

Hot Docs 2017–2021

Strategic Plan

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Hot Docs' 2017–2021 strategic plan builds on the organization's 24 years of success as a champion for documentary films and filmmakers. It capitalizes on many of the most successful elements that our stakeholders have told us they appreciate about Hot Docs: a trusted reputation with audiences and filmmakers, a sense of community and accessibility, providing meaningful new opportunities to filmmakers, and a team deeply committed to our mission.

Our new plan was developed through the collaborative input and insights of our core stakeholders: audiences, filmmakers, educators, patrons, government and corporate partners, foundations, the national and international documentary industry, and Hot Docs' volunteers, staff and Board. Their input was essential in guiding how we shape the next five years.

These stakeholders share the belief that documentary is a vibrant medium for capturing and enriching the critical discourses of our times. With them, we look forward to further progressing documentary as a preeminent form for cultural exploration, civic engagement and creative discovery.

MISSION

Hot Docs' mission is to advance and present the art of documentary, and to facilitate production, financing and distribution opportunities for documentary makers.

VISION

Hot Docs' vision is to be the leading documentary organization in the world; by providing outstanding programs, events and professional opportunities, the organization will set a recognized example for excellence.

BELIEFS AND VALUES

The BELIEFS that define our work:

- Creativity: creative excellence in documentaries should be vigorously supported, and should represent all regions, cultural backgrounds, identities, perspectives and voices.
- Community: documentaries help build stronger communities by sparking dialogue and sharing perspectives.
- Change: documentaries can help educate, influence and inspire action and help to foster empathy.

The VALUES that guide our work:

- Accessibility: our programs and events are open to the widest possible audiences, with service and support that is always easy-to-use, friendly and inclusive.
- Accountability: our teams are responsive and respectful to our stakeholders' interests, and are highly professional in all of our activities.
- Aspirational: we are ambitious and entrepreneurial in our enterprise, and we embrace opportunities to experiment with new ideas.

WHAT WE'RE BUILDING ON: SUPPORTING DOCUMENTARIES AT ALL STAGES

Hot Docs supports documentaries at all stages, from their earliest creative conception to their distribution to audiences. We will build upon our core programs, seeking to reinforce their interconnectivity in ways that magnify their impact. This includes:

CREATION: our creative labs, professional development events, market activities, and grantmaking programs provide critical support to filmmakers as they develop their films.

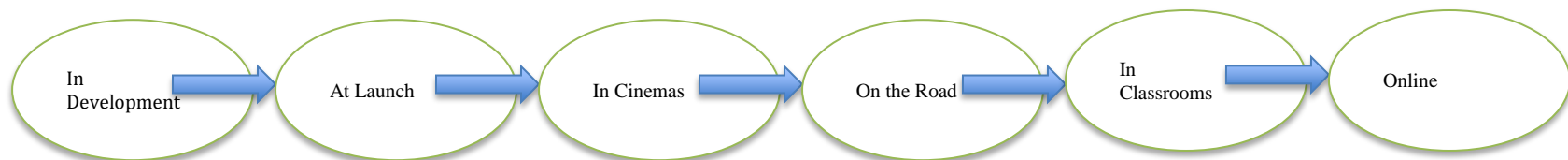
RELEASE: our flagship Festival launches hundreds of premieres to massive audiences, and brings together filmmakers from around the globe.

THEATRICAL: Hot Docs Ted Rogers Cinema provides tent-pole wide-release screenings and deep community engagement through compelling series and events.

ON THE ROAD: our touring programs and partnerships help bring documentaries to new audiences near and far.

IN CLASSROOMS: our educational programs support teachers and bring students new perspectives and rich, immersive learning experiences through documentaries.

ONLINE: our digital partnerships help connect audiences with the highest-quality documentaries no matter where they live.



EMPOWERING DISCOVERY & CURIOSITY

GOAL # 1

Hot Docs will be a destination for discovery and curiosity, bringing outstanding documentaries to larger and more diverse audiences.

WHY

The incredible growth of non-fiction media is creating tremendous choice; more than ever the public is looking for authoritative voices that can help them connect with the most creative, inspiring and relevant documentaries.

HOW

Hot Docs will continue to focus on high-quality programming across all of its activities and will invest in advancing and innovating how we attract and diversify our audiences.

KEY PRIORITIES

- Build on the Festival's strategies to reach diverse audiences and develop initiatives that further integrate Toronto's communities with our programming.
- Attract new visitors to the Cinema, in order to grow overall attendance and membership.
- Enhance the Festival's most distinctive elements (premieres, Q&As) and innovate the customer experience.
- Expand the reach of Hot Docs educational and touring programs beyond Ontario, and develop the program using new delivery technologies.
- Streamline Hot Docs' brand offerings across all of its activities to help audiences more easily discover content.
- Creatively showcase documentary's intersection with new technologies, from interactive and VR to podcasts and beyond.

CHAMPIONING CREATIVITY

GOAL # 2

Hot Docs will be a trusted and indispensable champion for filmmakers, helping them advance their artistic visions with even more creative, financial and professional development support.

WHY

The landscape for producing documentaries is as challenging as ever, and independent filmmakers are more likely to succeed in achieving excellence when they have robust support.

HOW

Hot Docs will focus on sustaining the quality of its core industry programs, while adding structure and enhancing the benefits of its year-round training and funding activities.

KEY PRIORITIES

- Ensure top quality projects are supported through existing funds (Hot Docs Blue Ice Fund, Hot Docs Ted Rogers Fund, and CrossCurrents Doc Fund) and seek funding partners for new production funds and training programs, with a focus on new strands that support diverse filmmakers at home and internationally.
- Develop programs that introduce new funders into the documentary ecosystem, including philanthropists, the general public and cause-based foundations.
- Relaunch the Doc Shop with a state-of-the-art new interface and backend, making it a sector-leading tool for programmers and buyers to discover documentaries.
- Help filmmakers reach larger audiences on VOD and digital platforms by growing the Hot Docs Collection and collaborate with partners to ensure robust promotion.

AMPLIFY ENGAGEMENT

GOAL # 3

Hot Docs will amplify the power of documentaries by creating unique events and programs that foster civic engagement, cultural dialogue and learning.

WHY

Documentary storytelling is a powerful platform for fostering empathy and sparking action, and audiences and filmmakers are seeking deeper opportunities to explore their social, cultural and historical context.

HOW

Hot Docs will seek to launch special initiatives and pilot new programs that offer a wider scope of perspectives on the stories that documentaries tell.

KEY PRIORITIES

- Develop plans that use Hot Docs 25th anniversary in 2018 to celebrate the stories, filmmakers, and audiences that champion the genre.
- Explore Canadian identity through a special film-commissioning project that connects documentary to Canada's 150th celebrations.
- Expand events that bring audiences behind-the-scenes into the creative process, including a public pitch event at the Cinema.
- Increase the number of festival screenings with Q&As and find new avenues for audience engagement with filmmakers.
- Seek opportunities to grow Hot Docs' touring programs, focusing on bringing documentaries to new communities.
- Develop new educational program streams for students, such as camps and documentary clubs, that build on the success of Docs For Schools and reaches wider constituencies.

GROWING CAPACITY

GOAL # 4

Hot Docs will grow its organizational capacity and be recognized as a leader within the not-for-profit and cultural sectors.

WHY

Investing in strong and empowered teams will foster the environment and structure necessary to successfully grow and sustain the organization.

HOW

Hot Docs will invest in and diversify its talent, reward innovation and excellence, and develop new resources that support professional development.

KEY PRIORITIES

- Develop a Board-approved diversity and equity plan that seeks for the organization to be responsive and inclusive in ensuring its team (staff, Board, volunteers) represents the communities and artists it seeks to serve.
- Invest in key resources, especially technology and information management systems and support, that allow teams to professionally and successfully achieve objectives.
- Further advance the organization's in-house financial planning capacity and management expertise.
- Create new onboarding resources, ensuring new team members are set up for success and internalize the organization's values and objectives.
- Advance the organization's professional and cultural development activities, rewarding success and providing competitive benefits to staff and volunteers.

ENABLING SUSTAINABILITY

GOAL # 5

Building on successful achievements to date, Hot Docs will further strengthen the sustainability of its financial and funding models by prioritizing reliable, long-term funding streams.

WHY

Successfully advancing Hot Docs' mission and vision requires resources that are aligned with the scope of the organization's ambitious goals.

HOW

Hot Docs will further diversify its income streams, developing new and improved earned revenue strategies and growing the support it receives from funders, sponsors and patrons.

KEY PRIORITIES

- Actively develop new earned revenue programs, recognizing their important role in long-term sustainability.
- Increase charitable giving and membership through building a compelling case for support, and cultivating loyalty and engagement from patrons.
- Attract major new corporate partners and funders, especially from new sectors, aligned with Hot Docs' objectives and beliefs.
- At the Cinema, further develop select high-net revenue generating events and series beyond documentaries, targeting earned revenue and sponsorship opportunities.
- Be responsive to public sector priorities in arts and culture, and pursue funding opportunities that align with Hot Docs' mission, vision and goals.
- Grow our circle of individual supporters, focusing on growth of the Founders Circle and other engagement programs and ramping up an individual giving campaign.

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

In 2016, Hot Docs received an unprecedented \$5-million gift from the Rogers Foundation, allowing Hot Docs to purchase what was renamed the Hot Docs Ted Rogers Cinema, which the organization had successfully administered, operated and programmed for the previous four years in partnership with the generous Blue Ice Group.

This game-changing development provides new opportunities for the organization to significantly enhance its ability to showcase and celebrate the art of documentary. Owning a home is a huge step in the growth of any cultural organization, and we are excited that this important cultural destination will remain dedicated to documentary film well into the future.

As we advance this strategic plan, the organization will actively build on feasibility studies and the ongoing planning that has already been undertaken to improve, enhance and expand the Cinema's capacity to serve audiences and filmmakers.

With over 5,000 members and growing, and established expertise in the year-round programming that engages audiences, the Hot Docs Ted Rogers Cinema is poised for major growth. Hot Docs will actively advance its potential to be a centre that celebrates documentary and provides a platform for learning, training and exploration. As part of this process, we look forward to engaging our community to help us envision a space that will connect audiences with more documentary films and be a centre for documentary excellence.

OUTCOMES AND BENCHMARKS

To measure the success of our plan, Hot Docs will regularly evaluate its ongoing results against the key outlined priorities, and use a broad array of quantitative and qualitative performance indicators. Major outcomes will include the following:

- Reach aggregate audiences of over 600,000 per year through all of the organization's activities.
- Increase the Cinema's overall membership base by 25% over five years.
- Increase in the Cinema's self-generated income through screenings and special events by 50% over five years.
- Achieve festival audience growth of 10–15%, driven by increasing existing capacity usage by 20% and growing diverse audience participation by 30%.
- Grow overall Q&A and live-event participation at the festival to 90% of all scheduled screening slots.
- Expand Docs For Schools to reach 200,000 students a year and over 500 schools nationally through an additional 100,000 students per year.
- Host or partner on 100+ screenings outside of Toronto, reaching communities coast-to-coast.
- Raise an additional \$1–2M for the Hot Docs portfolio administering funds supporting independent filmmakers.
- Expand the Hot Docs Collection to 250 titles across 10 digital and VOD services in multiple territories.
- Grow Hot Docs Founders Circle to 300 individuals and families.
- Target growth in the consolidated operational budget to \$9.5M annually, and grow restricted reserve funds to \$950k.