



DSO

Disability Screen Office

ORPHÉ

Office de la représentation des
personnes handicapées à l'écran

Annual Report

April 2024 - March 2025

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Message from our Chair

What an exciting year it has been for the DSO! It was thrilling to be able to build up the organization and establish ourselves as a more powerful and enduring voice for the community of disabled creatives.

This year, we are so pleased to have brought together a great staff team to support our goal of transforming the Canadian screen industry into one that is truly inclusive and accessible. They are each talented and dynamic creatives!

With this strong team working alongside Winnie Luk, our wonderful Executive Director, we have advanced several major initiatives, including our groundbreaking research project, “Mapping Representation and Barriers to Participation by People with Disabilities in the Screen-Based Media and Broadcasting Sectors”. The data gathered from this project will be invaluable in advancing our mission and building awareness throughout the screen industry.

At the core of what we do is commitment to our cause. This is truly a collaborative, team effort, and I am so fortunate to work with a dedicated volunteer Board of Directors. Their contributions – of time, wisdom, and heart – keep us focused and moving toward our goals.

Together, we have developed an ambitious yet achievable 3-year strategic plan. We have built important partnerships. We have sharpened our advocacy efforts and deepened our community engagement.

We recognize that the current context is unpredictable and unstable. There has been a huge backlash to inclusion, diversity, equity and access efforts worldwide. This makes our work even more important. We are heartened by the commitment of our allies and partners, both within and beyond the screen industry. But most of all, we are moved and motivated by the strength and courage of our disability community. You are the heart of who we are and what we do.

Yazmine Laroche
Chair of the Board

Message from the Executive Director

Wow, what a fantastic year for the DSO! Looking back, I'm filled with deep gratitude for all we've accomplished together. We've grown our team, shaped our new mission and vision, planned our strategy for the next three years, developed our programs, continued building our presence and impact across the screen sector, and laid a strong foundation for the work ahead.

We achieved all of this during a time when Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) initiatives have been under threat around the world. Despite these challenges, we secured funding for our programs and have already seen the influence and impact of our mission and work across the industry. We're seeing real changes across the sector, and each step has brought us closer to the inclusive and accessible future we're working toward.

I would like to thank our incredible partners and funders for all their support. You have played an essential role in helping us move forward, and none of this would have been possible without you. I am also grateful to our dedicated Board of Directors—Yazmine Laroche, Sasha Boersma, Prasanna Ranganathan, Rachel Desjourdy, Rayhan Azmat, Anna-Karina Tabuñar, and Ken Fredeen—for their steady guidance and thoughtful leadership. A heartfelt thank you as well to Alethea, Elspeth, and Kássia for being such a dedicated, collaborative team. Your creativity and shared commitment to our mission have made this work both impactful and joyful.

To the disabled creatives at the heart of our work: your voices, vision, and leadership continue to shape everything we do. Your impact is already being felt, and we're honoured to amplify it.

Winnie Luk
Executive Director

Disability Representation

The Ruderman Family Foundation, in collaboration with the Geena Davis Institute, [analyzed disability representation in 350 scripted TV series from 2016 to 2023](#). The study reveals that nearly 80% of characters with disabilities are inauthentically cast, with overall representation remaining disproportionately low at just 3.9%, despite nearly 30% of the U.S. population having a disability. Additionally, disability representation lacks diversity, with most characters portrayed as white.

Although the study focuses on the U.S. industry, the situation in Canada is not different. As of 2022, 27% of Canadians aged 15 and older live with one or more disabilities. Yet, this significant portion of the population remains vastly underrepresented in the Canadian TV and film industry.

The DSO is working to change that. This annual report details how we worked towards that goal in 2024-25.

“The DSO is crucial in nurturing the voices of creatives and crew with disabilities. The DSO sees the need for folks with disabilities to have a voice in the entertainment industry... The DSO must be supported to continue its mission of supporting and giving a voice to an otherwise underrepresented group”.

- Sean Towgood (*You're My Hero*), 2024 TIFF/DSO Panelist

Our Vision

An accessible and inclusive Canadian screen industry where disabled creatives thrive.

Our Mission

Develop opportunities for disabled creatives and advocate for a more accessible Canadian screen industry.

Our Goals

1. **Build** relationships with and foster connections among disabled creatives working and aspiring to work in the screen industry.
2. **Influence** those working in every stage of content production to remove barriers and create opportunities for disabled creatives.
3. **Advocate** for policies that support disabled creatives in the screen industry.
4. **Ensure** the long-term success of the Disability Screen Office for disabled creatives.

Our Story

In 2021, confronted with the challenges the disability community was facing in the Canadian screen industry, Accessible Media Inc. (AMI) brought together creators, writers, directors, and performers for a series of roundtable discussions. Their goal was to identify the barriers preventing equal access and authentic representation in the industry, and propose solutions to increase accessibility.

It became clear that no single policy or program could solve all the problems, so an idea started to take shape. What if there was an organization dedicated to breaking down those barriers and amplifying the voices of Canadians with disabilities in the screen industry?

Officially announced in April 2022, the Disability Screen Office was launched through a collaborative effort led by AMI with financial support from Telefilm Canada and the Canada Media Fund (CMF). The not-for-profit began its operations under the interim leadership of Andrew Morris and founding board members Yazmine Laroche, Sasha Boersma, Kenneth J. Fredeen, and Prasanna Ranganathan. It officially launched as a fully independent organization on December 3, 2022, the International Day of People with Disabilities, and, in June 2023, Winnie Luk was appointed as DSO's inaugural Executive Director.

Founding Partners: AMI, Telefilm and Canada Media Fund.

Board of Directors

Yazmine Laroche - Chair

Kenneth Fredeen - Secretary

Rayhan Azmat - Treasurer

Sasha Boersma - Director

Rachel Desjourdy - Director

Prasanna Ranganathan - Director

Anna-Karina Tabuñar - Director

Management and Staff

Winnie Luk - Executive Director

Alethea Bakogeorge - Director of Programs and Development

Elsbeth Arbow - Executive Assistant/Operations Manager

Kássia Neves - Communications Manager

DSO Highlights

Team Expansion

In 2024, our staff grew from one to four! The DSO welcomed Alethea Bakogeorge - Director of Programs and Development, Elspeth Arbow - Executive Assistant/Operations Manager, and Kássia Neves - Communications Manager. Their hard work helped us advance our programs, create internal workflows and policies, and establish a more robust online presence.

Annual General Meeting (AGM)

September 25, 2024, marked a major milestone for the Disability Screen Office, as we held our first online Annual General Meeting.

Strategic Planning Session

On October 24 and 25, 2024, the DSO Board of Directors and full staff team met in person for the first time, coming together at the Deloitte Greenhouse in Toronto for a strategic planning session focused on the future of the DSO. Over the course of two days, we shaped the DSO's new mission, vision, and strategic priorities for the next three years. The team had invaluable time to connect, share insights, and engage in invigorating and thoughtful conversations. We're deeply grateful to Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) for making this gathering possible through their generous support, and to Deloitte for their outstanding partnership in facilitating, supporting, and hosting the event.

Accountability

In December 2024, we published our first-ever annual report, reflecting on our inaugural fiscal year as an independent organization. The accessible PDF is available [on our website](#).

Advocacy Impact

We are already starting to see the results of the DSO's advocacy work. In a significant move toward greater accessibility, [the Canada Media Fund \(CMF\) has introduced a new requirement in its 2025 guidelines](#): all production projects with budgets over \$500,000 must now include Described Video to qualify for funding. This requirement reflects priorities the DSO has consistently advocated for.

This follows the CMF's 2024 launch of its ["All In" Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility \(EDIA\) Strategy](#), which firmly positions accessibility as a core pillar of CMF's vision for the sector. We applaud the CMF for taking these important steps toward a more inclusive and accessible screen industry!

New website and social media presence

In the past fiscal year, we expanded our social media presence to two new platforms: [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). In March 2025, our highly anticipated new website was launched. At dso-orphe.ca, our community is invited to learn about our mission, vision, strategic objectives,

and the story behind our organization; explore our programs; keep up with our latest news, events, and updates; and learn how you can support and partner with us.

Events

The DSO presented at several high-profile events in 2024–25, including the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), Banff World Media Festival (BANFF), Vancouver International Film Festival (VIFF), East by Northwest (EXNW), Prime Time, and Berlinale / European Film Market (EFM). These opportunities allowed us to share our work, advocate for accessibility and inclusion, and connect directly with industry leaders and creators across Canada and internationally.

We also participated in a wide range of key industry events, such as Content Canada, the Atlantic International Film Festival (AIFF), Reelworld Summit, Festival International du Cinéma Adapté de Montréal (FICAM), Festival du Nouveau Cinéma (FNC), ReelAsian, and the Black Screen Office (BSO) Symposium, among others. What a wonderful time to learn and collaborate with our industry friends!

Delegations

With support from Warner Bros. Discovery Access Canada, we were happy to bring a delegation to the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) and Content Canada in September 2024. Thanks to the support of the Canadian Media Producers Association (CMPA), in January 2025, we brought a delegation of three disabled industry professionals to the Prime Time Conference in Ottawa. Opportunities like these are essential for learning, networking, pitching, and building relationships. Ensuring disabled creatives have access to these spaces is central to our mission.

“Thank you so much for an incredible experience. It was an absolute pleasure to have been invited to this and get to be amongst such inspiring people”.

- Alicia Grace Chenier, 2025 Prime Time Delegation member

Industry and Community Partnerships

The DSO acted as a partner and consultant to the CBC program [AccessCBC 2.0](#), an initiative supporting Deaf and disabled creators with training and mentorship for scripted, unscripted, and kids' screen-based content. In partnership with the National Screen Institute and Women in View, we also supported the first-ever [Disabled Producers Lab](#) to foster the growth of disabled producers marginalized by gender. Additionally, our work with [Coalition M.É.D.I.A.](#) on the “Mapping Representation and Barriers to Participation” program enhanced our outreach in Quebec, helping us connect with the Francophone disability community.

Media Coverage

The DSO was featured in various media outlets throughout the year. Visit [DSO in the News](#) on our website to read the main stories.

For more details on what we've been up to, check out [our previous newsletters](#). Don't forget to sign up!

Program Developments

1) [Mapping Representation and Barriers to Participation by People with Disabilities in the Screen-Based Media and Broadcasting Sectors](#)

The DSO is leading Canada's first-ever study on the participation of people with disabilities in the Canadian screen sector and the barriers they face in the labour force. This multi-year initiative will result in a research report and a foundational best practices guide outlining standards and guidelines for disability representation in the industry.

As part of this project, in the 2024-2025 fiscal year, the DSO has partnered with Québec-based equity organization Coalition M.É.D.I.A and continued to employ creative industries research firm Nordicity to launch [Canada's Screen Industry Survey on Disability](#). Preliminary results and the Best Practices Guide to Disability Engagement in the Canadian Film and Television Industry are expected to be published in early 2026.

Supported by: Accessibility Standards Canada, the Canada Media Fund, Shaw Rocket Fund, Ontario Creates, Creative BC, Bell Fund and Picture NL.

"It's been a privilege to work with the DSO and the rest of the Research Project Working Group on such an important project, which is the first of its kind in this country. Disabled people have many stories to tell, both in front of and behind the camera. I'm glad we're getting an opportunity to bring these experiences to the fore."

— Kaila Hunte, Research Project Working Group committee member

2) [Industry Resource Hub](#)

In 2025, the DSO is launching the Industry Resource Hub (or the Hub, for short), a robust online database to centralize accessibility and disability-related resources for professionals and new entrants alike in the Canadian screen industry. In the past fiscal year, we engaged two researchers to collect data on these resources from across the country and internationally, and six volunteers for the Industry Resource Hub Advisory Committee, which provides guidance on the development of our project.

Submissions for the Hub are open through [this form](#).

Supported by: Canada Media Fund, Ontario Creates, Shaw Rocket Fund, Creative BC, and Picture NL.

3) [Screen Festival Accessibility Program](#)

Festivals are a cornerstone of the Canadian screen industry; however, there are currently no established national standards for the accessibility of these events. The Screen Festival Accessibility Program is a multi-year initiative by the DSO to develop, pilot, and refine these standards across the country.

The Banff World Media Festival (BANFF) and the Vancouver International Film Festival (VIFF) joined us in 2024-25 to pilot this program, which will now also include the Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival and the Reelworld Film Festival.

In February 2025, we recruited six volunteers for the Screen Festival Accessibility Program Advisory Committee. They are helping us refine festival standards through community engagement, research, the future publication of a best practices guide specific to the film festival and events environment, and the development of two frameworks for festival accessibility. One will help festivals measure the results and impact of their accessibility initiatives, while another will support funders in evaluating the impact of proposed accessibility measures at festivals and events that receive funding.

Supported by: Telefilm Canada.

Partner festivals in 2024-25: VIFF and BANFF.

4) [Accessibility and Disability e-Learning Series \(ADLS\)](#)

In 2024-25, we began developing our newest program, the Accessibility and Disability e-Learning Series (ADLS), a foundational-level e-learning program designed to help industry stakeholders understand and comply with federal and provincial accessibility legislation and regulations specific to the Canadian screen industry.

By the end of the e-learning series, participants will have learned how to identify common barriers that prevent people with disabilities from thriving within the sector, as well as how to apply industry-leading best practices to remove those barriers. Launching in spring 2026, the ADLS will also equip learners with tools to assess and improve their own practices in all areas of production, enabling them to identify changes that can lead to improved disability inclusion.

Supported by: Canada Media Fund, Ontario Creates, Creative BC, Bell Fund, and City of Toronto.

DSO by the Numbers

As a developing organization, we are proud to share the growth of the DSO over the course of the last fiscal year.

Budget Growth: 365% to \$1.8 million

The growth of our budget represents the cross-country and industry-wide excitement there is for our work as partners and funders join us to make Canada's screen industry more accessible.

61% of this amount will be deferred to the 2025-26 fiscal year to support the ongoing launch of our programs and to ensure that the DSO continues to be able to offer high-quality opportunities and training to the disability community for years to come.

Amount paid directly to disability community: \$390,927.96

The DSO is committed to engaging disabled creatives in our work wherever possible and ensuring they are compensated fairly. These numbers include DSO staff, independent contractors who work with the DSO on a project basis, and disabled creatives who were paid for their participation in our programs.

Number of disabled creatives paid: 29

Number of applicants to participate in our programs, committees, and roles: 350

Whether it's bringing on disabled creatives as part of our advisory committees, in contract roles to support our programs, or connecting them to new opportunities as part of a DSO delegation, we're thrilled that the number of individuals we can support continues to grow year over year.

Number of opportunities for disability community created via our programs: 21

However, our work continues! The amount of interest the DSO has in our programs, committees, and roles indicates that disabled people are ready, willing, and able to make meaningful contributions to our screen industry. While we are scaling our programs in 2025-26 and beyond to try to provide as many opportunities for disabled creatives as possible, we look forward to working hand in hand with our partners across the country to ensure that this demand is being met not only by the DSO, but by screen industry organizations coast to coast.

Financial Summary

Revenue

- Industry Funding - 81%
- Government Funding - 17%
- Consulting - 1%
- Investment - 1%

Total Revenue: 710,587.61

Allocation of Expenses

- Personnel - 56%
- Programming - 27%
- Conference and community Outreach - 14%
- Office & administration - 4%

Total investments: \$662,468.71

Partnerships & Support

Everything we've accomplished this year has been fueled by the generous support of our funders and partners. Your belief in our mission and commitment to a more inclusive screen industry has helped us grow, take bold steps, and build meaningful opportunities for disabled creatives across the country. We're deeply grateful for your continued partnership and look forward to what we can achieve together in the year ahead.

Organization Supporters

- Telefilm Canada
- Employment & Social Development Canada
- Accessible Media Inc. (AMI)
- Canadian Media Producers Association (CMPA)
- KM Hunter Foundation
- Writers Guild of Canada (WGC)
- ACTRA
- IATSE 891

Program Supporters

- Accessibility Standards Canada
- Canada Media Fund
- Ontario Creates
- Shaw Rocket Fund
- Warner Bros. Discovery Access Canada
- Creative BC
- Bell Fund
- Picture NL
- City of Toronto

Looking Ahead

The 2024–25 fiscal year was a turning point for the DSO. With a strong foundation now in place, we're ready to build on the progress we've made and move into a phase of deeper engagement with our wonderful community.

In the year ahead, we'll continue to focus on growing responsibly, strengthening relationships across the industry, and ensuring our work stays rooted in the needs and leadership of disabled creatives.

We're excited to see our programs beginning to benefit the disabled creatives at the very core of our mission. Stay tuned, the future is promising!

Follow the DSO on Social Media:

- [Instagram \(EN\)](#)
- [Instagram \(FR\)](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [YouTube](#)