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**HOT DOCS FORUM RETURNS WITH 15 PROJECTS FROM NINE COUNTRIES AS PART OF 2026 FESTIVAL CONFERENCE AND MARKET PROGRAMMING, ADDITIONAL 16 PROJECTS TO TAKE PART IN DEAL MAKER**

MORE FOCUSED BOUTIQUE APPROACH DESIGNED TO FACILITATE MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS; HOT DOCS FORUM WILL ALSO SEE THE RETURN OF WILD CARD SLOT

**Toronto, March 18, 2026** – Hot Docs is pleased to announce the return of the **Hot Docs Forum** as part of this year’s Festival Conference and Market, taking place during the 2026 Hot Docs Festival, April 23 to May 3, 2026. A total of 15 projects from nine countries will participate in the pitching event, which will take place over two days, April 28 and 29, onstage at Hot Docs Cinema. An additional Wild Card pitch will be selected live. The Hot Docs Forum is generously supported by Presenting Forum Partner the Canada Media Fund.

The Hot Docs Forum is a live event where pre-selected projects are pitched to a room of industry representatives such as broadcaster commissioning and acquisitions executives, distributors, sales agents, film festival programmers, foundations, associations, funds, charities, agencies, brands, platforms, interactive executives and other production partners. The Selected projects will also participate in **Hot Docs Deal Maker**, a curated one-on-one pitch meeting program, which includes an additional 16 projects from eight countries. The full list of Hot Docs Forum projects and Deal Maker projects appears below.

This year will bring a more focused, tailored boutique approach to Hot Docs Forum and Deal Maker, designed to facilitate meaningful connections that build relationships and open doors to collaboration, funding and distribution opportunities for these 31 projects.

“The Forum has long been central to how Hot Docs supports documentary filmmakers while providing a space for the industry to convene, and bringing it back was a priority for us,” said Diana Sanchez, Executive Director, Hot Docs. “This year, we’ve taken a more curated approach, with a focused group of projects and an emphasis on meaningful connections. The goal is to create an environment where conversations can translate into real opportunities for projects to move forward.”

Three cash prizes will be awarded to top Forum pitch teams: the prestigious **first look** prize, financed by members of Hot Docs **first look**, a curated access program for philanthropic supporters of and investors in documentary film; the **CMF-Hot Docs Forum Canadian Pitch Prize**, presented in partnership with the Canada Media Fund, a \$10,000 CAD cash prize awarded to the best Canadian pitch and intended to go towards the production and completion of the winning project, and the **Hot Docs–Chicken & Egg Special Pitch Forum Prize**, presented in partnership with Chicken & Egg, a \$5,000 CAD cash prize awarded to a top Forum pitch team representing an outstanding documentary project directed by a woman or gender-expansive filmmaker.

At the Forum, participating teams will take up to 10 minutes to pitch their doc project to the world's leading commissioning editors, investors, and industry experts. Participating decision makers confirmed to date include 7th Art Releasing, 90th Parallel Productions Ltd, Al Jazeera Documentary Channel, American Documentary | POV, ARTE France, Outlook Films, Bell Fibe TV1, Bell Fund, Bird Street Productions, Blue Ant Media, Blue Ice Docs / KinoSmith, Bogeydom Licensing, Bombozila, Cargo Film & Releasing, CBC, CBC News, Chicken & Egg Films, Cineflix Productions, Cinema Politica, Co Creation Studio at MIT Open Documentary Lab, Doc Society, Docubox, EBS Korea/EIDF, ESPN Films, EST N8, Eyesteelfilm, FILMOPTION, Films We Like, First Run Features, IMAX Corporation, Impact Partners, Indigenous Screen Office, International Documentary Association, Juice Worldwide, Les Films du 3 Mars (F3M), Lightdox, Limonero Films, Minderoo Foundation, Monoduo Films, Naked Edge Films, National Film Board, National Geographic, NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation), Obscured Pictures, Obscured Releasing, Ouat Media, Points North Institute, RIDM, RTBF, Scorpion TV, Sideways Film, Split Screen, Submarine Entertainment, Sundance Institute, Syndicado., The Redford Center, The Whickers, TVF International, TVO, Women Make Movies, ZDF-ARTE.

The following projects will be presented at the 2026 Hot Docs Forum:

### 2026 Hot Docs Forum Projects

#### **ExCoded**

Director: Javier Lovera

Producers: Hannah Donegan (Producer), Marc Serpa Francoeur (Producer), Ina Fichman (Executive Producer), Algorithmic Justice League (Executive Producer)

Production companies: Airplane Mode Productions Inc. (Canada), Better Together Films Inc., Intuitive Pictures Productions Inc. (Canada)

Amidst the steady creep of facial recognition technology into policing, immigration and even schools, people harmed by AI—aka the “excoded”—are taking on a system that’s rapidly rewriting the rules of public life.

#### **Hiding in My Cells**

Director: Ali Naqi

Producers: Christina Saliba (Producer), Ali Naqi (Producer), Ariel Nasr (Executive Producer), Sergio Kirby (Executive Producer)

Production companies: Misfit Films (Canada), Spicy Alii Inc. (Canada)

In rural Belgaum, India, a sanctuary shelters HIV-positive children abandoned by their families. Led by Kasturi, also HIV positive, it defies stigma and teaches India’s most vulnerable the meaning of family.

#### **The Instrument**

Director: Zac Manuel

Producers: Darcy McKinnon (Producer), Holly Stanton (Executive Producer), Carlos Lopez Estrada (Executive Producer)

Production companies: Gusto Moving Pictures (USA), Antigravity Academy (USA)

As a celebrated jazz singer confronts the decline of his voice, his filmmaker son attempts to resurrect their late patriarch through artificial intelligence—unfolding a story that bridges the birth of recorded sound, the erasure of Black voices, and the precarious frontier of technological resurrection.

### **Izhichigewin**

Director: Darlene Naponse, Sage Petahtegoose

Producers: Darlene Naponse (Producer), Jennifer Weiss (Producer)

Production companies: Baswewe Films Inc. (Canada)

An elevated intimate connection, *Izhichigewin* is recalling, creating and imagining a life well lived through Anishnawbek Traditional Knowledge & Food Sustainability.

### **Mid Wif**

Director: Mia Harvey

Producers: Natasha Dack Ojumu (Producer), Mia Harvey (Producer)

Production companies: Tigerlily Productions (UK), Past Life Films (UK)

In Atlanta, two Black midwives work underground to provide safe homebirths. *Mid Wif* explores the rich legacy of Black midwifery in the US, whilst following an urgent political fight to legalize a profession rooted in ancestral care.

### **North Korea's Joy Division**

Director: Noa Im

Producers: Ann Shin (Producer / Executive Producer), Sally Blake (Producer / Executive Producer), Erica Leendertse (Producer)

Production companies: Fathom Film Group Ltd. (Canada), Films á Cinq (France)

Four women break decades of silence to expose North Korea's secret pleasure squad, "Joy Division," revealing how sex and performance were weaponized to serve three generations of dictatorship.

### **The Ruin of the Earth**

Director: Yannick Jamey

Producers: Ophelia Spinosa (Producer)

Production companies: Stella Maris Films (Canada)

On a remote island off the coast of Ireland, 80-year-old Peadar Mór is the last inhabitant to hold on to a forgotten worldview on the edge of extinction.

**Tallawah**

Director: Laurie Townshend

Producers: Amar Lohana (Producer), Habiba Nosheen (Executive Producer)

Production companies: Akelo Media Corp (Canada)

On a weathered court in Kingston, Jamaica, three young women chase improbable hoop dreams, daring to reimagine their futures in women's basketball and beyond.

**The Thermocene**

Director: Giorgio Ferrero

Producers: Giovanni Pompili (Lead Producer), Rodolfo Mongitore (Producer)

Production companies: Kino Produzioni s.r.l. (Italy), Mybosswas s.r.l. (Italy)

While visionary minds imagine new ways of inhabiting the planet, two composers, isolated in the Alps, compose a symphony recording human traces in the air, revealing that zero impact doesn't exist.

**Unlocked**

Director: Luke Terrell

Producers: Lauren "Lo" Heimer (Producer), Alex Schmitter (Producer), Annie Marr (Producer), Alexander Mok (Consulting Producer), Lilly Wachowski (Executive Producer), Lawrence Mattis (Executive Producer), John Leguizamo (Executive Producer)

Production companies: Restless Productions (USA), Hello Friend Media (USA), Anarchists United (USA), Kartemquin Films (USA)

Best friends in Missouri's death row prison build a tech company on the inside. When they're unexpectedly released after 25 years, they find that freedom could destabilize everything they've built.

**Vuka (Rise Up)**

Director: Matthew Robinson

Producers: Rehad Desai (Lead Producer), Shannon Walsh (Executive Producer), Matthew Robinson (Producer)

Production companies: Trevendy Films (Pty) Ltd (South Africa), Uhuru Productions (Pty) Ltd (South Africa)

Amidst the challenges of township life on the outskirts of Cape Town, an inspirational choir conductor uses the language of music to help students find purpose and harmony in an unforgiving world.

**Widows of Living Husbands**

Director: Diego Kelmann, Jussara Costa do Macuco (co-director)

Producers: Diego Kelmann (Lead Producer), Clelia Bessa (Lead Producer), Renata Lobo (Executive Producer), Jussara Costa do Macuco (Associate Producer)

Production companies: UZ Produções, Eventos & Criação Ltda, UZ Z CORP (USA), Raccord Produções Artísticas e Cinematográficas Ltda (Brazil), Aquilombei Produções (Brazil)

In Brazil's rural Jequitinhonha Valley, parents spend 11 months working far away, leaving a single month with their family. Generations of forced migration have etched lasting scars into the community.

**With Time**

Director: Brit Fryer and Noah Schamus

Producers: Jesse Miller (Producer), Jess Devaney (Executive Producer), Carrie Lozano (Executive Producer), Jun Stinson Yamagishi (Supervising Producer), Jess Zeidman (Executive Producer)

Production companies: In Time Productions LLC (Producer, USA), Multitude Films (USA), ITVS (USA), Alina Pictures (USA)

*With Time* follows a group of trans people over 50 as they gather in a storytelling workshop, bringing to life moments of euphoria, connection and mutual recognition.

**What You Remember**

Director: Pauline Blanchet

Producers: Ljubomir Stefanov (Producer), Pauline Blanchet (Producer)

Production companies: Apolo Creative Solutions (North Macedonia), Aral Sea Productions LTD. (UK)

How do we remember the past when our history has been faked? One man's idea to rebuild a capital erased collective memory, casting a dark shadow over Skopje's future identity.

**Untitled Mexican Project**

Title: [Undisclosed]

Director: [Undisclosed]

Producers: Santiago Esteinou (Producer)

Production companies: [Undisclosed]

Following the eruption of violence in her community's sacred forest, a filmmaker returns home to honour the victims and document her people's struggle to protect the land that sustains and defines them.

**2026 Hot Docs Deal Maker Projects**

Hot Docs Deal Maker is a specially curated one-on-one pitch meeting program for producers seeking financing and distribution from the international marketplace. Deal Maker pitches will take place April 28 and April 29. Deal Maker is generously supported by Telefilm Canada, Ontario Creates and the City of Toronto.

The following projects will participate in Deal Maker 2026:

**Be Free**

Director: Silvana Costa  
Producers: Federico Schiavi (Producer)  
Production companies: Nacne srl (Italy)

**Before the Sun Sets**

Director: [Undisclosed]  
Producers: Javiera Quintana (Lead Producer), Stuart Henderson (Executive Producer), Fabrice Esteve (Producer)  
Production companies: 90th Parallel Productions Ltd (Canada), Yuzu Productions (France)

**Feminist City**

Director: Alison Duke  
Producers: Alison Duke (Producer / Executive Producer), Ngardy Conteh George (Producer / Executive Producer), Nina Beveridge (Development Producer), Sally Browning (Producer), Keaton Stewart (Producer), Monica O'Brien (Executive Producer)  
Production companies: Oya Media Group Inc. (Canada), Emerald Films Pty Ltd. (Australia), Stewart Brothers Pty Ltd

**The Food Barons**

Director: Sara Manisera  
Producers: Fabio Saitto (Producer), Marine Vaillant (Co-Producer)  
Production companies: Point Nemo SRL (Italy), Special Touch Studios SAS (France)

**New Spring – Nûbihar**

Director: Benedetta Argentieri  
Producers: Eleonora Savi (Executive producer), Domenico Procacci (Producer), Laura Paolucci (Producer), Benedetta Argentieri (Producer)  
Production companies: Fandango SPA (Italy), Possibile Film (Italy)

**Never Move Backwards**

Director: Alexandra Tahereh Kaucher

Producers: Michael LaPointe (Producer), James Jenkins (Producer), Jonathan Olson (Producer)

Production companies: Never Move Backwards Film LLC (USA), Hiss.tv, LLC. (USA), Pointe Media, LLC. (USA), Yesteryear, Inc. (USA)

**NOW: No Ordinary World**

Co-directors: Anna Kuelken, Patrick Lundeen

Producers: Patrick Lundeen (Producer), Edmon Rotea (Executive Producer)

Production companies: Twisted Timber Productions (Canada)

**Pure Madness**

Director: Inès Arsi

Producers: Sarra Ben Hassen (Producer), Kaouthar Hadidi (Producer)

Production companies: Instinct Bleu (Tunisia), 3ème Genre Production (France)

**The Scientist's Guide**

Director: Caitlin Durlak, Sean Stiller, Emilie Martel

Producers: Bryn Hughes (Producer), Nicholas de Pencier (Producer), Kevin Feiyang Li (Showrunner / Producer), Jonathan Qu (Showrunner / Producer)

Production companies: Curiosity Films (Canada), Frequent Flyer Films (Canada)

**The Simulation / La Simulation**

Director: Justine Harbonnier

Producers: Line Sander Egede (Producer), Carine Chichkowsky (Co-Producer)

Production companies: TAK films Inc. (Canada), Survivance (France)

**Ski the Wong Way**

Director: Danny Berish

Producers: Leah Mallen (Executive Producer / Producer), Ryan Mah (Producer), Joanna Wong (Producer)

Production companies: Black Rhino Creative Inc. (Canada)

**Solas**

Director: Lila Penagos

Producers: Lila Penagos (Producer), Juliana Khalifé (Creative Producer)

Production companies: Killa Producciones S.A.S (Ecuador), Lunar producción y comunicación audiovisual S.A.S (Ecuador)

**Sons of the River**

Director: Katyayani Kumar

Producers: Eric Cook (Producer), Sanjay Sharma (Executive Producer), Milan Chakraborty (Executive Producer)

Production companies: Shastra Productions (USA), Eric B Cook Productions LLC (USA), Marginal MediaWorks, Inc. (USA)

**Sugo!**

Director: Alfio Foti

Producers: Emilija Davidovic (Producer)

Production companies: Faustalgia Pictures (Canada)

**Up in the Clouds, Down in the Valley**

Director: Carmen Pollard

Producers: Jenny Rustemeyer (Producer), Carmen Pollard (Producer), Sarah Jane Flynn (Executive Producer for Knowledge Network)

Production companies: Diving Bell Films Inc. (Canada), Silvapark Films Inc. (Canada)

**Weathering Architect**

Director: Sunhyeon Kwon

Producers: Duhyun Ko (Producer)

Production companies: Keumyoil Film (South Korea)

The Hot Docs Forum wishes to thank Presenting Forum Partner the Canada Media Fund. The Hot Docs Industry Conference receives additional support from Telefilm Canada, Ontario Creates, Blue Ice Docs, Indigenous Screen Office, City of Toronto, Rogers, Gardiner Roberts LLP, Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television, Canadian Media Producers Association, CBC, Creative BC, DGC National, DGC Ontario, DOC, El Mocambo, Front Row Insurance Brokers, Italian Trade Commission, Paramount +, Picture NL, Story Money Impact, National Film Board of Canada, Netflix, TELUS originals, TVO, and Vistek.

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Hot Docs ([hotdocs.ca](http://hotdocs.ca)) is North America's leading documentary festival, conference and market. A not-for-profit organization dedicated to advancing and celebrating the art of documentary and to creating production opportunities for documentary filmmakers, Hot Docs will present its 33<sup>rd</sup> annual edition in Toronto from April 23 to May 3, 2026. Hot Docs will also mount a dynamic series of knowledge sessions, networking opportunities and market programs for documentary practitioners and industry delegates, including the renowned Hot Docs Forum and Hot Docs Deal Maker. Since its inception in 1993, Hot Docs has supported the Canadian and international industry with professional development programs, production fund portfolio, and valuable professional development programs. The organization fosters education through documentaries with its popular free program Docs For Schools. Hot Docs also operates the Hot Docs Ted Rogers Cinema, a century-old landmark located in Toronto's Annex neighbourhood and the world's first and largest documentary cinema.

Starting Tuesday, March 24, Festival ticket package holders, including Doc Soup subscribers, can use their ticket packages, and Hot Docs Members can purchase single tickets. Starting Tuesday, March 31, single tickets will be available to the public. Tickets and ticket packages can be purchased and/or redeemed [online](http://www.hotdocs.ca) at [www.hotdocs.ca](http://www.hotdocs.ca) or in person at Hot Docs Ted Rogers Cinema Box Office, located at 506 Bloor Street West (hours vary daily in accordance with cinema screenings). Single tickets are \$22 (\$20 member) for regular screenings, and \$27 (\$24 member) for Big Ideas screenings. A Festival 12-Pack is \$228 and a Festival 20-Pack is \$340 (\$216 and \$320 members). Hot Docs offers free tickets for regular screenings before 4:00 p.m. to patrons 60+ and students with valid photo I.D., available in-person on the day of the screening, subject to availability.

Hot Docs is proud to include Rogers as its Founding Partner and Telefilm Canada, the Government of Ontario, and the Canada Media Fund as its Major Supporters.

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