

INDUSTRY SCIENCE & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CANADA

***RESPONDING TO THE NEW ENVIRONMENT
CALL FOR COMMENTS***

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submission from

DOCTalks Festival & Symposium Inc.
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I) PURPOSE OF DOCTalks SUBMISSION

In 2000, the *Survivor* reality TV show first debuted on American and Canadian television networks. Since then there has been a proliferation of reality TV and lifestyle shows that have eliminated and/or displaced knowledge-based documentary programming on public and private television networks and specialty channels in Canada and across the world.

Some of the negative effects of this glut of reality TV (competition shows) and lifestyle (cooking & home renovation shows) programming in Canada and globally has been:

- 1) a general “dumbing down” of audiences (citizens) due to a loss of accessible “knowledge-based” documentary media content that is socially and cultural relevant to people living in local communities;
- 2) a significant rise in the quantity of “fake news” and loss of “knowledge-based” documentary content that has resulted in the “extreme polarization” of socio-political economic issues;
- 3) the erosion of democratic principles and consensus based decision making due to an unbalanced, confused, uniformed and disengaged citizenry; and
- 4) an increase in market driven “global entertainment” programming and a decline in community relevant “local educational” content.

DOCTalks was created to help understand and address these democracy, citizenship, social, cultural, educational, political and economic issues. The following is provided to help explain what DOCTalks does and plans to do over the next few years, in the hopes it will lead to new policies.

II) DOCTalks PRIMARY ACTIVITIES

DOCTalks Festival & Symposium Inc. is a not-for-profit organization, provincially incorporated in New Brunswick. Since 2013, DOCTalks has fostered and facilitated the creation and mobilization of knowledge-based documentary media for social, cultural, educational and economic purposes.

To that end, DOCTalks seeks to promote cross-sector collaborations between - documentary filmmakers, academic researchers, charities, governments, foundations, broadcasters - to produce, fund and distribute knowledge-based documentary media content. This includes showcasing projects that involve knowledge mobilization and the dissemination of applied research using various documentary media content.

Creating knowledge-based documentary media content involves multiple cross-sector partners collaborating with each other to produce, fund and mobilize feature & short documentary films, podcasts, immersive learning technologies (virtual & augmented reality, apps, games), interactive websites and social media activities. The underlying narratives of knowledge-based documentary media are – *real stories, about real people, living in real communities, addressing real issues, and creating real change in society.*

DOCTalks has four primary activities to promote cross-sector collaborations that will produce, fund and mobilize knowledge-based documentary media. These are as follows:

i) DOCTalks Festival & Symposium

The DOCTalks Festival and Symposium is an event that has been presented in Fredericton, NB in 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2018. Festival and symposium programming features documentary film screenings & talks, panel discussions, workshops, and presentations on a variety of issues related to producing, funding and mobilizing knowledge-based documentary media projects using cross sector collaborations between documentary filmmakers, academic researchers, charities, governments, foundations, and broadcasters. The festival and symposium is also an opportunity for participants to meet, socialize and network in a collegial and relaxed environment.

DOCTalks web link: <https://www.doctalks.ca/festival-symposium/>

ii) Open Your Eyes

The Open Your Eyes (OYE) initiative is a community based, cross-sector collaboration to mobilize knowledge-based documentary media content. The concept is simple and was initially developed in 2015-16, then piloted in 2017, and is now going into its third year in Fredericton, NB. Here's how the OYE initiative works.

Are you with a non-profit organization that would like to raise community awareness about a social issue in your community? If so, the OPEN YOUR EYES initiative can provide access to cash and in-kind promotional support to produce a short documentary film to tell your story (approx. 5 minutes in length), and an online cross-sector promotional campaign to share your story with others in the community. This includes preparing a detailed promotional campaign to heighten awareness of your organization, social issue and the short documentary film to be produced. The promotional campaign will include social media & email promotion, film launch & community screenings, media releases & interviews, and other related activities (i.e. special events, fundraising). One organization and social issue is selected annually.

To-date, the OYE recipients in Fredericton have included the Community Action Group on Homelessness that addressed the issue of "housing first" for homeless persons in 2017; and the Hayes Urban Teaching Farm that addressed the issue of local "food security" in 2018. The 2019 OYEF recipient will be announced in February.

The OYE initiative has been designed to incorporate applied research (understanding a social issue) with a community impact service activity (knowledge mobilization using a short film & online promotional campaign). The OYE model is an easy way to establish cross-sector partnerships in a community and raise awareness towards a social issue by producing, funding and mobilizing knowledge-based documentary media.

DOCTalks web link: <https://www.doctalks.ca/open-your-eyes/>

iii) DOCTalks Presents TV Series & Fund

In 2016, the *DOCTalks Presents TV Series & Fund* initiative was conceived and launched. This is a documentary television series that was piloted in the spring and summer of 2017 on CHCO, a

community television station in St. Andrew's, NB. The TV series aired 16 documentary films in prime time on CHCO. Eight of the documentary films came from independent producers in Atlantic Canada and eight from the National Film Board of Canada.

Given the positive feedback received from filmmakers and CHCO audiences, the *DOCTalks Presents TV Series & Fund* expanded this initiative in 2018 to include CIMC, another community television station in Arichat, NS. From May to September 2018 ten documentary films were aired in prime time on CHCO and CIMC. Nine films came from independent producers in Atlantic Canada and one film from an indie producer in the USA.

DOCTalks is currently exploring the expansion of the *DOCTalks Presents TV Series & Fund* initiative across Canada and the United States. Through "letters of collaboration" with CACTUS (Canadian Association of Community Television Users and Stations – which CHCO & CIMC are members) and NETA (National Educational Telecommunications Association – which is affiliated with PBS stations), DOCTalks is planning to distribute knowledge-based documentary films to tens of millions of Canadian and American households.

Based on this collaboration, DOCTalks, CACTUS and NETA-PBS officials are mutually proceeding to investigate programming, funding and distribution models for the *DOCTalks Presents TV Series & Fund* initiative in Canada and the United States.

DOCTalks web link: <https://www.doctalks.ca/doctalks-presents/>

iv) DOCTalks Chapters

In 2018, DOCTalks began the process of establishing chapters in several communities in Atlantic Canada where there was interest from cross-sector partners to produce, fund and mobilize knowledge-based documentary media content and projects.

The purpose of each DOCTalks Chapter will be to showcase activities and projects that involve knowledge mobilization and the dissemination of applied research using documentary media (feature & short films, podcasts, immersive learning technologies, interactive websites, social media). DOCTalks Chapters will also provide a professional forum to research, test, evaluate, publish and mobilize the "best-practices" to create knowledge-based documentary media using cross-sector partnerships.

To this end, a DOCTalks Chapter "discussion document" has been prepared and forwarded to interested cross-sector partners (i.e. academic researchers, filmmakers, charities, etc.) in Atlantic Canada. The goal is to establish DOCTalks Chapters in several communities (Fredericton, Halifax, Charlottetown, St. John's) and then continue to expand regionally, nationally and internationally where there is interest.

DOCTalks web link: <https://www.doctalks.ca/doctalks-chapters/>

III) DOCTalks STRATEGIC GOALS & OBJECTIVES (2018 to 2022)

Based on DOCTalks four primary activities, it will seek to accomplish three main strategic goals over the next four years. These include:

Goal 1) Develop a DOCTalks Handbook of Best Practices using Cross Sector Partnerships

Over the past six years DOCTalks has been conducting applied research to determine the need for more cross-sector collaborations to produce, fund and mobilize knowledge-based documentary media. Its findings have identified many formal and informal cross-sector collaborations taking place in Atlantic Canada, nationally and internationally.

But to better understand and promote knowledge-based documentary media projects between cross-sector partners, will require that a “best practices” approach be developed. To accomplish this, DOCTalks plans to research, test, evaluate, publish and mobilize a *DOCTalks Handbook of Best Practices using Cross-Sector Partnerships*.

To reach this goal DOCTalks will be partnering with Dr. Paul De Decker, Vice President & board member of DOCTalks and a linguistics researcher at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Dr. De Decker has used documentary media to mobilize his own research findings and will oversee the submission of several academic research applications (i.e. SSHRC, Mitacs, etc.) to fund and develop a *DOCTalks Handbook of Best Practices*.

This research project partnership between DOCTalks and Dr. De Decker will be as follows:

- a) DOCTalks will tap into its extensive network of cross-sector collaborators in Canada and the United States to identify and contact project participants (i.e. co-applicants, collaborators, research subjects), many of whom have an on-going relationship with DOCTalks.
- b) DOCTalks will assist with the preparation of academic research grant proposals, which includes establishing research goals & objectives, project descriptions, expected outcomes, budgets, and contributions.
- c) DOCTalks will integrate the goals and outcomes of the *DOCTalks Handbook of Best Practices* research project with its various activities.
 - Between June 2019 and June 2022, the DOCTalks Festival & Symposium will align its programming with the “best practices” research project. This will include bringing project participants together for networking, chapter development, survey preparation & administration, documentary media content production and testing, best practices evaluation, presentations and mobilization activities.
 - DOCTalks will provide guidance and assistance to cross-sector partners that are interested in establishing DOCTalks chapters in Atlantic Canada, so the *DOCTalks Handbook of Best Practices* can be researched, tested, evaluated, published and mobilized regionally; and then launched nationally and internationally.

- DOCTalks will also provide guidance and assistance to Chapters that want to undertake an Open Your Eyes (OYE) initiative in their community to raise the profile of a social issue using a short documentary film and an online promotional campaign. Where the OYE initiative is based on a proven cross-sector partnership model, it will allow a DOCTalks Chapter to produce, fund and mobilize knowledge-based documentary media content within a one-year time frame for ongoing research, testing and evaluation purposes.

Goal 2) Expand the DOCTalks Presents TV Series & Fund in Canada and the United States

The impetus for establishing the *DOCTalks Presents TV Series & Fund* was due to documentary films and series being “pushed aside” by television networks and channels after the reality TV show *Survivor* became an international hit in 2000. Since then American, Canadian, and international television broadcasters have expanded their reality TV (competition) and lifestyle (home reno & cooking) programming because these genre’s of non-fiction programming cost less to produce and generate higher revenues and profits from advertising and sponsorships. Because of this, the number of documentary films and series being produced by independent producers and licensed for broadcast on television has significantly declined over the years.

To counter-balance this loss of documentary content on Canadian television networks and channels, DOCTalks established the *DOCTalks Presents TV Series & Fund*. This initiative seeks to create a television partnership between DOCTalks, CACTUS community TV stations in Canada and NETA-PBS TV stations in the United States, so as to produce, fund and broadcast knowledge-based documentary films and series that will reach tens of millions of Canadian and American households.

In July 2018, DOCTalks received “letters of collaboration” from CACTUS and NETA officials to explore how they can collaborate on the *DOCTalks Presents TV Series & Fund*. Based on this collaboration, DOCTalks will undertake several activities to move this initiative forward.

i) DOCTalks will collaborate with officials from CACTUS and NETA-PBS television stations to identify knowledge-based documentary media projects that would be of mutual interest to all partners from a TV audience and programming perspective. For example:

- Documentary films & series that would resonate with and affect people living in communities along the Canadian and American border (i.e. Atlantic, Great Lakes, Prairies, Pacific, Arctic).
- Documentary films & series that would raise the level of understanding between Canadians and Americans on a wide variety of issues and topics (social, cultural, political, ecological, science, economics, spirituality, nature, etc.).
- Documentary films & series that would inspire Canadians and Americans to work cooperatively to address continental and global issues of mutual concern (climate change, economic equality, ecological sustainability, diversity & inclusion, etc.).

As part of a pilot project, DOCTalks will assist in the identification of several knowledge-based documentary media projects that will be produced using a best practices cross-sector partnership

approach, financed with various funding sources, and broadcast on CACTUS and NETA-PBS television stations in Canada and the United States.

ii) DOCTalks will also undertake a research project to identify sources of funding in Canada and the United States that would enable the *DOCTalks Presents TV Series & Fund* initiative to produce, fund and mobilize knowledge-based documentary media projects for broadcast on CACTUS and NETA-PBS television stations.

Sources of potential Canadian documentary funding to be researched are:

- public film & television funding agencies (i.e. Canadian Audio-Visual Certificate Office, Canadian Heritage, National Film Board of Canada, Telefilm Canada, Canada Media Fund, provincial & territorial - NB, NS, NL, PEI, QC, ON, MB, SK, AB, BC, YT, NT, NU);
- private film & television funding agencies (Rogers, Bell, Telus, Cogeco, etc.)
- academic research agencies (i.e. Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council, Natural Sciences & Engineering Research Council, Canadian Institutes of Health Research)
- public & private foundations (i.e. Community Foundations of Canada, Philanthropic Foundations Canada, Canadian Environmental Grantmakers Network);

Sources of potential American documentary funding to be research are:

- public & private foundations (Council on Foundations, Media Impact Funders, Environmental Grantmakers Association);
- public, television funding agencies (I.e. Corporation for Public Broadcasting, etc.);
- academic research agencies (National Institute of Health, National Institute of Science, etc.).

As part of the pilot project, DOCTalks will assist in the identification of Canadian and American funding sources to produce several knowledge-based documentary media projects for broadcast on CACTUS and NETA-PBS television stations.

Goal 3) Establish Educational Television Channels in Atlantic Canada

According to the Canadian Radio-television & Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) there are six “Educational Service Broadcasters” that have been designated by Provincial Governments. These are in Ontario (TVO, TFO), British Columbia (Knowledge Network), Saskatchewan (SCN), Quebec (Tele-Quebec) and Alberta (Access Alberta - two CTV channels owned by Bell Media).

There are no Educational Service Broadcasters designated by Provincial and Territorial Governments in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland & Labrador, Nunavut, North West Territories and the Yukon. But there has been interest from members of the Documentary Organization of Canada Atlantic Chapter, CHCO & CIMC television stations, and DOCTalks to establish educational television channels in all four Atlantic provinces.

In 2017, a research study entitled: *The Time Is Now: A Nova Scotia Public Broadcaster*, outlined the need and potential for a Public Educational Broadcaster in Nova Scotia.

Since then the Nova Scotia Society for Public Broadcasting has been organizing itself to try and establish an educational broadcaster in that province.

DOCTalks and CHCO are also exploring establishing an educational channel in the province of New Brunswick. This could become a reality if the provincial Ministry of Education & Childhood Development designates CHCO a provincial educational broadcaster, and with development, operations & programming support from other government ministries and academic institutions (i.e. NB Post-Secondary Education Training & Labour, NB Tourism, Heritage & Culture, Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, University of New Brunswick, St. Thomas University, and others).

Where there is interest, DOCTalks Chapters will also advocate for educational television channels in Atlantic Canada. Some of the benefits that provincial educational broadcast services would bring to the region are: 1) Strengthen Educational Programs & Partnerships, 2) Promote Creativity & Innovation, 3) Advance Cultural Diversity & Inclusiveness, and 4) Grow the Creative Economy in Rural & Urban Communities.

If there is interest, DOCTalks will also advocate for educational channels in Nunavut, North West Territories and the Yukon.

IV) FEDERAL GOVERNMENT POLICIES TO ADDRESS THE LOSS OF KNOWLEDGE-BASED DOCUMENTARY MEDIA CONTENT

As previously mentioned, there has been a proliferation of reality TV and lifestyle shows that have eliminated and/or displaced knowledge-based documentary media programming on public and private television networks and specialty channels in Canada and across the world.

The negative effects of this in Canada and globally has been a general dumbing down of audiences (citizens), a significant rise in the quantity of fake news, the polarization of socio-political economic issues, the erosion of democratic principles and consensus based decision making, and an increase in market driven “global entertainment” programming.

To neutralize and balance these issues, federal government policies will need to address the loss of accessible “knowledge-based” documentary media content. DOCTalks is attempting to do this with it various activities and strategic goals, but a more focused approached will need to taken.

If Canada hopes to address some of the most pressing issues facing humanity, then it will need to develop a cultural and economic framework to creatively tell - *real stories, about real people, living in real communities, addressing real issues, and creating real change in society.*

To that end, Industry Science & Economic Development Canada and Canadian Heritage will need to collaborate with various stakeholders - documentary filmmakers, academic researchers, charities, governments, foundations, broadcasters - to develop a coordinated policy that will foster and facilitate the creation, funding and mobilization of knowledge-based documentary media for social, cultural, educational and economic purposes. DOCTalks is prepared to assist.