



DOCUMENTARY
ORGANIZATION OF CANADA
DOCUMENTARISTES
DU CANADA

The Roadmap to Creative Distribution: Survey Results

by: Chanda Chevannes

for: Documentary Organization of Canada



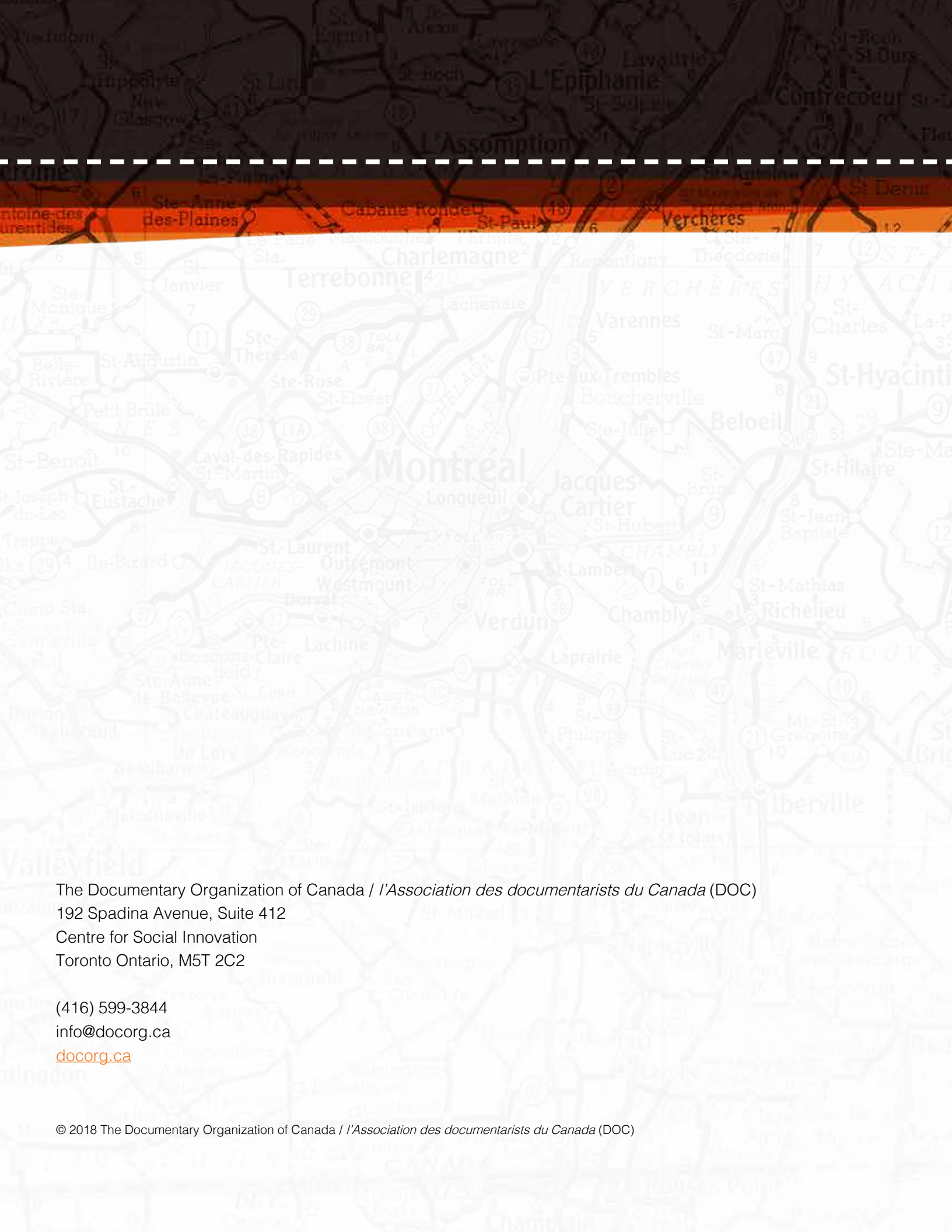
ONTARIO
CREATES | ONTARIO
CRÉATIF



ROGERS
Group of Funds



RING FIVE
IMPACT DOCS



The Documentary Organization of Canada / *l'Association des documentarists du Canada* (DOC)
192 Spadina Avenue, Suite 412
Centre for Social Innovation
Toronto Ontario, M5T 2C2

(416) 599-3844
info@docorg.ca
docorg.ca

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| About the Survey | 5 |
| Survey Results | 6 |
| Question #1: Where is your primary place of business? | 6 |
| Question #2: Are you a member of the Documentary Organization of Canada? | 7 |
| Question #3: Have you ever engaged in self-distribution for one of your documentary projects? | 7 |
| Question #4: In total, how many documentaries have you self-distributed? | 8 |
| Question #5: In approximately what year did you first begin self-distribution? | 8 |
| Question #6: When engaging in self-distribution, which rights do you typically exploit—both exclusively and non-exclusively? | 9 |
| Question #7: When engaging in self-distribution, which rights do you assign to another distributor—exclusively and non-exclusively? | 9 |
| Question #8: What was the primary factor in your decision to engage in self-distribution? | 10 |
| Question #9: Do you feel that your self-distribution efforts have been financially successful? | 10 |
| Question #10: Do you feel that your self-distribution efforts have been successful at creating social change or educational impact? | 11 |
| Question #11: Thinking about your most successful self-distributed project, approximately how much money (in gross) did you make as the result of self-distribution? | 11 |
| Question #12: Thinking about your most successful self-distributed project, approximately how much money did you spend on the work of self-distribution (other than any costs covered in your production budget)? | 12 |
| Question #13: Thinking about your most successful self-distributed project, approximately how many people have seen your project as a result of self-distribution? | 12 |
| Question #14: How did you fund your self-distribution efforts? | 13 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Question #15: What did you do in your self-distribution that worked well? | 13 |
| Question #16: What would you do differently next time? | 13 |
| Question #17: What service providers, suppliers, or partners did you work with that you would recommend to other filmmakers? | 14 |
| Question #18: Why haven't you engaged in self-distribution (yet)? | 14 |
| Question #19: Are you interested in engaging (or continuing to engage) in self-distribution in the future? | 15 |
| Question #20: What do you feel you would need to be successful at self-distribution in the future? | 15 |
| Question #21: How do you define success when it comes to self-distribution? | 16 |
| Question #22: If you work in Canada, what are the external barriers to self-distribution that you have experienced and/or witnessed? | 17 |
| Question #23: Who are the people or organizations whose work on self-distribution has inspired you? If possible, provide names and what makes their work inspiring. | 17 |

| | |
|--------------------------|----|
| About <i>The Roadmap</i> | 18 |
| About DOC | 18 |
| Guide Author | 19 |
| Guide Contributors | 19 |
| Guide Funders | 20 |

About the Survey

The Self-Distribution Survey of Documentary Filmmakers was released by the Documentary Organization of Canada in May 2018. The survey represented one phase of the research project that produced *The Roadmap to Creative Distribution*. Researched and written by documentary filmmaker Chanda Chevannes for the Documentary Organization of Canada, *The Roadmap* was grounded in DOC's mandate of helping Canadian documentary makers get their work made and seen.

The data collection for *The Roadmap* involved the following three phases:

1. Environmental Scan and Literature Review, through which key players, strategies, terminologies, and best practices were identified and explored. Over 50 articles in industry publications and websites were consulted.
2. Online Survey of Documentary Filmmakers, through which respondents provided insight into their individual self-distribution practices, experiences, knowledge, and needs. 127 responses were received (109 in English and 18 in French) over a six-week period. This document represents a compilation of the survey results.
3. Targeted Research Interviews, through which interview subjects provided a range of expert knowledge and experience. Interviews in both English and French were conducted with filmmakers, funders, service providers, and distribution consultants. A list of interview subjects can be found in the "Guide Contributors" section in this document.

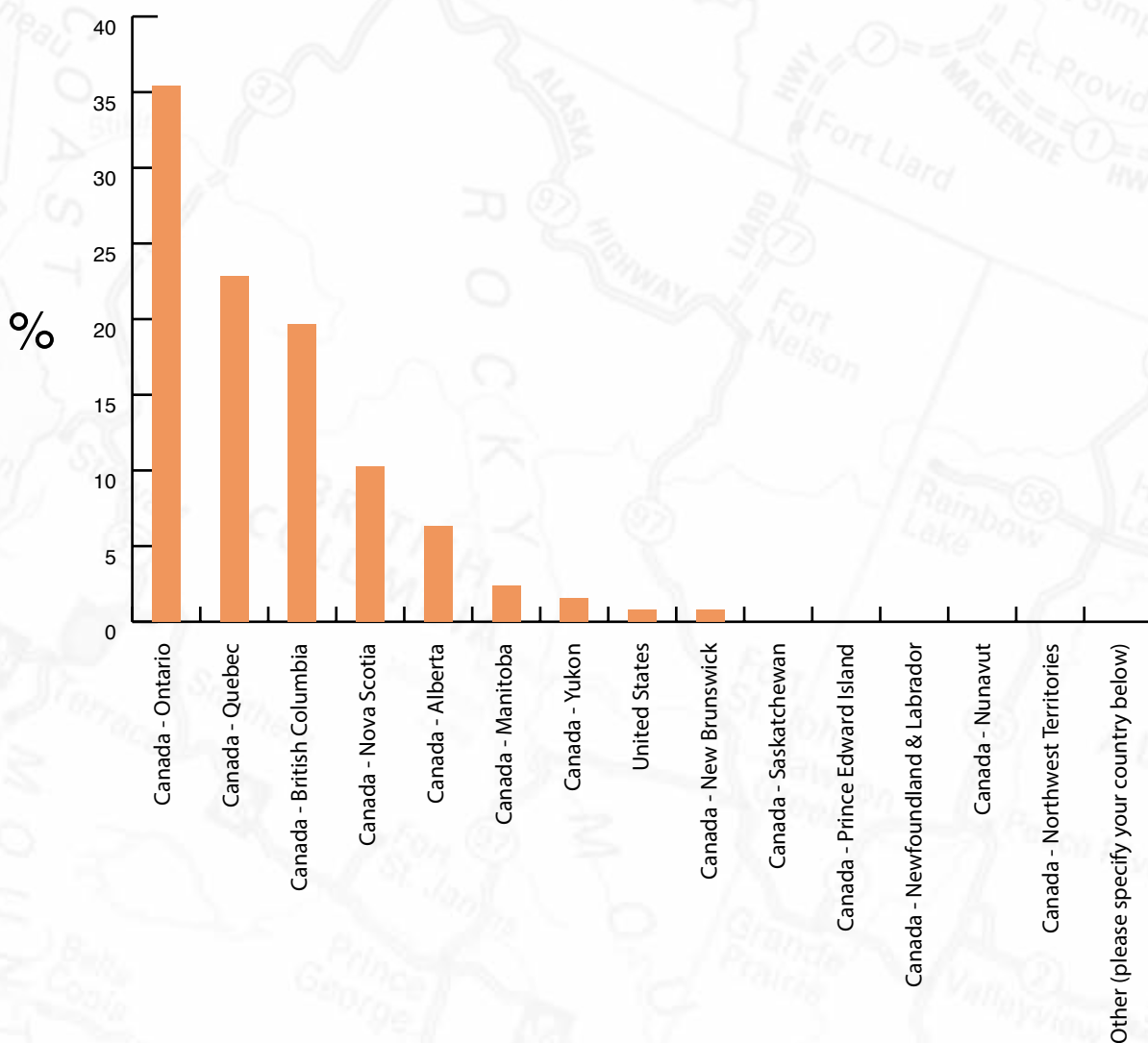
While the best practices and case studies that appear throughout *The Roadmap* were identified through the literature review and the targeted research interviews, the survey offered a clear window into the current needs and knowledge of the Canadian documentary filmmaking community. This ultimately helped us to identify which best practices required more depth of exploration within the pages of *The Roadmap*.

The Roadmap to Creative Distribution was released on October 12, 2018 and can be downloaded from DOC's website at: https://www.docorg.ca/roadmap_to_creative_distribution.

Survey Results

The Self-Distribution Survey of Documentary Filmmakers was targeted towards all documentary filmmakers (producers, directors, and producer/directors), whether they had engaged in self-distribution or not.

Question #1: Where is your primary place of business?

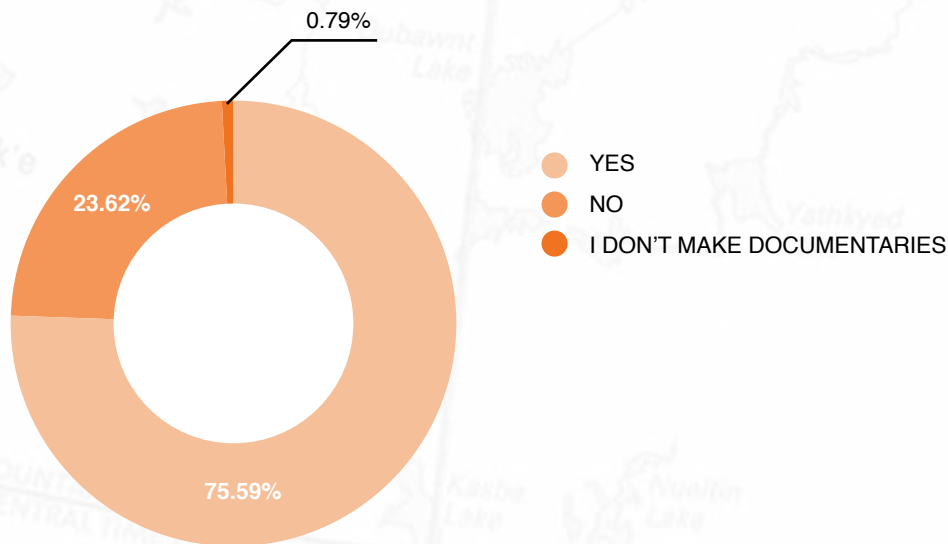


Question #2: Are you a member of the Documentary Organization of Canada?

| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|----------------------------|-----------|-----|
| Yes | 86.61% | 110 |
| No | 11.81% | 15 |
| I don't make documentaries | 1.57% | 2 |
| Answered | | 127 |
| Skipped | | 0 |

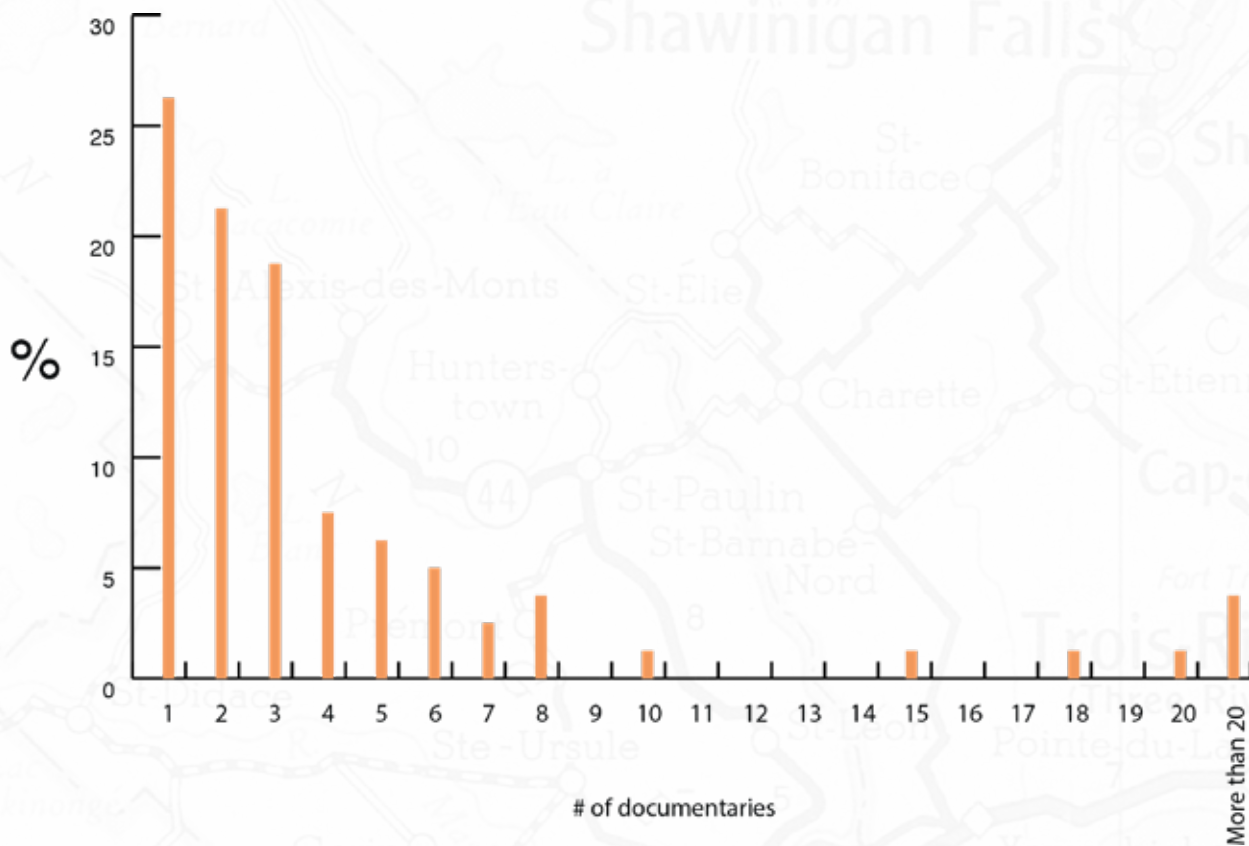
Question #3: Have you ever engaged in self-distribution for one of your documentary projects?

For clarity, self-distribution occurs when a filmmaker distributes their work themselves. Self-distribution can be conducted independently by the producer, with help from paid service providers, or by dividing the rights between the filmmaker and traditional distributors (sometimes referred to as hybrid distribution).

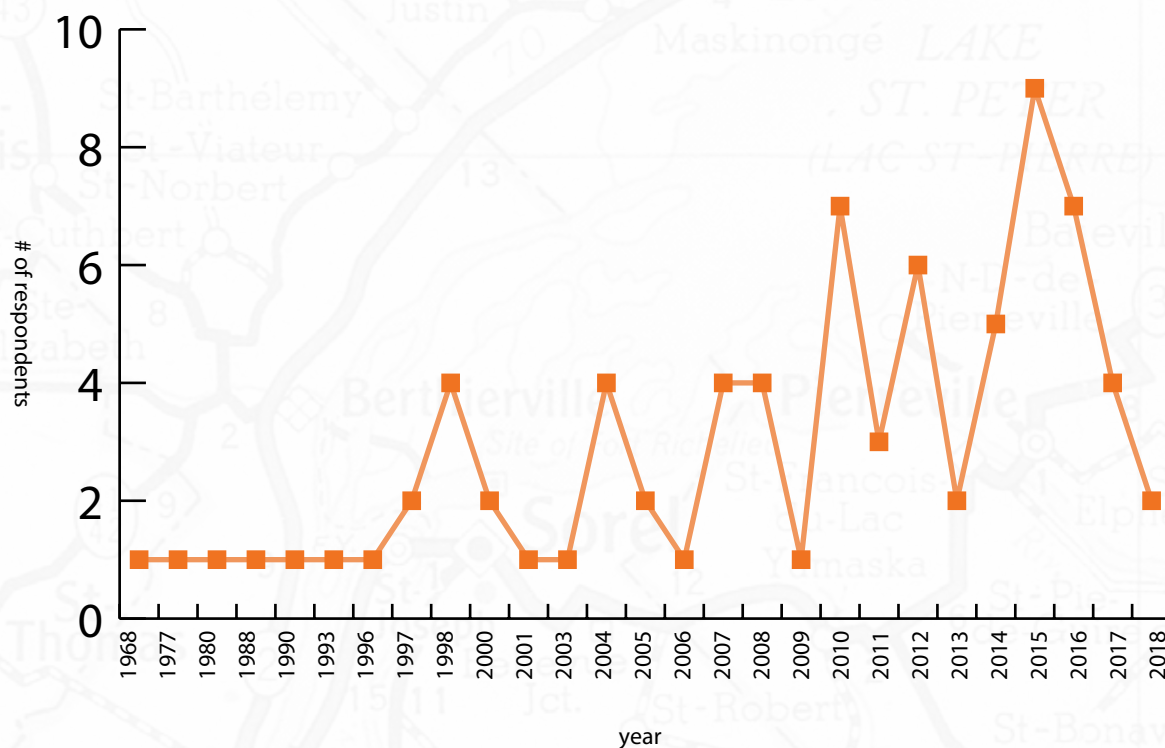


Note: Those respondents who answered “yes” to the above question were then asked a series of questions about their work in self-distribution (beginning with Question #4). Those who answered “no” were skipped ahead in the survey to questions about future possibilities for self-distribution (beginning with Question #18). Those who indicated that they didn't make documentaries were disqualified from the survey and thanked for their time.

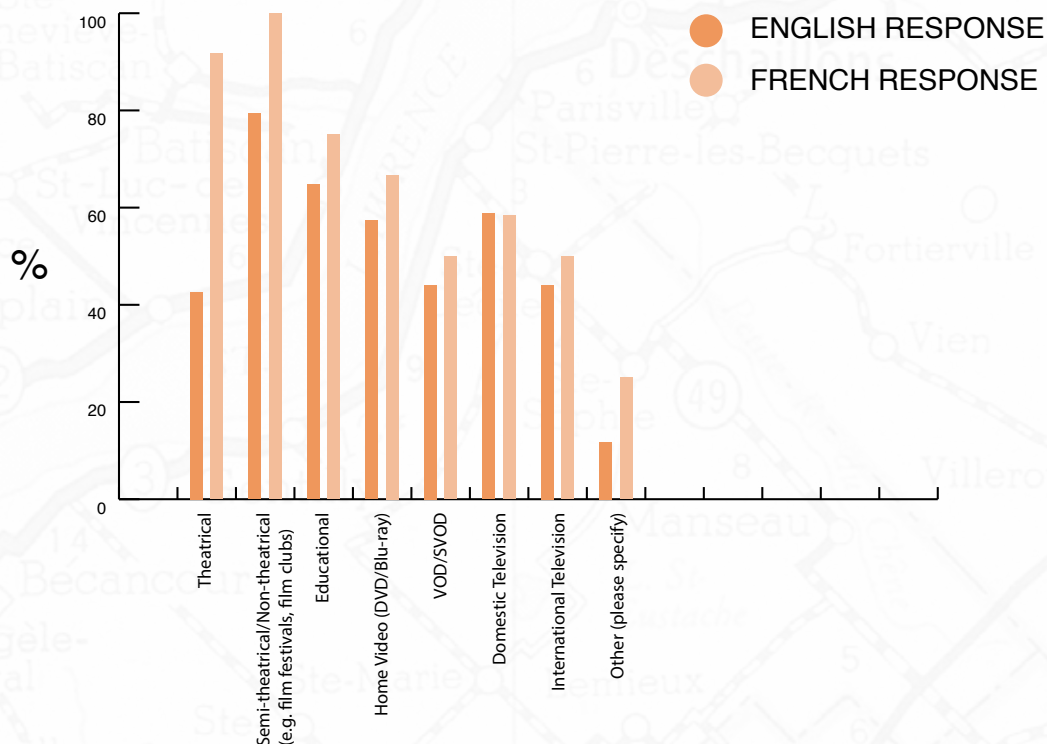
Question #4: In total, how many documentaries have you self-distributed?



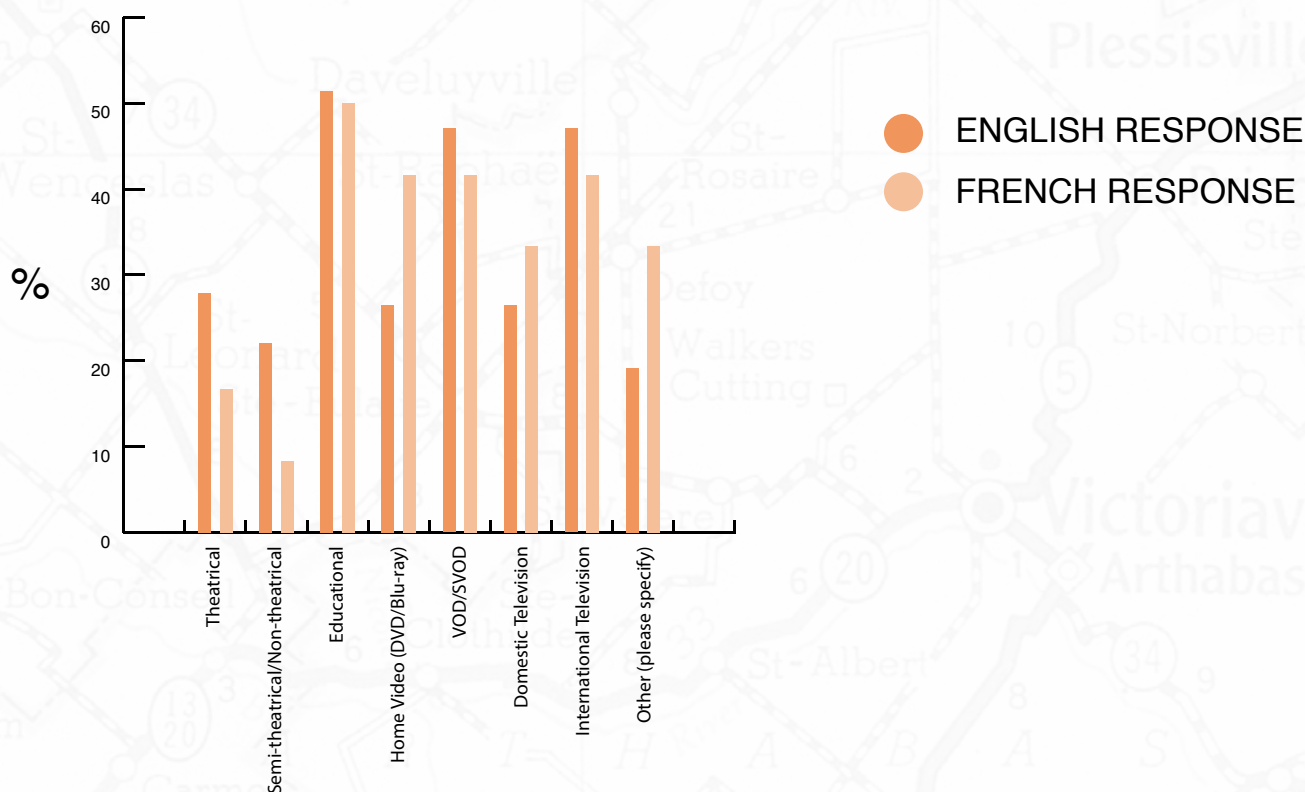
Question #5: In approximately what year did you first begin self-distribution?



Question #6: When engaging in self-distribution, which rights do you typically exploit—both exclusively and non-exclusively? (Check all that apply)



Question #7: When engaging in self-distribution, which rights do you assign to another distributor—exclusively and non-exclusively? (Check all that apply)



Question #8: What was the primary factor in your decision to engage in self-distribution?

Answer Choices

I had a specific vision for my distribution that I felt I needed to carry out myself (or in close collaboration with distribution partners).

Other (please specify)

The traditional distributors weren't interested in my project.

I felt I could make more money doing it myself.

I wanted to connect directly with my audience/customers.

The traditional distributors were only interested in some rights, so I chose to exploit the remaining rights myself.

The traditional distributors were offering a revenue split that I thought was unfair/unreasonable.

Responses

25.00% 20

21.25% 17

12.50% 10

12.50% 10

11.25% 9

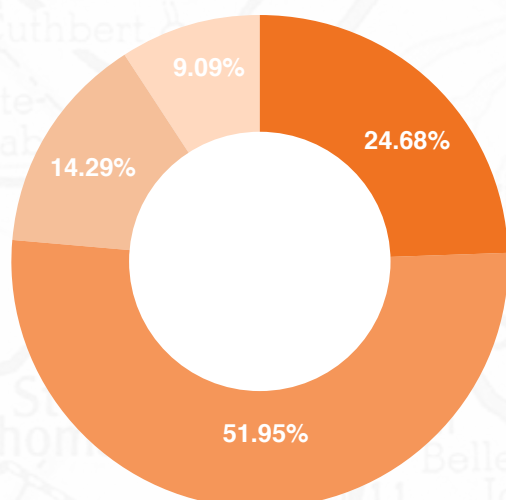
10.00% 8

7.50% 6

Answered 80

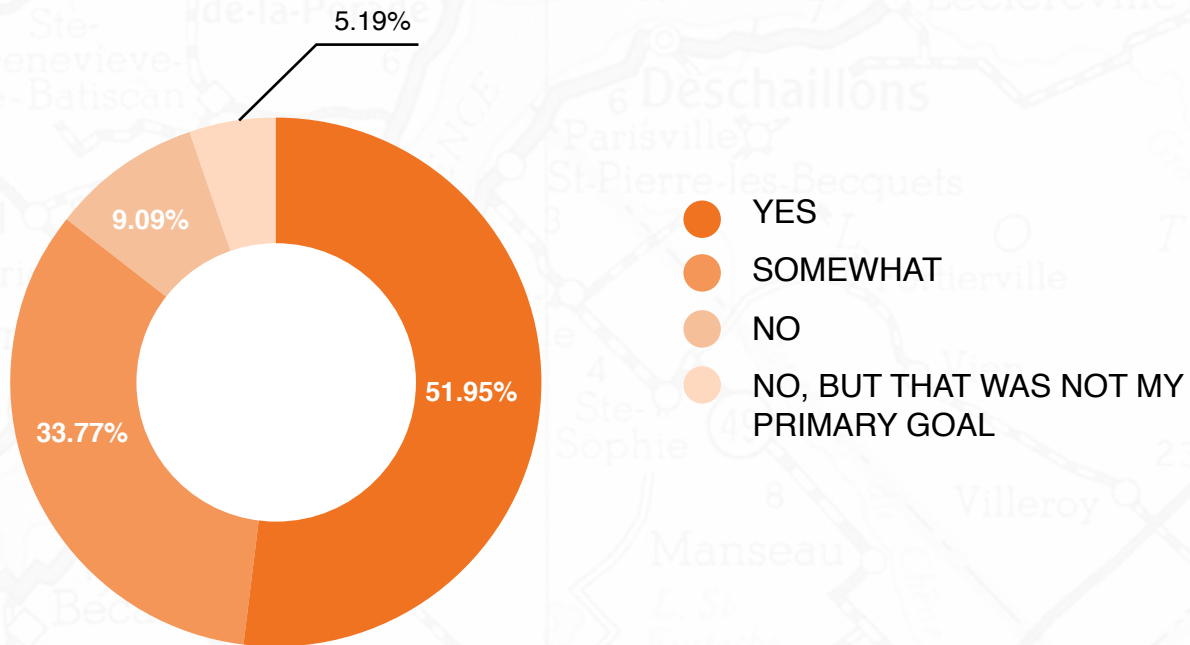
Skipped 47

Question #9: Do you feel that your self-distribution efforts have been financially successful?

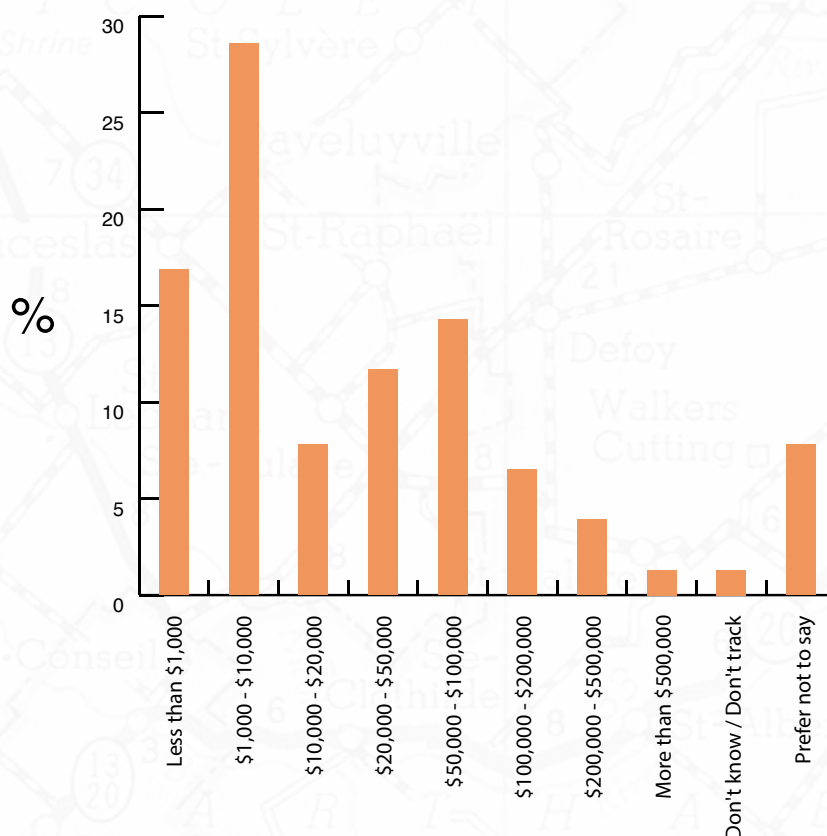


- YES
- SOMEWHAT
- NO
- NO, BUT THAT WAS NOT MY PRIMARY GOAL

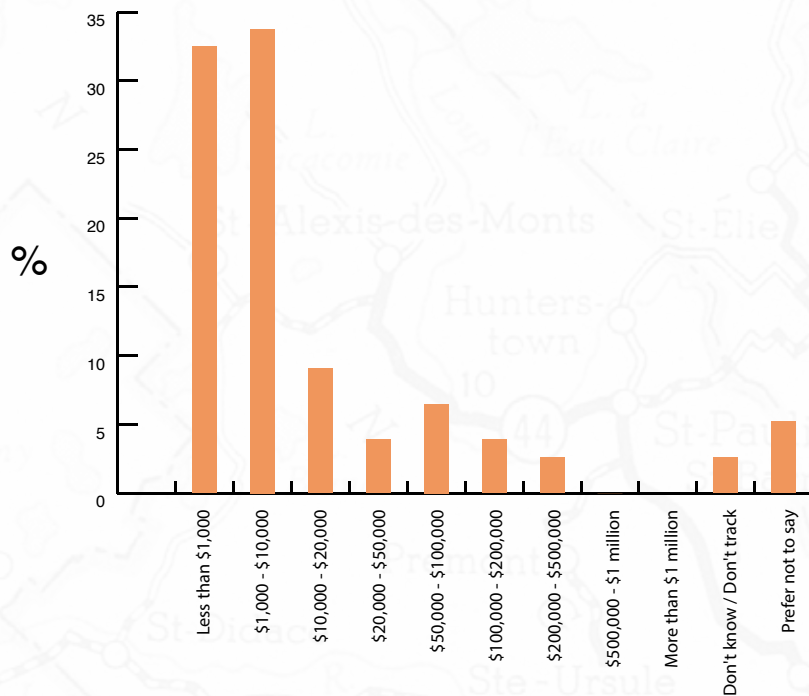
Question #10: Do you feel that your self-distribution efforts have been successful at creating social change or educational impact?



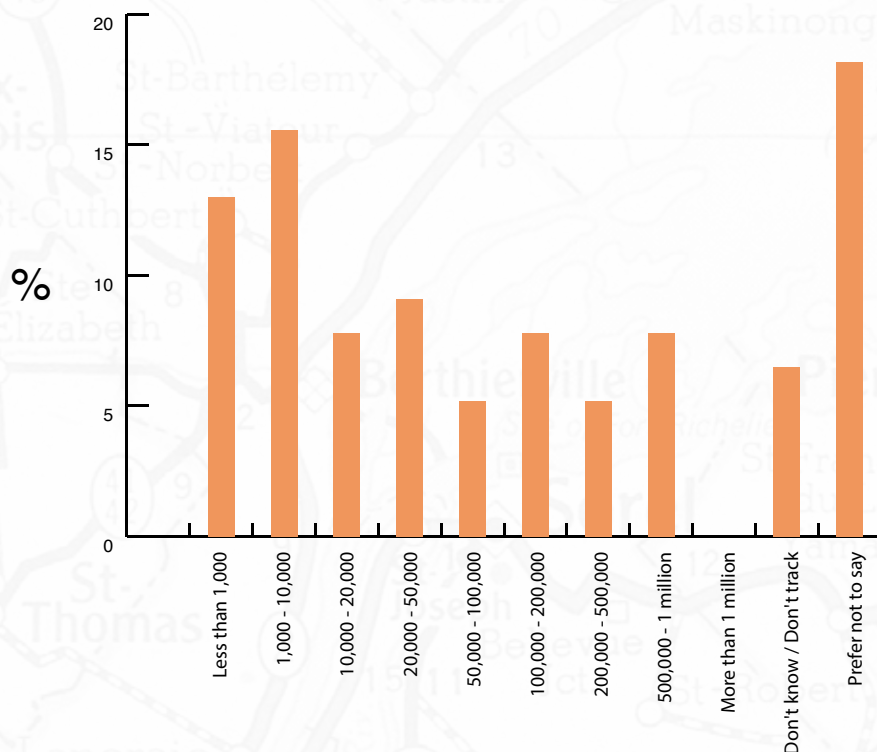
Question #11: Thinking about your most successful self-distributed project, approximately how much money (in gross) did you make as the result of self-distribution?



Question #12: Thinking about your most successful self-distributed project, approximately how much money did you spend on the work of self-distribution (other than any costs covered in your production budget)?



Question #13: Thinking about your most successful self-distributed project, approximately how many people have seen your project as a result of self-distribution?



Question #14: How did you fund your self-distribution efforts? (If possible, please name specific funding sources and include producer contributions, such as investments of time/money and/or deferrals.)

69 respondents shared their funding sources in short-answer form. The individual answers have been coalesced into common categories below.

| | |
|---|----|
| Self-funded, contribution of time, producer investment, deferrals | 50 |
| Telefilm | 9 |
| OMDC | 2 |
| SODEC | 4 |
| Crowdfunding | 5 |
| Private Foundations | 4 |
| Provincial Grants | 3 |
| CALQ | 3 |
| Festival Awards | 2 |
| Distribution Revenues | 5 |

Question #15: What did you do in your self-distribution that worked well?

67 respondents shared their thoughts in short-answer form. The individual answers have been coalesced into common categories below.

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| Educational outreach and resources | 10 |
| Strategic film festival submissions | 9 |
| Active grassroots outreach | 6 |
| Social media outreach | 5 |
| Press outreach | 4 |
| "DIY attitude," lots of hard work | 3 |
| Partnerships | 3 |

Question #16: What would you do differently next time?

64 respondents shared their thoughts in short-answer form. The individual answers have been coalesced into common categories below.

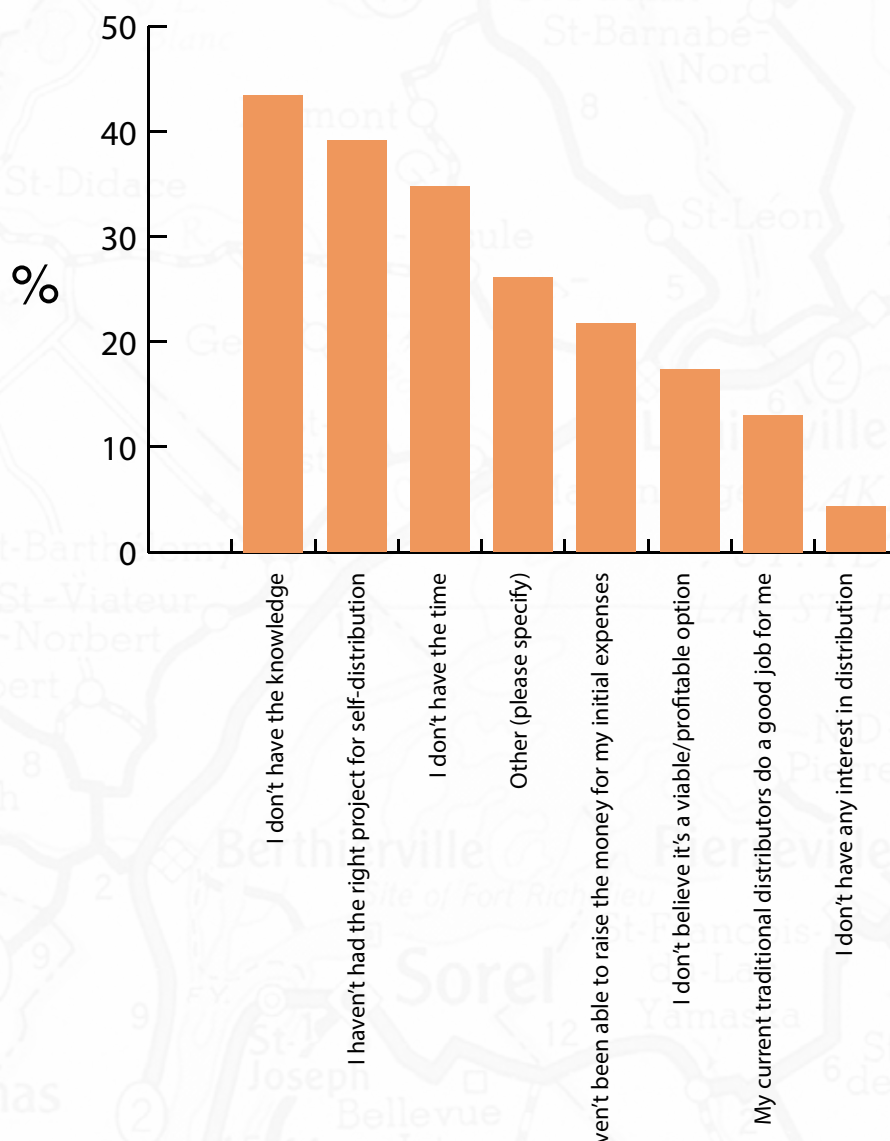
| | |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| Hire (more) help | 10 |
| Work with a distributor | 7 |
| Raise (more) financing | 7 |
| Work (more) in the digital space | 5 |
| Nothing | 5 |
| Begin with a solid distribution plan | 4 |
| Leverage social media (more) | 4 |

Question #17: What service providers, suppliers, or partners did you work with that you would recommend to other filmmakers?

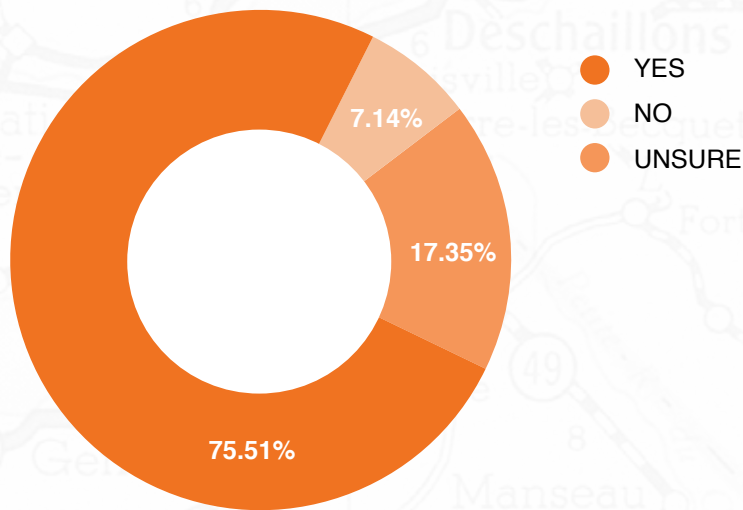
59 respondents shared their thoughts in short-answer form, many listing entities that have been featured in *The Roadmap to Creative Distribution*.

Question #18: Why haven't you engaged in self-distribution (yet)? (Check top three)

This question was asked of the 23 respondents who indicated that they had not yet engaged in self-distribution in Question #3. All survey respondents were then asked to respond to the remaining survey questions.



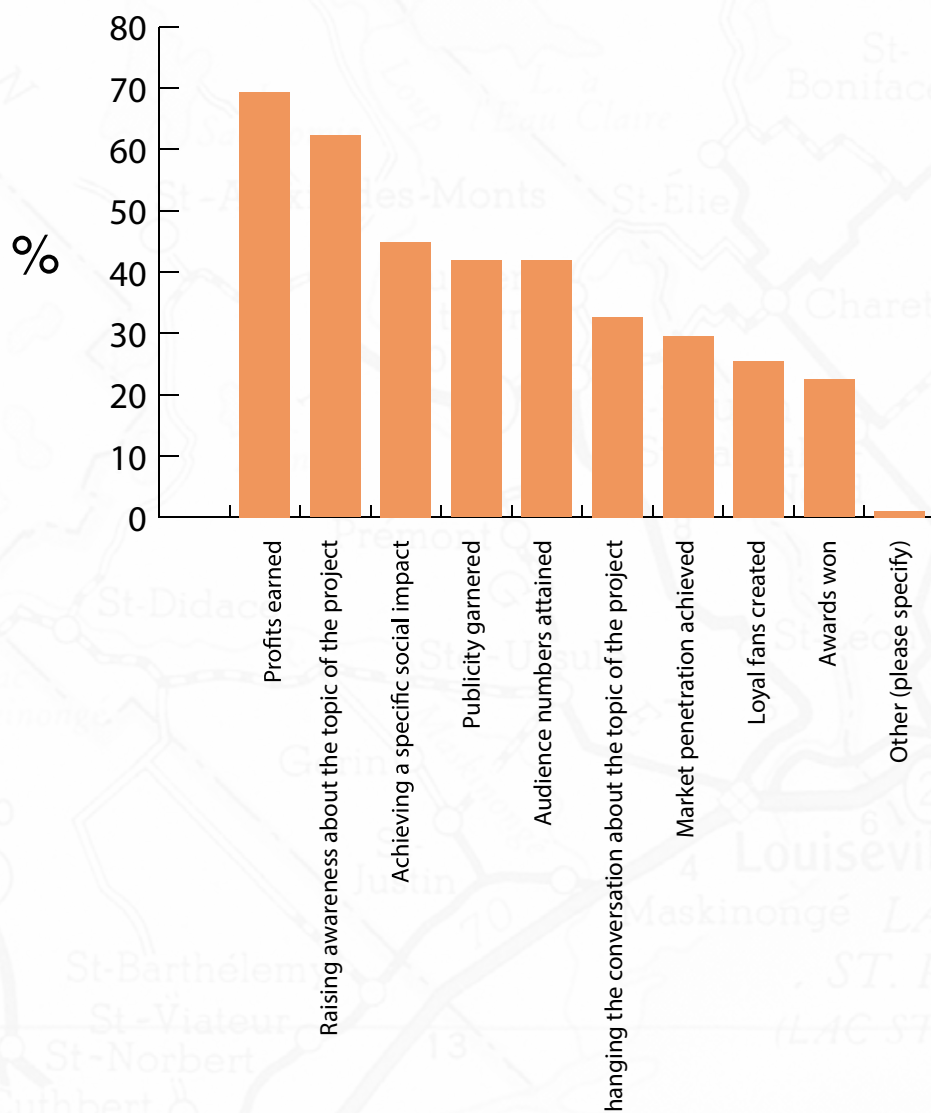
Question #19: Are you interested in engaging (or continuing to engage) in self-distribution in the future?



Question #20: What do you feel you would need to be successful at self-distribution in the future? (Check up to three responses)

| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|---|-----------|----|
| Funding for my distribution/outreach efforts | 77.55% | 76 |
| A distribution consultant | 53.06% | 52 |
| Access to a distribution collective, where I work cooperatively with other filmmakers | 44.90% | 44 |
| Training in self-distribution | 42.86% | 42 |
| Resources explaining the self-distribution process | 33.67% | 33 |
| A distribution department as a branch of my production company | 19.39% | 19 |
| Other (please specify) | 7.14% | 7 |
| Nothing—I already have everything I need to be successful | 1.02% | 1 |
| Answered | | 98 |
| Skipped | | 29 |

Question #21: How do you define success when it comes to self-distribution?



While the majority of respondents believe profits earned to be the most important indicator of success, as we have seen in Question #9, only 25% feel their work is financially successful. Therefore, *The Roadmap to Creative Distribution* was largely focused on helping documentary filmmakers to work towards increasing their self-distribution revenues.

Question #22: If you work in Canada, what are the external barriers to self-distribution that you have experienced and/or witnessed? (Check all that apply)

| Answer Choices | Responses | |
|---|-----------|----|
| Funding for distribution and marketing is not available to me as a self-distributor. | 59.18% | 58 |
| Many of the digital platforms that I would use to distribute my films do not work with small independents, or if they do, they are not very approachable. | 45.92% | 45 |
| My production funding requires me to work with traditional distributors. | 24.49% | 24 |
| The new Canadian copyright legislation makes it difficult to sell my films in the educational market. | 21.43% | 21 |
| International customs, trade regulations, and tax forms make my sales process cumbersome and difficult. | 16.33% | 16 |
| Other (please specify) | 16.33% | 16 |
| I have not experienced/witnessed any roadblocks | 11.22% | 11 |
| I do not work in Canada | 0.00% | 0 |
| Answered | | 98 |
| Skipped | | 29 |

Question #23: Who are the people or organizations whose work on self-distribution has inspired you? If possible, provide names and what makes their work inspiring.

58 filmmakers shared their thoughts on this open-ended question, many listing entities that have been featured in *The Roadmap to Creative Distribution*.

About *The Roadmap*

The Roadmap to Creative Distribution is intended as a travel guide. Drawing on the data collected in this survey, this practical and informative publication is for independent filmmakers (producers, directors, and producer/directors) who are looking to have more control over—and success with—the distribution of their films. While any indie filmmaker will find this guide to be useful and informative, *The Roadmap* pulls its lessons and best practices directly from the unique experiences of Canadian documentarians. Download the guide at: https://www.docorg.ca/roadmap_to_creative_distribution.

About DOC

The Documentary Organization of Canada / l'Association des documentaristes du Canada (DOC) is the collective voice of independent documentary makers across Canada. DOC is the premier organization for Canadian documentary advocacy, policy analysis, and insightful research. Guided by a mandate to promote and protect documentary and the people who produce them, DOC helps Canadian documentarians get their work made and seen. Our membership is comprised of over 800 Canadian documentary professionals, working from coast to coast to coast. www.docorg.ca

Executive Director:

Programming and Partnerships Coordinator:

Administration and Communications Coordinator:

Mathieu Pierre Dagonas

Dylan Freeman-Grist

Christine Ciuciura

Lian Novak



Guide Author

Author & Lead Researcher:

Chanda Chevannes

Chanda Chevannes is a Canadian documentary filmmaker, writer, and educator. She is well versed in the topic of self-distribution after successfully using a hybrid distribution model with her first feature documentary, *Living Downstream*. Chanda is an instructor at Centennial College and her writings have been published in *IndieWire*, *The Female Gaze*, and *On the Issues Magazine*. Her newest feature documentary is *UNFRACTURED*, which is currently on the festival circuit. Chanda has been an active member of DOC for more than fifteen years. www.chandachevannes.com

Guide Contributors

Design Concept

Monika Traikov

Design Layout

Linh Ngo

French Research & Proofreading

Jenny Cartwright

Research Assistance

Erika Thoen

Advisory Committee

Liz Marshall, LizMars Productions

Elisa Paloschi, Eyes Full Productions

Noemi Weis, Filmblanc

We would like to express our gratitude to all those who helped with *The Roadmap to Creative Distribution*. Thanks to the staff at DOC for their assistance in the guide's creation and promotion. In addition to the contributors above, we are thankful to all the documentary filmmakers who took the time to respond to our survey and offer their ideas, experiences, and knowledge. More than two dozen filmmakers, funders, and distribution professionals offered their time and advice to this project, including: filmmakers Ed Barreveld, Mélanie Carrier, Suzanne Crocker, Sylvain L'Espérance, Ina Fichman, Johanne Fournier, Sylvia Hamilton, George Hargrave, Joanne Jackson, Christine Kleckner, Annabel Loyola, Liz Marshall, Andrew Nisker, Elisa Paloschi, Nathalie Perreault, Noemi Weis, Brandy Yanchyk; Peter Broderick of Paradigm Consulting; Sean Farnel of SeaFar North; JoAnne Fishburn of Good Influence Films; Jonathan Skurnik of New Day Films; Erin Creasey, Sherri Hills and Ariana Moscote-Freire of Ontario Creates; and James Finlay, Carolina Bondioli, and Patrick McCrudden of Juice Worldwide. The team at Juice was helpful in offering insights into the world of digital distribution; Ontario Creates provided astute feedback and suggestions on the content of the guide; and Elisa Paloschi generously acted as a sounding board throughout the research and writing process.

Guide Funders

The Documentary Organization of Canada (DOC) is grateful to our project funders: Ontario Creates, Rogers Group of Funds, and Ring Five Impact Docs.

The opinions, findings, and recommendations expressed in this guide are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Ontario Creates, Rogers, or Ring Five. The Government of Ontario and its agencies and the funders of this guide are in no way bound by the recommendations contained in this document.

