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STRATEGIC PLAN
2002-2006



NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA

JANUARY 2002

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Foreword

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Since its inception in 1939 the NFB has established a tradition of cinematographic excellence – appreciated by Canadians and audiences around the world. Its collection of close to 10,000 titles makes it the greatest storehouse of Canadian stories. Over the years, the NFB has won over 4,000 Canadian and international prizes, including 65 Academy Awards nominations, ten Oscars® – nine for individual productions, and one for its overall achievements, five *Palmes d’or* at Cannes and a *Golden Bear* at Berlin. In its early years, the NFB was central to the development of the film industry in Canada; it played a key role by being a powerful incubator of new talents and new artistic forms. In its heyday NFB artists and artisans were hailed for their work in the development of a new cinematographic language.

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Over the past three decades, recognizing the need for Canadian control over its cultural sector, the Canadian government, through major financial incentives and new structures, nurtured the emergence of private film, broadcasting and new media industries. Today, a whole sector has emerged as a vibrant force in the Canadian economy.

Given this context, what is the role to be played by public sector institutions such as the CBC and the NFB? Now in its seventh decade, the NFB today has an impressive past and will have an exciting future if it adapts to today’s environment. The advent of a strong film, television and new media industry, the impact of the government’s major budget cuts of the mid-nineties, a technological revolution and a media explosion require the NFB to evolve, and to adjust its trajectory.

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In 1996 the NFB had to change to deal with the budget cuts – it slashed its infrastructure heavily with the result that it became less relevant and accessible to Canadians.

Can the NFB in this new private-public economy play an essential role in the audiovisual landscape of the 21st century? We firmly believe so. The NFB can play a major role in helping to redefine Canada to Canadians and to the world. In the context of today’s societal changes, the NFB is essential to the weave of Canada’s social fabric.

As citizens, we have a responsibility to redefine Canadian society and its place in the new world order. In this context, the NFB can distinguish itself as an indispensable lever of Canadian social cohesion. The NFB has a role to play as a lighthouse to permit Canadian audiovisual works to shine around the world, and a responsibility to act as Canada's cultural conscience.

At the dawn of this century the challenges facing Canada and the NFB are similar to those the pioneers of the Film Board faced when they created it in 1939. As we enter the uncharted waters of globalization, the NFB must become the social instrument that articulates for Canada and Canadians, their aspirations, their dreams.

To succeed in this endeavor, we need to pull together, from the inside and the outside, in the same direction to affirm the necessity of the NFB – a unique institution with a unique mandate, as relevant today as when it was founded, and one that aspires to be part of our solutions for our collective future.

The starting point is simple – it is to integrate all parts of the NFB, so that it can act once again as a whole, producing and distributing significant audiovisual works (film, video and new media). This strategic plan reflects wide-ranging consultations that took place between June and November 2001. The plan establishes clear priorities and describes the strategies that we will take to make them become a reality. For the next three years, the NFB's budget will be set on a near zero-based formula to ensure that the activities that are in line with its new priorities and strategies are financed. This approach will give the NFB the flexibility it needs to put the new program in place.



Nisha Pahuja
Bollywood Bound

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Mission

To produce and distribute distinctive, culturally diverse, challenging and relevant audiovisual works that provide Canada and the world a unique Canadian perspective.

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Vision

The NFB is recognized as being indispensable to all Canadians as the world-renowned public producer and distributor of audiovisual works that are socially relevant and innovative.

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Goals

1. To define and position the NFB in its essential role in the Canadian audiovisual landscape in the context of a new global reality
2. To connect Canadians with the NFB of today and their audiovisual legacy
3. To make the NFB a better and more relevant reflection of Canadian society
4. To confirm the NFB's role as an incubator of creative excellence and innovation
5. To maintain and nurture the NFB's human capital
6. To demonstrably increase the NFB's return on investment



Tableaux d'un voyage imaginaire
Photo: Michel La Veaux

Core Values

Culturally diverse, socially cohesive
Risk-taking and open to partnerships
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Transparent
Innovative
Value driven, committed to excellence
Embracing new talents

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Strategies

1. Making the NFB's Overall Program More Relevant:

To achieve a more relevant overall program, we will enhance the programming process; introduce transparent programming priorities such as tackling major social issues, innovation and cultural diversity, giving voice to younger generations; strengthen our regional structure; open our doors, as well as set improved evaluation mechanisms. The NFB's performance should be judged on the relevance it has to Canadians of all ages and all walks of life.

Until now, the NFB's success has been pegged on individual stories of achievement, whether an Oscar[®], a *Palme d'or*, a Genie or a Gemini. NFB productions were green-lighted based on independent criteria, not tied to overall goals. In some years, this meant that while the NFB met annual production goals in terms of numbers, the overall results were somewhat lacklustre.

Today, the NFB has to prove its relevance in the life of Canadians. To do so, we must mobilize our sectors of activities around certain issues that are major preoccupations for Canadians. The NFB fully played its role as a social instrument when it focussed its funds and human resources around initiatives such as Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle, Studio D or Unit B.

Canadians are now facing major issues fundamental to our society – issues such as the rethinking of the education system, dealing with the crisis in healthcare, articulating its vision of social cohesion in a pluralistic society and affirming Aboriginal rights. One can imagine the essential role that the NFB could play in such areas if it decided to mobilize efforts to engage citizens in exploring these issues.



View from the Summit
Les Productions Érézi/NFB
Photo: Jacques Nadeau

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To ensure that the NFB's annual production slate forms a body of work that meets its goals, and reflects its mandate, programming priorities will be introduced. These priorities will be weighted, and adjusted periodically to ensure that overall goals are being met.

In order of importance, the programming priorities are:

- Focus and treatment of major social issues – unique, necessary, and relevant
- Focussing on key audiences, especially youth, the educational sector
- Innovating the audiovisual narrative form
- Advancing the documentary ethic, and media literacy
- Creative vision: strength of story
- Working with filmmaking talent in all regions of Canada
- Nurturing emerging filmmakers
- Championing intercultural and Aboriginal voices
- Promoting social cohesion through examination, debate and dialogue
- Increasing audiences

These priorities will guide the programming process throughout the year. The programming process, under the leadership of the English and French Program Directors General, must be fully transparent, open to new voices and accessible throughout. Distribution objectives will be fully meshed at the outset of each project.

Throughout Canada, the NFB's production footprint will be strengthened so that it is more open, relevant and connected to the local community. A special effort will be made to nurture filmmaking talent in minority language regions.

The NFB will explore the major issues facing Canadian society today such as the rethinking of the education system, the impact of cultural diversity and health concerns, all of which will be increasingly topical for Canadians in the years to come.

Evaluation mechanisms, both quantitative and qualitative will be established to allow us to gauge the success of our new program. These mechanisms will help enhance the planning cycle by supplying prospective performance indicators.

2. Placing Innovation at the Forefront:

To foster innovation, experimentation in traditional media, new media and alternative fiction, we will dedicate resources to model innovation and act as catalyst for change.

The NFB has always been recognized for innovation; its founder John Grierson set the stage through his vision of using art for social purpose. In the 60's and the 70's the NFB earned a reputation for innovation in its productions and its way of working. It not only invented new ways of using film to change society, it pioneered using the camera as an extension of the human eye. To foster an environment conducive to innovation in our productions, mechanisms, such as earmarked funds, dedicated mentors and production resources, and special purpose production teams will be put in place. Innovation will be one of the dominant objectives guiding our programming decisions, and a core value of the organization. We will take appropriate risks commensurate with the scope and role of the NFB. For instance, the NFB will once again open the door to alternative fiction, on the proviso that such a proposal is distinctive, innovative and in line with the budget of a major documentary project. In the broadcasting area, where Canada has built a strong and diversified private sector, co-production opportunities will be sought as projects are initiated.



Paul Cowan
Westray

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On the new media front, a new media matrix, reporting to both Program Heads and working in close collaboration with the Internet Unit will create new media works and act as a catalyst for the creation of others. The Internet Unit will create an Internet site that is inspired from and goes beyond a cluster of specialty television channels to show and explain the work of the NFB, to inform audiences, to showcase innovation in the animation and documentary fields, Aboriginal and intercultural productions, and new media works, to educate, provide learning resources and to provide opportunities for exchange and dialogue on the art of filmmaking. The NFB's extensive collection either through excerpts or through full-length streams will be accessible on-line to audiences around the world. The collection will continue to be digitized in different formats thanks to funding from Canadian Heritage for this purpose.

3. Strengthening the NFB Brand:

To strengthen the NFB brand, we will promote the production slate so that it is easily and clearly understood: films that advance social debate, films that innovate, and films that educate.

The NFB will coalesce the power of its brand by adopting a coherent approach to its communications, marketing and distribution undertakings. Internally, all public relations, communications, curatorial, publicity, festivals and publishing services, traditional or on-line will be regrouped in one service. Launch activities will remain within the purview of the studios to ensure tie-in with the productions from the outset. Design, communications and publicity needs for launches will be handled centrally, using an advertising agency as a model. This approach will consolidate the communication of the NFB's mission and vision and will therefore contribute to building the organization's already considerable brand equity.

All of the NFB's communications activities will support the whole rather than seek to establish differentiation between products. In line with the new directions, we will seek to link the NFB's image with its legacy, with its role in producing socially relevant audiovisual works, supporting emerging filmmakers, championing intercultural voices and distinctive audiovisual works that are synonymous with innovation, risk-taking and creativity. We will create new alliances to increase the number of branded television slots for the NFB. Special efforts will be made to make the NFB's production slate and legacy relevant to younger audiences. As an example, master classes, bringing the best of the NFB as well as the best of the world, will be organized in all production centres to convey the art of filmmaking to communities of interest. In major urban centres, new storefronts, like the one in Montreal, will reflect the new positioning, offering a full range of activities and programs which connect audiences to the NFB's legacy and current productions. To help establish these connections a new curatorial capacity will be introduced. The curatorial staff will act as content editor for sections of the NFB's Internet site, conserve and curate the NFB collection, and program retrospectives. This new capacity will allow the NFB to establish closer links with Festivals and museums around the world. Furthermore, to support the objective integrating all components into a stronger whole, the NFB's information will be made explicit through a centralized knowledge management system called Synchronie. This system links assets to processes and qualitative and quantitative information. Parts of this system will become operational in the course of fiscal year 2002-2003. One of its major components will be the Electronic Rights Management Database that will be completed by December 2003.



Mon œil pour une caméra

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4. Nurturing Emerging Filmmakers:

To give emerging filmmakers the full benefit of the NFB's legacy, we will increase the number of productions by emerging filmmakers to 35 percent, and introduce a mentorship program.

The NFB is a unique organization – it provides an environment for filmmaking that is free of the financial pressures that mark independent filmmaking, and allows adequate time to research, develop and complete a film. Since its inception, the teaching of the craft of filmmaking as an art has evolved tremendously, with schools, institutions and special programs across the country. The NFB should be the logical next step for young Canadians as they break into the industry, a complement to formal film training. With its different programs the NFB is the place for young talented filmmakers to complete their first, second or third film.

Therefore, 35 percent of the NFB's total production slate will feature works from emerging filmmakers, defined as having already completed one professional film. The filmmaking experience at the NFB is enriched by the considerable legacy found in its collection and in the intellectual and creative capital of its alumni and current personnel. On top of the master classes, a flexible mentorship program, putting emerging filmmakers in touch with seasoned practitioners, whether directors, producers, screenwriters, directors of photography or other masters of the craft will be set upon a formal and informal basis. Seasoned filmmakers will be invited to the NFB to practice their art in the NFB's unique environment and to contribute to building the NFB's legacy by mentoring an emerging filmmaker and participating in master classes. Closer ties will be cemented with film schools across the country to create greater synergies for new and emerging filmmakers. The Filmmaker's Assistance Program, and the ACIC (Aide au cinéma indépendant (Canada)) will be enhanced, not only with financial resources, and a more robust structure, but will also give new filmmakers access to the NFB's distribution arm and to mentorship opportunities. Closer collaboration will be established with the Canada Council for the Arts to support emerging filmmakers making their second and/or third films.

5. Championing Cultural Diversity and Aboriginal Voices:

To champion cultural diversity, we will become more inclusive and increase intercultural and Aboriginal voices and views throughout the NFB, on the screen and behind it. We will create an environment that celebrates diversity and puts it at the centre of our operations, in terms of human resources and programming.

As a vibrant instrument of social cohesion the NFB must be a true picture of the full range of the diversity that exists in Canada and in the world. The NFB has been for many years now Canada's premiere producer and distributor of Aboriginal films. With the objective of strengthening and expanding this role, the existing Aboriginal Program, which comes to an end in 2001-2002, will be reviewed. In terms of cultural diversity, the English Program has developed a distinguished track record of producing works by and for intercultural filmmakers. In fact, in 2000-2001, these works represented close to 28 percent of the English Program's production slate. However, to ensure that this success takes root throughout the NFB, we will introduce mechanisms to ensure that the programming process and all other facets of production and distribution are fully committed to advancing cultural diversity objectives. A special effort will be made within the French Program to better reflect today's culturally diverse francophone population. Partnerships with Aboriginal and intercultural organizations will be sought to enhance the NFB's program delivery.

All restructuring initiatives within the organization will reflect the NFB's three-year equity plan, ensuring that targets are met for all four equity groups under the terms of the Federal Government's equity program.



Fernand Dansereau
Quelques raisons d'espérer...
Photo: Marc Gadoury

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6. Rekindling Relations with Canadians:

To rekindle our relationship with Canadians, we will establish mechanisms for greater access, closer contact and dialogue on NFB productions.

Under Grierson, the NFB set up a comprehensive distribution system, reaching Canadians on their own turf, in community halls, in church basements, at political rallies and in schools. When television came in the NFB didn't receive a broadcasting mandate, nor did it receive a licence with the advent of the specialty channels. Maintaining the NFB's presence in the lives of Canadians is a continuous challenge. However, even without our own broadcast outlet (although we now have a foothold in a new English tier 1 digital channel, the Documentary Channel), the NFB enjoys a relatively high profile amongst Canadians. Close to one out of four Canadians readily identifies the NFB when asked to name an organization that produces and distributes documentaries and animated shorts. Thirty-three percent of Canadians can identify the NFB logo, and 72 percent support its mission. But this support can only fade to black if we do not rekindle relations with Canadians. At this juncture, it is crucial that the NFB plant deep roots within Canadian society and in cinematographic circles around the world. This does not mean turning back the clock to Grierson's vision of a distribution network that no longer exists, but rather opening new doors, finding ways that will make the NFB's productions once again accessible to Canadians. The NFB should pursue specialty channel licences in French and in English, continue its partnership with the Documentary Channel, while producing films for other networks. Another avenue is to establish storefronts in Canada, which will make the NFB collection as well as other compatible collections available on demand to Canadians. Audiences, old and new will also have access to the NFB's extensive film collection on-line via its digitized fully searchable catalogue. To increase the relevance of film and filmmaking to Canadians we will create a representative advisory council to give advice to the Government Film Commissioner, which will advocate for socially responsible filmmaking. Connection points with communities of interest will be made through public screenings, master classes, retrospectives, museum exhibits, branded television slots and a variety of other means.

Furthermore, we will put in place a comprehensive membership program to enable Canadians to re-establish a lasting connection with their NFB. We will ramp up our presence at Canadian and international festivals in an integrated fashion, demonstrating the NFB's core values – the support of diversity and emerging filmmakers, innovation and distinctiveness. An important way to nurture relations with Canadians consists of establishing closer collaborative mechanisms with other agencies of the Department of Canadian Heritage's portfolio such as the CBC/Radio-Canada, National Archives, and the Canadian Centre for Race Relations.

7. Strengthening the Artist-Artisan Relationship:

To allow the NFB's unique way of making films to flourish, we will develop the artist-artisan relationship in the creative process.

The NFB's way of making films, where artists and artisans collaborate from the concept stage to post-production to push forward the art form, was a house tradition well into the nineties. The closure of the lab and the shooting stage had the effect of turning the NFB's technical services into a supplier of technical equipment and facilities.

The idea is to restore the creative relationships that once existed to support the development of a new cinematographic language, to have a technical base that is at the forefront, all the while maintaining the appropriate financial balance in terms of cost recovery. Technical services will be committed to excellence, and high quality client services. They will be on the leading edge of new technologies and quick to adapt to new formats and new ways of working with sound and images.



Martine Chartrand
Âme Noire/Black Soul

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To this end, we will begin to set the stage for this new relationship by making our current infrastructure more client-centred by introducing standard rates in line with the private sector while we gear up to a study that will evaluate our technical services and its future within the larger vision that we are setting forth.

8. Forging International Alliances:

To protect and enhance the cultural industry's public sector space at the global level, to take advantage of the emerging global market, and to increase visibility and revenues on the world stage, as well as maximize synergies, we will create an international co-production unit with the goal of forging productive international alliances. In the field of international co-productions there is an increasing demand to create a larger public service vision, one that sets its sight beyond a country's borders.

If Canada wants to retain its own cultural sovereignty, the NFB, as a voice for Canada needs to be heard and seen within and beyond our frontiers, as distinctive within the homogenizing forces of ever-increasing globalization, and vertical and horizontal integration. On the plus side, on the world scene, Canada and Canadian productions are recognized because of our cultural sensitivity and considerable successful experience in intercultural relations. This factor, and the continued contacts that new citizens have with the part of the world that they come from, increases the value of partnerships with Canadian production entities.

The NFB still enjoys a very strong international reputation. But this is at risk unless we increase our connections, improve our image and our bench strength abroad. With the expertise already developed in this area, its offices abroad, its reputation as a reliable co-producer of innovative high quality documentaries, animated shorts and alternative fiction features, the NFB can contribute to improving Canada's image, maintain its international reputation and garner additional revenues. It can also serve as a broker between international entities and smaller

producers here in Canada. To this end, the NFB's new international co-production unit will seek for both programs co-production agreements that will bring in new revenue opportunities. This unit will be light and flexible in structure and report to both program heads. Key partnerships or output agreements with international organizations and broadcasters will be explored by the Commissioner and both Program Heads.

9. Maximizing Revenues:

To maximize revenues through all possible sources, we will regroup the NFB's commercial distribution skills and capacity under one branch, create a business affairs unit and seek partnerships.

There is no greater guarantee for the future success of the NFB than increasing its revenues. The NFB has one of the world's largest audiovisual catalogues and a well-established stock shot library. It can and it should through broadcasting licences, repackaging for specific markets, improved alliances with the education systems and other means, increase revenues considerably. Market research will be undertaken to understand the existing and future gaps in the audiovisual material needs in school systems. Furthermore, the commercial distribution unit will not have the onus of cultural and visibility objectives that have historically obscured the goals of revenue generation.

A business affairs unit serving both Programs will be set up to establish best practices, negotiate co-production agreements, pre-sales and manage rights administration, using the Electronics Rights Management Data Base, once it is fully operational.



CineRobotheque

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10. Building on Partnerships:

The NFB will be more open to creative and financial partnerships. To do this, we will seek out and welcome projects in production, distribution, access, and training.

Partnerships are key to the NFB's success, and the fulfillment of its mandate. It is only through partnerships that we will be able to undertake diversified activities and enter new fields. Partnerships or sponsorships will allow the NFB to broaden its scope while pursuing common goals. We will actively seek out strategic alliances that support the NFB's priorities, on all fronts. This could mean forging alliances with broadcasters, with telecom companies, with major production houses, social organizations and corporations. Partnerships can also take the form of administrative collaboration agreements with other agencies, and training partnerships with national training institutions. When undertaking major initiatives such as the creation of new storefronts, we will search out sponsorships that are in line with NFB values.

Conclusion

At the dawn of the 21st century Canada must review the role of its cultural institutions and their contribution to the building of a diversified society that is evolving in the context of globalization, the redefinition of our culture and our economy.

We believe that the NFB is one of the primary instruments that Canada must engage to define its cultural place in the next decades – so that our artists, whether seasoned or emerging, can be seen and heard. In 1939, the NFB was born out of a need to communicate and engage with Canadians in a time of war. In 2002, Canada and the NFB share much the same mission as its founders, that of reflecting and engaging its citizenry in a time of flux and upheaval.

Are we up to it? We owe it to ourselves to try.

The future holds great promise for the audiovisual field and for the NFB, as a public producer. At this point in our collective history the type of productions for which the NFB is renowned is more important than ever. Our country today needs forces of social cohesion to encourage dialogue and debate on the major issues that face us. The NFB will once again offer Canada and the world audiovisual works that not only express the social conscience of this country but also coalesce, reflect a plurality of voices, and engage emerging new talents.

By implementing this plan, we will create art with a social conscience in an era of globalization. The NFB will be recognized as being essential, exceptional and accessible.



John Walker
The Fairy Faith
John Walker Productions/NFB