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HOT DOCS BOLSTERS EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM TO CHAMPION THE FUTURE OF CANADIAN DOCUMENTARY, DRIVE GROWTH AND FINANCIAL RESILIENCE

DIANA SANCHEZ ELEVATED TO PRESIDENT; MARA GOURD-MERCADO TO BECOME
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

JULIE BRISTOW AND AARON ZEGHERS TO SERVE AS HOT DOCS' BOARD OF DIRECTORS
CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR, RESPECTIVELY

Toronto, ON – **Diana Sanchez** has been elevated to **President** of **Hot Docs**, effective immediately. Alongside Hot Docs' Board of Directors, Sanchez has restructured the executive leadership team to better accomplish the organization's long-term strategic goals and growth. Accordingly, Sanchez has appointed **Mara Gourd-Mercado** (currently at CPH:DOX) to the position of **Executive Director, Hot Docs**. Gourd-Mercado begins her new role on **October 19, 2026**, and will report to Sanchez.

In her new role as President, Sanchez will concentrate on the organization's strategic direction — artistic oversight, government relations, business development, and major financial partnerships — while safeguarding Hot Docs' long-term health and stability. Gourd-Mercado will lead day-to-day operations and fiscal management of the organization and the festival, including festival and industry fundraising, with an additional focus on industry programming, a revitalized Hot Docs Forum, and ties with the Francophone doc community in Canada and abroad.

"On behalf of the board, I want to congratulate Diana on this new role and on all the phenomenal work she has done to stabilize and elevate Hot Docs," said **Julie Bristow, Chair, Hot Docs**. "As we look to the future, this enhanced executive leadership team enables Diana to focus on what matters most: taking Hot Docs to the next level while ensuring it is financially secure, resilient, and nimble. I'm also absolutely delighted to welcome Mara to Hot Docs. Her experience and skills blend seamlessly with Diana's, and I know they will make a remarkable team."

"I couldn't be happier that Mara is coming back to Canada for this role," said **Diana Sanchez, Hot Docs' President**. "She's a highly respected documentary thought leader with extensive festival experience and deep connections in the documentary ecosystem worldwide. This, combined with her fundraising and executive-level strategic planning skills, perfectly aligns with what we're aiming to accomplish at this stage of Hot Docs' evolution."

"Documentary has always been about bearing witness to the world as it is, and imagining what it could be — and after building that work across the globe, I want to bring that perspective home to Canada, one of the richest places in the world for documentary storytelling," said **Mara Gourd-Mercado**. "I'm elated to join Hot Docs at such a pivotal moment, to build the kind of stability that lets bold storytelling

flourish, help strengthen the industry programming and Forum, and deepen ties with French-speaking communities. Every spring, our industry gathers in Toronto because of what this festival makes possible — and part of my job is to make sure that keeps growing, for the filmmakers here today and the ones who aren't in the room yet.”

With a new board structure now in place, Julie Bristow and Aaron Zeghers’ roles on Hot Docs’ Board of Directors have been solidified. Bristow is now the Chair, while Zeghers is the Vice Chair. **Hot Docs’ Board of Directors** comprises **Chair Julie Bristow** (Catalyst); **Vice-Chair Aaron Zeghers** (The Infinite Image); **Doug Allison** (The Northpine Foundation); **Caroline Harvey** (Senior Communications Strategist); **Merit Jensen-Carr** (Merit Motion Pictures); **Lea Marin** (Netflix Canada); **Habiba Nosheen** (Akelo Media); **Noah Segal** (Elevation Pictures); and **Marc Serpa Francoeur** (Lost Time Media / Better Together Films).

Hot Docs has also restructured its cinema operations to better align resources with future goals. As a result of these changes, a small number of theatre roles have been consolidated or eliminated. Hot Docs extends its sincere gratitude to those impacted for their hard work and service. This restructuring does not affect the upcoming schedule or the quality of Hot Docs’ patron services.

Hot Docs has made several financial and community impact gains recently, including: a programming partnership with Soulpepper Theatre this fall/winter; expanded offerings for the upcoming [2026-27 Doc Soup season](#); \$121K in Hot Docs-Slaight Family Fund funding for Canadian projects; a 14% increase in 2026 Festival single ticket revenue and a 3% increase in Festival attendance; and the successful return of the Hot Docs Forum.

MARA GOURD-MERCADO BIO

Mara Gourd-Mercado is an Argentinean-Canadian arts administrator, who combines deep operational expertise with a sustained commitment to people and culture. With more than 20 years’ experience in the screen industry, she has managed both large and small permanent and seasonal teams and seven-figure budgets. Gourd-Mercado is currently the Head of Industry & Training at CPH:DOX where she oversees the CPH:FORUM, the CPH:LAB, the INTER:ACTIVE exhibition, and all industry activities. Prior to that she served as the Executive Director of the Montreal International Documentary Festival (RIDM) and was the Executive Director of the Academy of Canadian Cinema & Television’s Quebec division. She has been a jury member, a moderator, a speaker and reader for organisations such as Cannes Docs, Visions du Réel, DOK.Fest Munich, Sunny Side of the Doc, SANFIC, Festival internacional de cine de Guadalajara, Chicken & Egg, Catapult Film Fund. Gourd-Mercado holds a BA in Visual and Media Arts from the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), and is fluent in English, French, and Spanish. Gourd-Mercado currently resides in Copenhagen but is returning to Canada in 2026 and will make her permanent home in Toronto.

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About Hot Docs

Hot Docs, North America's leading documentary festival, conference and market, is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to advancing and celebrating the art of documentary and to creating production opportunities for documentary filmmakers. Hot Docs presents its **34th Hot Docs Festival April 23 to May 2, 2022**, in Toronto. Since its inception in 1993, Hot Docs has supported the Canadian and international industry with professional development programs and production fund portfolio, including the Hot Docs Ted Rogers Fund, CrossCurrents Doc Funds, Hot Docs-Slaight Family Fund, Hot Docs-Blue Ice Docs Fund and Hot Docs Partners, and valuable professional development programs, including Doc Ignite and Hot Docs Incubator.