution of the NFB’s works. Heads of sales (domestic and foreign) participate in international festivals and business-development-oriented markets in order to meet potential buyers (for sales, pre-sales or potential agreements for the theatrical, institutional, TV and home consumer markets).

**Marketing** management also plays a role with regard to launches and filmmaker participation in international events, as well as placement of interactive projects and installations (branding).

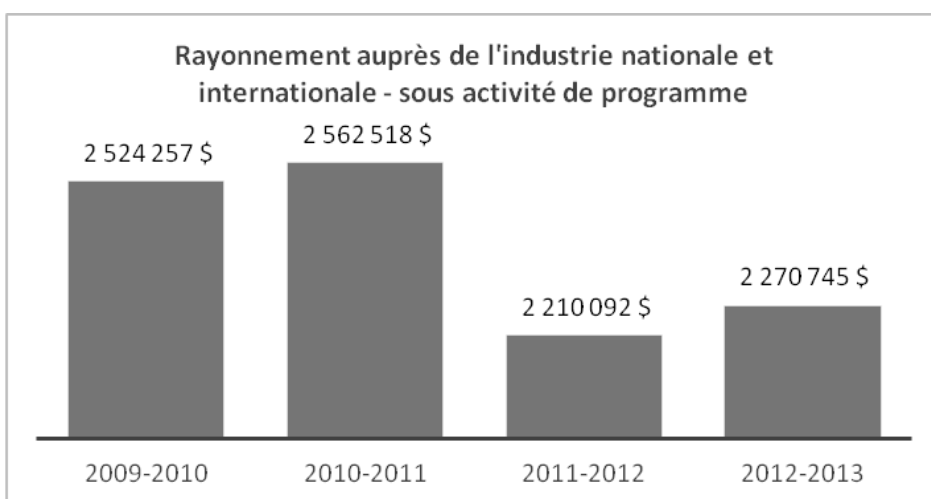
*Organization chart – roles and responsibilities*



## Costs associated with the activities

The following table shows the resources allocated by the NFB to the National and International Industry Outreach sub-program.

Expenditures on outreach activities have been grouped within the same budget since 2009–2010, which saw the implementation of a major corporate restructuring as set forth in the NFB’s five-year strategic plan. Nine branches were merged into five, and responsibility for outreach activities was brought together within the new Accessibility and Digital Enterprises (ADE) division. The reduction in the 2011–2012 budget is due to the closure of the Paris office.



## Evaluation context

### *Objective and scope*

The overall objective of this evaluation is to contribute to the continuing improvement of the NFB’s international outreach activities by offering findings and recommendations regarding its participation in international festivals and events.

There are two reasons why NFB management decided to limit the scope of the evaluation to the NFB’s participation in international festivals. First, because this activity is central to the institution’s international outreach objectives and accounts for the bulk of its resources. Second, because this activity takes place within a global environment that has radically changed over the past decade<sup>2</sup>, making it especially urgent to examine the NFB’s strategies in this regard.

<sup>2</sup> See the Environmental Scan section of this report for an analysis of the context.

The evaluation therefore consisted in collecting and analyzing data in order to answer the following questions:

1. What are the NFB's current practices with regard to film festival participation?
2. What are the best practices in the industry in this regard?
3. What practices should be adopted by the NFB to improve the performance of this activity?

The period evaluated spans five years, from fiscal 2008–2009 to fiscal 2012–2013.

#### *Key clients and stakeholders of the evaluation*

This evaluation is intended first and foremost for NFB employees and managers, who will find useful analyses, advice and recommendations in it for aligning the NFB's strategies, objectives and actions for participating in international film festivals.

The conclusions on the relevance and performance of this activity will also enlighten political decision-makers and Canadians regarding its *raison d'être* and the need for this activity in fulfilling the NFB's mission.

Lastly, in reading this report, the other stakeholders in the audiovisual industry, as well as decision-makers in the cultural sector, can learn about the practices employed at the NFB.

## Methodology, questions and limitations

### *Methodology*

This evaluation report is based on a review of the relevant documents, primarily: a study commissioned by ADE entitled *Film Festival Distribution Study* (Sean Farnel, July 2013), departmental performance reports (DPRs) and an internal evaluation entitled *Festival Policy* (Madeleine Bélisle, Head, Festivals Office, 2010).

To conduct his study, Sean Farnel, a strategist and project manager specializing in festival and digital distribution who was Hot Docs' Director of Programming for six years, conducted interviews with a broad cross-section of internal and external stakeholders—some 30 managers in the different ADE sectors and the NFB's English and French Programs, as well as representatives of six film institutions<sup>3</sup>.

This document review was rounded out with interviews with key informants responsible for international outreach activities.

### *Issues and limitations*

As stated in the Treasury Board of Canada's [Directive on the Evaluation Function](#), evaluations can be conducted to serve to a variety of purposes and, consequently, can be designed to answer a multiplicity of questions through many different approaches, subject to the requirement to address the five core issues set forth in the directive. These issues are grouped

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<sup>3</sup> Danish Film Institute, Swedish Film Institute, Slovak Film Institute, Swiss Films, Sundance Film Festival (Artist Services), The Film Collaborative



into two components: program relevance and performance (effectiveness, efficiency and economy).

Since festival participation is not a stand-alone activity but a sub-program of the Accessibility and Audience Engagement program, this evaluation addresses the core issues but concentrates on Issue #4, *Achievement of Expected Outcomes*:

*Assessment of progress toward expected outcomes (incl. immediate, intermediate and ultimate outcomes) with reference to performance targets and program reach and program design, including the linkage and contribution of outputs to outcomes<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> For the detailed Evaluation Framework, see Appendix II.

## Environmental scan

THE FESTIVAL CIRCUIT: FROM A SHOWCASE FOR CINEMA AS AN ART FORM TO A DISTRIBUTION AND EXHIBITION PLATFORM

**Beginning with Venice in the 1930s, and followed by Cannes, Berlin, Karlovy-Vary and others in post-war Europe, film festivals were originally founded to promote national cinemas to the international market and to recognize and award excellence.**

**With the addition of discovery showcases (Berlin’s Forum section and the Directors’ Fortnight at Cannes), the festivals helped to establish cinema as a new art form. In time, they came to occupy a strategic position that made the festival circuit an international venue for film culture and commerce.**

**Now, many film festivals have evolved into large, integrated institutions that not only include markets but also their own training and funding programs and distribution and exhibition platforms (often online).**

The international film festival circuit has experienced explosive growth over the past decade. To grasp the extent of this phenomenon, just visit [withoutabox.com](http://withoutabox.com), an international festival submission portal that promises access to more than 5,000 festivals around the world, or check out British producer Stephen Follows’ 2013 study on international film festivals<sup>5</sup>, in which he says he found almost 3,000 festivals that were active in the past two years, three-quarters of which were created in the last decade.

This boom is due to a variety of factors, including the disappearance of repertory cinemas and cities’ growing interest in organizing cultural events to enhance tourism. But most importantly, the advent of the Internet and digital technologies, contributing to the democratization of film production and distribution, has resulted in a sharp increase in the number of productions seeking a promotion, marketing and distribution platform and in the number of events seeking to meet that need.

The role of festivals is changing. “Given that film festivals appear to be thriving, at least in terms of audience growth, while other sectors, namely distribution and commercial exhibition, flounder, there does seem to be a growing consensus that film festivals could provide a spine to whatever new distribution/exhibition model(s) emerge in the coming years.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Follows, Stephen. “Film Festivals Pt 1: The Truths Behind Film Festivals.” August 19, 2013. Retrieved March 4, 2014. <[www.stephenfollows.com/film-festivals-pt1-the-truths-behind-film-festivals/](http://www.stephenfollows.com/film-festivals-pt1-the-truths-behind-film-festivals/)>.

<sup>6</sup> Farnel, Sean. “Can the Fest Circuit Empower Your Film's Distribution Strategy?” *Festival Express*. <[www.documentary.org/content/festival-express-can-fest-circuit-empower-your-films-distribution-strategy](http://www.documentary.org/content/festival-express-can-fest-circuit-empower-your-films-distribution-strategy)>.

The major festivals have become their own brands, and their goals can supersede, or even conflict with, those of the participants. After all, festivals, like other cultural institutions, have to ensure their existence in a highly competitive environment. Producers, filmmakers and institutions must therefore manoeuvre carefully in order to derive the maximum benefit from their participation.

The film festival circuit still offers a plethora of useful tools for promoting and marketing productions, but in this new 3,000-festival universe (with the largest festivals presenting a slate of over 200 films) one should not overrate the impact of participation.

The notion of “film festival strategy” is a relatively new, but necessary, consideration for any producer, distributor or institution that wants to learn to navigate this complex culture of festivals and get the most out of it.

*[Film festivals are] increasingly more important because at this point, it's not necessarily the case that films reap most of their financial reward from theatrical distribution. In fact, theatrical distribution often counts for very little of a film's earnings because films now make most of their money through cable distribution packages and DVDs. I think it's interesting that film festivals have grown in significance as theatrical distribution has been unseated as the most important factor in a film's success. It's a whole different way to circulate a film, and there are indeed certain films that circulate exclusively on the film festival circuit, never enjoying theatrical distribution in certain parts of the world or all parts of the world.*

**“What is the importance of film festivals?”** Q&A with Cinema Studies professor Corinn Columpar, University of Toronto, *Research and Innovation*, 2011.

[www.research.utoronto.ca/what-is-the-importance-of-film-festivals/](http://www.research.utoronto.ca/what-is-the-importance-of-film-festivals/)

## 2. Main findings

### Performance evaluation – achievement of expected outcomes

Participating in and presenting its productions at Canadian and foreign festivals helps raise the NFB's profile and strengthens its position as a leading producer and distributor of unique and innovative audiovisual works.

Over the past five years, the NFB has averaged a thousand submissions a year to international festivals, for over a hundred productions.

Participating in the international festival circuit requires the involvement of numerous people, both inside and outside the NFB, and is subject to a set of variables that includes the high expectations of the producers and directors, the premiere politics of the major festivals, the selection competitiveness at the international level, the colossal unknowns at play in this type of event and the elusive tangible benefits.

#### *Results*

The NFB's festival participation activities require a complex effort to reconcile the special, and sometimes divergent, needs and goals of the different stakeholders concerned. The internal stakeholders are the English and French Programs, the Documentary, Animation and Interactive sectors, Marketing, Sales, the Festivals Office, Partnerships and Audience Development. The external stakeholders are the NFB's partners as well as filmmakers, producers and distributors.

From interviews conducted at the NFB and a document review, the following points were identified as the primary considerations that have informed these activities over the years.

#### Relevance and need for the activity and federal government priorities

As indicated in the Introduction and Context section of this report, the NFB's mission is to **reflect Canada, and matters of interest to Canadians, to Canada and the rest of the world through creating and distributing innovative and distinctive audiovisual works based on Canadian points of view and values.**

To reach international audiences, the NFB has to engage in activities to distribute and promote its works. Film festivals are the best window to international markets.

The NFB is part of the portfolio of the Department of Canadian Heritage. The NFB's international outreach activities are directly linked to the department's expected strategic outcome: **"Canadian artistic expression and cultural content are created and accessible at home and abroad."**

<[www.pch.gc.ca/eng/1268233827985](http://www.pch.gc.ca/eng/1268233827985)>

The **objectives** were basically to:

- showcase the NFB as a world leader in creation and innovation in film and emerging new platforms
- position productions for distribution
- reach the NFB's primary audience
- support filmmakers in their careers

The main **strategies** were to:

- determine priority festivals
- determine appropriate festival launches and placement for individual productions
- align the festival plan with marketing, sales and distribution goals
- ensure effective, transparent collaboration with rights holders (creators, producers and distributors) from the outset of negotiations
- support the participation of creators and producers when it will contribute significantly to achieving the objectives
- provide marketing and media relations support for the participation of films when it will contribute significantly to achieving the objectives

The interviews with NFB staff revealed a consensus regarding the following **principles**:

- festivals can be effective platforms to generate notoriety, buzz, prestige, profile, etc.
- festivals offer pedigree for both the brand and individual creators
- festivals provide opportunities for professional networking and development for all NFB staff
- festivals offer a direct, though limited, connection to audiences, curators, creators, buyers, media, etc.

The interviews also pointed up the following key **challenges**:

- a sense that the NFB is too reactive in its approach to film festivals
- a strong belief that festivals may be overrated, and are certainly not an appropriate outlet for the bulk of NFB production
- a sense that filmmaker and producer expectations can undermine and frustrate strategies and actions
- a sense that there is no clear policy or strategy for film festivals
- a perception that there is a lack of alignment between festival, marketing, sales and distribution strategies and goals
- a belief that there is an opportunity for innovation in how the NFB thinks and acts regarding film festivals

## Actual results

Each year the NFB files a Departmental Performance Report (DPR) in order to provide an overview of the institution's achievements during the past year. Each strategic priority is linked to the achievement of measurable results by means of performance indicators. In the DPR for the 2012–2013 fiscal year, the NFB set forth the following expectations and indicators for the National and International Industry Outreach sub-program:

2012–2013 Performance Results <sup>7</sup>			
Expected Results	Performance Indicators	Targets	Actual Results
The NFB's expertise is recognized at a broad range of major festivals and industry events in Canada and abroad	Number of events (such as panels, presentations, round tables) with NFB participation as experts	35	28
Participants present	Number of participants at these events	Baseline set at 35,000	Not available Estimated at 35,000
NFB films selected in festivals	Number of NFB films selected in Canadian and international festivals	400	602

In 2012–2013, the NFB far exceeded its target for the number of films selected by Canadian and international festivals.

This indicator was examined in greater detail in the *Film Festival Distribution Study*. In the following tables, the number of productions submitted over the past five years was broken down by origin of the festival (Canadian or international) and by genre (animation, documentary, interactive and fiction/experimental) and was further broken down by the number of productions that were selected and that won awards.

<sup>7</sup> Source: 2012–2013 Departmental Performance Report.  
<[onf-nfb.gc.ca/en/about-the-nfb/publications/institutional-publications/departamental-performance-report-2012-2013/#a\\_4\\_3\\_4](http://onf-nfb.gc.ca/en/about-the-nfb/publications/institutional-publications/departamental-performance-report-2012-2013/#a_4_3_4)>.

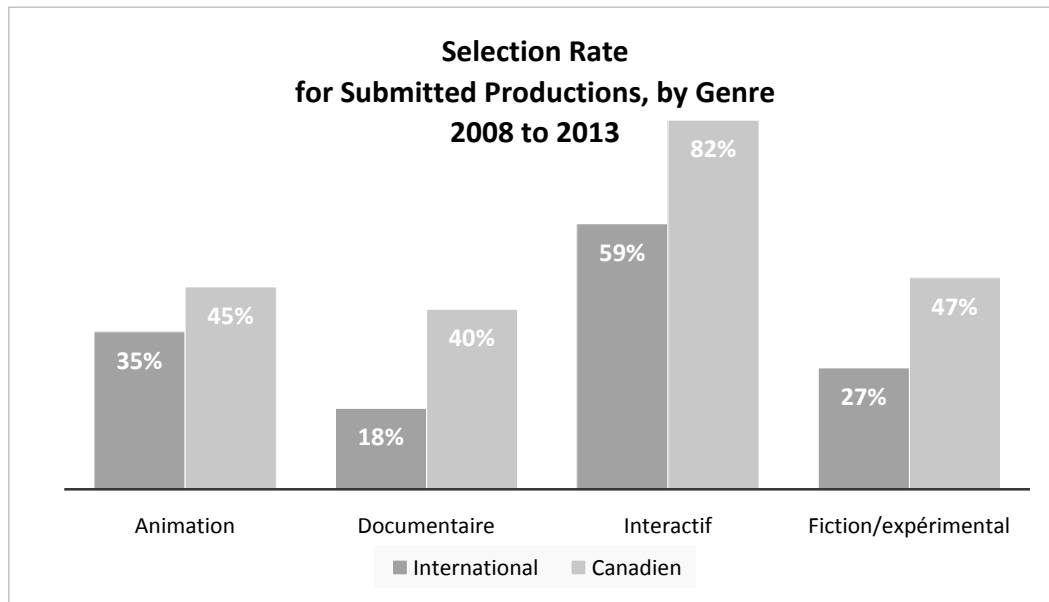
**Table 1 – Canadian festivals**

	Animation			Documentary			Interactive			Fiction & Experimental			Total		
	Submitted	Selected	Awarded	Submitted	Selected	Awarded	Submitted	Selected	Awarded	Submitted	Selected	Awarded	Submitted	Selected	Awarded
2008–09	283	124	20	491	196	40	0	0	0	39	11	0	813	331	60
2009–10	304	143	9	343	139	30	1	1	1	8	7	0	656	290	40
2010–11	272	137	18	224	86	14	16	17	13	19	9	0	531	249	45
2011–12	288	117	19	153	73	13	38	33	13	24	15	0	503	238	45
2012–13	302	136	23	239	84	21	44	30	16	13	4	0	598	254	60
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,449</b>	<b>657</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>1,450</b>	<b>578</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3,101</b>	<b>1,362</b>	<b>250</b>

**Table 2 – International festivals**

	Animation			Documentary			Interactive			Fiction & Experimental			Total		
	Submitted	Selected	Awarded	Submitted	Selected	Prime	Submitted	Selected	Awarded	Submitted	Selected	Awarded	Submitted	Selected	Awarded
2008–09	589	236	41	654	137	12	0	0	0	50	14	0	1293	387	53
2009–10	481	182	17	454	88	6	2	1	1	5	4	1	942	275	25
2010–11	565	195	25	334	64	3	12	9	3	22	14	1	933	282	32
2011–12	563	206	35	316	43	5	35	21	11	28	8	2	942	278	53
2012–13	806	244	43	491	62	10	43	23	9	52	5	1	1392	334	63
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,004</b>	<b>1,063</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>2,249</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5,502</b>	<b>1,556</b>	<b>226</b>

It can be seen that the results achieved vary greatly according to genre. If one calculates the ratio of films selected versus the number submitted to festivals, the performance rate, by genre, for the five years studied, is as follows:



In considering the festival circuit according to production genre, one can draw a number of conclusions concerning the realities of this environment and the performance of certain strategies employed by the NFB.

#### *Animation*

The Animation festival circuit is very well defined and contained, as are its key events (Annecy, Zagreb, Hiroshima and the Ottawa International Animation Festival). What's less clear is the relationship between presenting Animation productions at these festivals and reaching a broader public audience for these works. These events seem to primarily offer a way of deepening the NFB's brand within the Animation industry, encouraging professional development/networking and securing eligibility for Oscar nominations (which, of course, could be considered a marketing strategy). Also, all festivals are becoming more lenient with regard to availability of short works online in conjunction with festival screenings (allowing opportunities to align the transactional streaming day/date with festival play).

This noted, internally there seems to be much more clarity, in comparison to the other NFB program strands, with regard to what constitutes a successful festival run for Animation works. Productions such as *Bydlo* and *Sunday* were frequently mentioned as benchmarks of success.

However, issues of the volume of production against internal resources and the efficacy of the broad festival circuit are of concern.

#### *Interactive*

Assessing the benefits of festival exposure for Interactive productions is a work in progress, as this is a new genre. The high success rate of its Interactive productions undoubtedly reflects the NFB's pioneering role in this area.



Clearly, festival exposure has solidified the NFB brand as an Interactive innovator and leader, while establishing the NFB's Interactive producers and creators as "name brands" in themselves within the festival/conference circuit.

However, this period of emergence of both the NFB's approach to Interactive production and that of film festivals is now coalescing. For the most part, film festivals have not yet successfully integrated Interactive programs within their public programs, and the NFB is not yet able to clearly determine their impact. For instance, it's unclear how/if festivals can drive traffic to NFB Interactive sites, nor is there any evidence that, contrary to Animation and Documentary, these events contribute to distribution and sales objectives.

On the market side, festivals have endeavoured, with some success, to include Interactive within their funding and professional development programs. IDFA<sup>8</sup> remains the leader in this area, within the documentary speciality circuit. SXSW<sup>9</sup>, Sundance and Tribeca are also interested in this content, and the 2013 Interactive events presented there were generally considered a success.

Festival exposure on the market side has, anecdotally, driven some partnerships (for example, with *The New York Times* – see sidebar) and enhanced staff expertise.

Since Interactive intersects with the film, Web and technology worlds, there are many events to choose from, and the next step in developing an event strategy for Interactive must involve clearly mapping and assessing the event landscape, sharing accrued intelligence across the NFB and developing strategies to fully leverage event exposure, especially on the audience development side.

### *A Short History of the Highrise*

Drawing on *The New York Times's* extraordinary visual archives, director Katerina Cizek looks at residential skyscrapers in her latest interactive documentary, *A Short History of the Highrise*.

Produced by the National Film Board of Canada and *The New York Times*, *A Short History of the Highrise* explores the 2,500-year global history of vertical living and issues of social equality in an increasingly urbanized world.

The interactive documentary had its world premiere at the New York Film Festival in September 2013.

[www.highrise.nfb.ca/tag/new-york-times/](http://www.highrise.nfb.ca/tag/new-york-times/)

<sup>8</sup> International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam

<sup>9</sup> South by Southwest, Austin, Texas

*Documentary*

Documentary is the genre that has the lowest selection rate and most clearly shows the weaknesses in the NFB's approach to festival participation.

This is mostly due to the fact that the film festival circuit, including the documentary speciality festival circuit, is broad and messy. It's also somewhat of an old platform in need of its own innovations. There are too many festivals, promising too much opportunity within a diminishing marketplace. For filmmakers, a film festival invitation is an honour. However, for a distributor, it is a business proposition. The difficulty is in balancing the work and play of film festival culture.

Festivals are fun, they're a celebration, but there has to be a business imperative which drives the agenda. When things have gone awry in the internal implementation of various festival strategies for an NFB documentary, it seems to be because there were competing agendas, along with a lack of both decisiveness and communication.

Most importantly, festivals are "important" for only a modest percentage of NFB documentary productions. Most NFB documentaries would be better served by other self-directed launch strategies.

### 3. Efficiency and economy

The NFB has innovated in many ways over the past decade in its film festival participation, as in its other activities.

However, the NFB's approach to film festivals is based on assumptions, strategies and tactics which are no longer consistently applicable in achieving organization-wide goals. While the overwhelming growth and development of the international film festival circuit can make it a very effective platform for exhibiting and promoting NFB productions, festivals are only one option among many, given the concurrent development of communication, distribution and exhibition tools available to producers.

At a time when productions have more and more ways to reach their audiences, wherever they are – and with the NFB positioning itself as a pioneer of these new tools – it is counterproductive for it to continue to allocate significant resources to festivals, especially since it is hard to clearly determine the tangible returns on this investment.

Lastly, it would have been too time-consuming, within the scope of this evaluation, to compile the financial and human resources devoted to festival participation. This is symptomatic of an activity whose resources are too dispersed across the institution to be used efficiently.

### 4. Main recommendations

A number of recommendations were made by the consultant Sean Farnel in his *Film Festival Distribution Study*.

These recommendations are based on best practices and focus on two necessities: that of establishing a cohesive strategy among the various sectors concerned within the NFB and of defining a policy and guidelines that clearly establish the parameters for festival participation for NFB productions.

#### Film festival strategy

Tightly integrate and align film festival strategies with distribution, marketing and communications strategies, including:

- implementing more aggressive critical paths for making decisions regarding festival and distribution strategies for NFB productions
- ensuring that all live event presentations, including festivals, are directly related to both mission and brand goals, not to mention revenue goals regarding transactional distribution. In other words, have something to market when committing to a live event.
- radically minimizing the “windows” between festival/live event/theatrical launches and commercial digital launches (and building these into sales agreements with external distributors), prioritizing the most profitable distribution “windows”

## Parameters for NFB festival participation

### *Priorities and objectives*

- Create a Festival Policy Guide which clearly communicates, to all internal and external stakeholders, the NFB's priorities and goals when engaging productions in the international film festival circuit. This would include a list of priority festivals, limiting the number of festivals to which NFB productions would be submitted.

### *Guidelines*

Develop and implement such measures as:

- a transparent selection process for deciding which NFB productions are prioritized for its internal festival distribution services (Create internal limits to the number of productions annually receiving festival services.)
- a policy stating that the NFB does not pay festival submission fees in order to reduce expenses and resources consumed by the film festival submission process
- a directive stating that every aspect of a festival presentation must be actively negotiated, ideally BEFORE the NFB confirms its participation. This would include expectations around which expenses, such as guest travel, are to be covered by the festival. (An idea may be to create a questionnaire that is issued to festivals upon the invitation of an NFB production.)
- expense guidelines, and an application process, which clearly communicate NFB policy and terms of support, including allocation limits, for all expenses incurred in presenting an NFB production at a film festival (including filmmaker travel, as well as targeted exhibition, marketing and communications support)
- a set of outcomes and expectations, which includes professional networking and development opportunities, for festival-, market- and conference-related travel by NFB staff
- a simple, efficient reporting mechanism for disseminating experiences and intelligence generated by event travel

A final recommendation is that the NFB's B2B streaming site be adapted to allow festival programmers to preview NFB productions online, whether or not they are being considered for festival submission, in order to radically reduce staff time and costs in managing DVD shipments.

## 5. Management response

NFB management has studied the recommendations contained in Sean Farnel's report. These recommendations were used as the basis for developing the strategy and guidelines that constitute the NFB's Festival Policy, which was adopted on April 24, 2014 by the Management Committee.

Other measures and action plans being implemented, or about to be, include:

- Draw up the list of priority festivals.
- Launch the B2B site for festivals. It will be open to all festivals and enable them to preview all NFB productions.
- Better target which productions will be submitted to festivals and which festivals should be selected.
- Redefine relations with the major festivals: negotiate submission fees, scheduling, travel expenses, etc.
- Aim to reduce festival-related travel expenses by 50%.

## 6. Conclusion

The NFB's participation in the international festival circuit is still relevant and closely linked to its objectives of raising the NFB's profile and strengthening its position as a leading producer and distributor of unique and innovative audiovisual works.

However, the NFB is not obligated to submit the hundreds of audiovisual works it produces each year to the thousands of film festivals that take place around the world. This makes neither financial nor strategic sense.

NFB participation in film festivals must be handled more strategically. It is imperative to take the institution's financial situation into account and align its strategic objectives as much as possible with its distribution and marketing plan. This means carefully selecting which NFB productions will be submitted to festivals, reducing the number of festivals serviced and adopting strategies that will maximize the positioning and career of the productions submitted so as to get the most out of participation in the international film festival circuit.

The strategy adopted must also allow for more decisive, innovative and robust launch strategies, instead of festival participation, for the majority of NFB productions.

## APPENDIX I – STRATEGY STATEMENTS AND BEST PRACTICES

Issue	Strategy Statement	Best Practices
<b>Distribution</b>	<p><b>Think and act like a distributor</b> NFB festival participation should be addressed as an element in the marketing strategy for the productions.</p>	<p><b>Sony Pictures Classics:</b> As a general rule, this distributor acquires at Sundance and Cannes and launches at Telluride and TIFF. Every aspect of the launch of their films at the fall festivals is made to serve decisive communications and marketing strategies (whether it's the beginning of an Oscar campaign or a fall commercial release).</p>
<b>Selection</b>	<p><b>Be focused</b> Only a limited number of NFB productions can meaningfully leverage the film festival circuit</p>	<p>Most European film institutions have either informal or formal selection processes. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Swedish Film Institute:</b> The Festival manager ultimately decides (with informal input from colleagues) which 20 or so documentary productions (from about 100) will be promoted to festivals.</li> <li>• <b>Danish Film Institute:</b> A formal committee selects which productions will be promoted to festivals (less than 50% of works considered).</li> <li>• <b>Swiss Films:</b> Produces an annual catalogue of productions to be promoted to festivals (includes about 50% of qualified production).</li> </ul>
<b>Efficiency</b>	<p><b>Be efficient</b> Film festival participation and presentations can involve significant expenses, with immeasurable or negligible returns for most productions. It is therefore important to be highly selective in the choice of film festivals.</p>	<p>An increasing trend in the industry: <b>screening fees</b>. A festival like Sundance pays \$13,500 to \$72,000 for a premiere<sup>10</sup>.</p> <p><b>Submission fees:</b> None of the 10 film institutions interviewed paid festival submission fees (with some exceptions). Rarely does a commercial film distributor fill out the required forms, let alone pay a fee.</p> <p>All of the European institutions interviewed draw up a <b>list of priority festivals</b> (40-80 according to the interests of the institution).</p> <p>It would be expected that many international festivals will make significant contributions to filmmaker travel. Some have published guidelines regarding terms and limits for support offered to invited productions (filmmaker travel, marketing and publicity expenses).</p>

<sup>10</sup> "How Much Can Your Film Make From Festival Screening Fees?" *Filmmaker Magazine*, December 2013. <[www.filmmakermagazine.com/82690-how-much-can-your-film-make-from-festival-screening-fees/#.Ux3J2\\_I5PDU](http://www.filmmakermagazine.com/82690-how-much-can-your-film-make-from-festival-screening-fees/#.Ux3J2_I5PDU)>.

Issue	Strategy Statement	Best Practices
<b>Negotiations</b>	<p><b>Be vigilant</b> It is an honour for a production to be selected by a film festival, but it is also a business proposition.</p>	<p>Commercial distributors negotiate, with authority, for guest travel, venue, scheduling, program placement, etc. Rarely do they fully commit to a festival premiere without confirming program placement (will it be in competition, is it a gala, a special presentation? etc.). Scheduling and venue are just as important, and require a knowledge of the idiosyncrasies of individual events. These negotiations should take place PRIOR to confirming a festival invitation.</p>
<b>Launches</b>	<p>Be decisive There are very few film festivals—fewer than five—for which waiting for a decision is truly worth sacrificing a thoughtful, decisive and well-executed commercial launch plan.</p>	<p>Be decisive about which productions can tangibly benefit from a festival presentation. While festivals are Plan A for a select number of productions, have another Plan A for those productions which are better served by other kinds of live event launches. <b>NFB – <i>Une dernière chance/Last Chance</i></b> Rather than a festival launch, the NFB organized promotional events in Montreal and Toronto, quickly followed by a free streaming preview that received 17 thousand views over one weekend. The subsequent DTO/VOD release generated better than average revenues.</p>



## APPENDIX II - EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Evaluation Issues and Questions	Performance Indicators	Methodology
<b>RELEVANCE</b>		
<p><b>1. <i>Continued Need</i></b> Is there a continued need for the NFB's participation in international festivals and events?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- NFB mission/mandate</li> <li>- NFB's Strategic Plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Document review</li> <li>- Key-informant interviews</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. <i>Alignment with Government Priorities</i></b> How consistent are the international outreach activities with (i) the Government of Canada's current priorities and (ii) the NFB's strategic objectives?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Federal government priorities</li> <li>- NFB's Strategic Plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Document review</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. <i>Alignment with Federal Roles and Responsibilities</i></b> To what extent does the federal government have a role to play in the international outreach activities?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Alignment with existing federal legislation, policies and programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Document review</li> </ul>
<b>PERFORMANCE</b>		
<p><b>4. <i>Achievement of Expected Outcomes</i></b> What is the festival selection rate for productions submitted by the NFB?</p>	<p>NFB Performance Indicators and Performance Management Framework 2011-12 &amp; 2007-08, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- number of events (e.g. panels, presentations, round tables) in which the NFB took part as an expert participant</li> <li>- number of NFB films selected by international festivals</li> <li>- number of participants at these events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internal databases; departmental performance reports (DPRs)</li> <li>- Document review</li> <li>- Key-informant interviews — <i>Film Festival Distribution Study</i> (Sean Farnel, July 2013) and previous evaluations</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. <i>Demonstration of Efficiency And Economy</i></b> What are the allocated resources? Are they being used efficiently?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organization chart – roles and responsibilities</li> <li>- Costs associated with the activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Document review</li> <li>- Key-informant interviews</li> </ul>