Protecting our children and showcasing Canadian kids' content at home and abroad

Ensuring Canada's post-pandemic recovery reflects the needs of children

Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2021 Budget

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Support and invest in online safety measures for children.

Recommendation 2

Ensure that the needs of children and youth are taken into account when financial assistance programs and related policy or program strategies, such as broadcasting regulations, are being developed.

Recommendation 3

Establish an Economic Strategy Table on Creative Industries to support post-pandemic economic recovery.

Introduction

On behalf of the Shaw Rocket Fund, we are pleased to submit to the House of Commons Finance Committee's Budget 2021 consultation process. Our submission proposes practical, affordable and necessary public policy recommendations that protect our children, showcase Canada's exceptional Canadian children's audiovisual and digital content seen both at home and abroad and ensure Canada's post-pandemic recovery reflects the needs of Canadian children and youth.

About the Shaw Rocket Fund

The Shaw Rocket Fund helps drive the creation of robust world leading Canadian children's content on all platforms by supporting content creators to ensure their programs reach kids at home and abroad. Since the Shaw Rocket Fund was established more than 20 years ago, we have invested more than $247 million into 1,007 Canadian-made audio-visual and digital media programs for children, youth and families. We support programming in both official languages, as well as Indigenous and various minority languages, on all platforms that air Canadian children's and youth programming.

The Shaw Rocket Fund, a true equity fund within a not-for-profit framework, represents an innovation-based model of social enterprise. By making strategic investments with the goal of reinvesting returns to benefit the wider children's production sector, we're able to help grow the creative industries and contribute to Canada's economy.

Today, the Shaw Rocket Fund develops strategic global partnerships to support producers while helping drive the discoverability of Canadian content for children and youth. The Shaw Rocket Fund successfully invests in children's programming that reflects the diversity of Canadian kids and tells their stories, for example, *The Breadwinner, Dino Dana, 16 Hudson, Wild Kratts* and *Indian Horse* among many others.

The Shaw Rocket Fund has consistently helped raise awareness of the importance of kids' media globally from a Canadian point of view. Examples include being the inaugural partner for the International Emmy Kids Awards, representing Canada (NYC, 2012); creating an innovative workshop for industry executives: The Future of Kids TV Summit in conjunction with MIPTV (Cannes, 2014); contributing to University of Westminster CAMRI's Policy Solutions and International Perspectives on the

Funding of Public Service Media Content for Children (UK, 2016); representing Canada at a roundtable hosted by the Duchess of Cambridge at the Children's Global Media Summit (Manchester, 2017); and spearheading an international conversation on the media industry's role in cyber-bullying prevention (Cannes, 2018).

In a post-pandemic world, Canada can showcase our leadership in children's programming on the world stage to help meet the government's export and discoverability objectives. The Shaw Rocket Fund looks forward to working with the government to leverage this expertise and continue to find ways to highlight and capitalize on the competitive edge Canada has in the children's programming sector.

Protecting children online

The past few months have shown just how vital it is for governments to take online safety for children seriously. While the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the increased value of media content for children from both an educational and entertainment perspective, it has also exposed many of the risks for children in an online world and why greater support from the government is needed.

We're proud of the Rocket Online Safety Program which was launched in September 2018. This program ensures that all Canadian digital content receiving Shaw Rocket Fund investment be certified based on established online safety and/or privacy standards through the kidSAFE Seal Program, an independent safety certification service designed exclusively for children-friendly technologies. Online game sites, educational services, virtual worlds, social networks, mobile apps, tablet devices, connected toys, and other similar online and interactive services are all eligible for this program. Understanding the importance of online safety for our children, we have made this certification program available for all Canadian-made kids' digital content even without Rocket Fund investment. Through the Rocket Online Safety Program, Shaw Rocket Fund finances 100 per cent of the cost of kidSAFE Seal Certification, demonstrating our commitment to supporting producers in an evolving digital environment. A safe online environment for kids is paramount.

We urge the federal government to work with industry partners to continue to ensure children are protected online. This will be especially important in a post-COVID-19 world that will increasingly be online, working from home and where e-learning becomes the new normal. As a world leader in children's programming, Canada must also be a world leading protector of children online. We urge the federal government to work with us to ensure Canada has a robust and comprehensive system in place

to protect children. This will be especially critical as international standards emerge around the world.

Recommendation 1: Support and invest in online safety measures for children.

Ensuring the voices of Canadian children and youth are reflected in public policy, programming

Canadian children and youth, Gen Z (born 1996 to 2011) and Gen Alpha (born 2010 to 2025), make up close to 21 per cent of Canada's population (18 and under). The children's production community in Canada alone serves millions. Gen Z are avid consumers of media and goods and make up 40% of all consumers today.[1] However, children's and youth voices are rarely part of any formal proceedings when it comes to the sector. Canadian children and youth have access to global programming on demand, making it more important than ever to ensure they have quality Canadian-made programming. A 2018 Pew study showed that 85% of teens use YouTube and according to Google (which owns YouTube), they are using it to gain knowledge or learn skills. Seven out of 10 Gen Zers said watching videos with others helps them feel more connected.[2] And this was prior to the pandemic. During a time where media consumption is at an all-time high, this demonstrates that young people are streaming content online and on demand. Cisco estimated in 2019 that video would account for 82% of internet traffic globally by 2022, pre-pandemic.

The shift to online has accelerated as a result of the pandemic, both out of necessity and convenience. Dubit research reports that platforms or content engaging children as emerging citizens will become stronger as will non-fiction storytelling, news and information offered at appropriate age levels.[3] The importance of providing our children with Canadian-made media content while always important, is even more so today.

And yet, Canadian broadcasters have significantly reduced their commissioning of original Canadian children's content over the past three years. This has created challenges for producers to finance their productions within Canada resulting in the producer's inability to access Canada Media Fund contributions which are triggered

[1] The Key To Gen Z Is Video Content, FORBES, July 3, 2019
[2] The Key To Gen Z Is Video Content, FORBES, July 3, 2019
[3] Kids and Media In The Time Of Corona, CMA YMA Webinar, May 21, 2020

by Canadian broadcasters and require licence fee thresholds that many broadcasters can no longer meet. As a result, many production companies that are dedicated to children's content did not qualify for COVID-19 emergency funding and the continued reduction in the creation of original Canadian-made programming for our children will surely be seen over the next three years.

We urge the federal government to look at various ways to modernize its role in supporting children and youth screen-based content, including ensuring that a dedicated review of children's media programming is taken into account when financial assistance programs and related strategies, such as broadcasting regulations, are being developed. The future of children's media is integral to Canada's recovery and growth in a post-pandemic economy. Children's voices must be reflected in public policy.

Recommendation 2: Ensure that children and youth programming are taken into account when financial assistance programs and related strategies, such as broadcasting regulations, are being developed.

Supporting the creative industries through an Economic Strategy Table

In Canada, we do not specifically acknowledge the special place for children's content and the value of Canadian stories for our young people and it is our desire that future policy establishes children's content as a priority throughout the entire media sector.

Governments around the world – including provincial governments across Canada – are increasingly recognizing the economic might and growth opportunities within the creative industries sectors. Indeed, Canada's creative industries drive job creation and economic growth in every region of the country much like other leading sectors of the Canadian economy.

Creating an Economic Strategy Table for the Creative Industries would be a low-cost and high-reward initiative for the Government of Canada. It would show businesses and organizations in Canada's creative industries that the Government of Canada supports the sector and is committed to helping it unlock its full innovative potential, produce world-class content and share its creative works both at home and abroad. This will be especially important in the months ahead for post-pandemic economic recovery.

An Economic Strategy Table on Creative Industries would ensure all stakeholders are working together to identify opportunities, discuss challenges and other barriers to growth and what solutions and supports government partners can provide, including for children's programming. Bringing together industry leaders, private and public sector representatives and other partners would help unlock the potential of Canada's creative industries and support economic recovery.

We urge the Government of Canada to follow and implement the recommendation of its own Economic Strategy Tables on Digital Industries: "To fully capture the potential of Canadian creative firms, we recommend the creation of a dedicated creative industries forum as a next step."

Establishing an Economic Strategy Table on Creative Industries will advance and spur innovation in this vital, fast-growing Canadian industry to better harness its innovation potential and unlock its global competitiveness.

Recommendation 3: Establish an Economic Strategy Table on Creative Industries to support post-pandemic economic recovery.

Conclusion

We believe that with Canadian children and youth representing approximately 21 per cent of Canada's population, it's imperative that the government develops policies that ensure Canadian children and youth have continued access to engaging Canadian-made media. While always important, it is even more so today.

The Shaw Rocket Fund is dedicated to the ongoing sustainability of this special sector of the media industry. We believe we have a collective responsibility to ensure that Canadian children continue to experience Canadian stories – their stories – and that the creation of original Canadian children's content is not lost during this time of incredible change within the Canadian broadcasting sector and during this pandemic. Canadian kids' content must be a priority within our economic recovery strategy – for the benefit of our children who must have access today and for the sector that contributes to Canada's export goals.