



FESTIVAL ARTISTIC POLICY

Effective as of October 2025

imagineNATIVE is the world's largest presenter of Indigenous screen content. The organization is recognized locally, nationally, and internationally for excellence and innovation in programming and as the global centre for Indigenous media arts. imagineNATIVE is committed to creating a greater understanding of Indigenous peoples and cultures by presenting contemporary Indigenous-made media art, including film, video, audio, and digital media.

We are an Indigenous-led organization located on the territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee, and the Huron-Wendat nations. We acknowledge the Dish With One Spoon covenant. Based on collective stewardship, this treaty's spirit and sharing of land and resources extend to all nations living in present-day Toronto.

The imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival is the world's largest Indigenous Festival of its kind. The Festival is imagineNATIVE's primary event hosted annually every October in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. At our Festival, we present Artistic and Industry programming showcasing Film + Video, Digital + Interactive, and Audio media work created by Indigenous artists (directors, producers, writers, designers) at all levels of experience.

Artistic programming consists of works selected through our general Call for Submissions, guest-curated programs, partnership exhibitions, and special curated initiatives.

The **Festival Artistic Policy** comprises the guiding principles that ground the eligibility and process of selecting the works for the Festival. The policy is a living document, and continually evolves to reflect the community of Indigenous artists we serve. The policy is reviewed annually by imagineNATIVE's Artistic Director and approved by the Executive Director and Board of Directors.



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GUIDING PRINCIPLES

imagineNATIVE presents new and innovative film, video, audio, and digital media works. This mandate guides our programming and initiatives towards reaffirming concepts of Indigenous narrative sovereignty.

As an Indigenous-led and Indigenous artist-centred organization, we support the artistic visions and perspectives of Indigenous artists working in film and media arts in an inclusive and professional manner. As identified in our mission statement, we are committed to a greater understanding by audiences of Indigenous peoples, cultures, and artistic expressions. Works are therefore not required to have overt Indigenous content or themes, and can be productions made at all budget levels. We strive to represent a variety of ideas, themes, and genres, in addition to a diversity of Indigenous languages, nations, and cultures.

EQUITY

imagineNATIVE acknowledges that barriers to services exist within Indigenous communities, particularly for equity-seeking members. We are committed to acting as a positive force in reducing and eliminating these barriers. To achieve this, and as stated in our Equity Policy, imagineNATIVE will:

- Ensure that diverse members of the Indigenous communities it serves have equitable access to its services, resources, and decision-making;
- Be non-discriminatory and promote the goals of anti-racism, access, and equity;
- Take reasonable steps to ensure its services, programs, and decision-making reflect the communities it serves. This decision-making is never done individually and is a consensus process.

CARE

imagineNATIVE adheres to a [Code of Conduct](#) and strongly encourages all programmed artists, staff, contract employees, volunteers, and guests to read and respect it.



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imagineNATIVE supports the uncensored artistic visions of Indigenous artists while acknowledging that some of the work we present can be triggering. As part of our commitment to audience care, imagineNATIVE offers Indigenous health support workers for any individual who requests to meet with them throughout the Festival.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

PROCESS

imagineNATIVE is committed to a fair and democratic selection process.

Our public Call for Submissions opens on **October 1, 2025** and closes on **January 9, 2026**. The fields of practice we accept for the Call for Submissions are Film + Video, Digital + Interactive, and Audio created by Indigenous artists. All submissions that meet eligibility requirements outlined below are presented to and considered by the Programming Selection Committee associated with that field of practice. Programming Selection Committees are invited Indigenous members of the film and media arts milieu who are recognized as experts, as well as reflective and knowledgeable of our Indigenous communities. Programming Selection Committees are supported by imagineNATIVE's Artistic Director and Program Manager, either as Committee members or administrators respectively. The Programming Selection Committees provide additional perspectives on individual titles, overarching themes, and programming structures that push the boundaries of innovative programming. imagineNATIVE will announce the Programming Selection Committee shortly after the Call for Submissions closes.

ELIGIBILITY

Film + Video (e.g. episodic series for web and television, music videos)

- The director must be Indigenous;
- The writer or key producer must also be Indigenous, or both;
- Joint creative positions (co-director, co-writer, co-producer) may be considered by the imagineNATIVE Artistic Director with additional requirements to clarify creative and decision-making processes.



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Digital + Interactive (e.g. video games, VR, 360, AR, web-based experiences)

- The lead creative (director/writer/lead programmer/lead designer, etc) must be Indigenous;
- Joint creative positions (co-lead designer, co-narrative designer, co-lead programmer) may be considered by the imagineNATIVE Artistic Director with additional requirements to clarify creative and decision-making processes.

Audio

Sound Art + Fiction Category

(e.g. soundscapes, audio art, radio plays, narrative podcasts, etc)

- The lead creative must be Indigenous;
- For radio plays and narrative (fiction) podcasts, the producer and writer must be Indigenous.
- Joint creative positions (co-collaborator, co-designer) may be considered by the imagineNATIVE Artistic Director with additional requirements to clarify creative and decision-making processes.

Audio Non-Fiction Category

(e.g. non-fiction podcasts, documentary podcasts)

- The lead creative (producer/host) must be Indigenous;
- Joint creative positions (co-producer, co-host) may be considered by the imagineNATIVE Festival Director with additional requirements to clarify creative and decision-making processes.

All other roles — including the executive producer, associate producer, or any individual credited as an advisor or consultant — do NOT fulfill eligibility requirements for consideration for any of our submission categories.

We understand that in some cases, an Indigenous person may not know their nation or community due to the impacts of colonial or assimilationist practices. With the intent of gaining a better understanding of these realities, we welcome your submission and ask that you articulate your truth.



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In the interest of upholding our mandate's integrity to support Indigenous Artists, imagineNATIVE reserves the right to inquire further about any submissions concerning eligibility.

CRITERIA

Premiere Status

A premiere is the first public presentation of a film. A work will often have many premieres: a world premiere, international premiere, national premiere, continental premiere, and regional premieres.

A premiere status of any kind is not a requirement. Due to submission volumes and the limitation of screening slots, programmers may choose to prioritize work by an Indigenous filmmaker that has not yet had the opportunity of a public presentation at another festival or via other media.

Production Year

We will be accepting work completed on or after January 1, 2024, meaning films and videos whose production years are 2024, 2025, and 2026 are all eligible for the 2026 imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival. Works with all other production years are not eligible for the Festival. They are still eligible for year-round initiatives or special programs, such as retrospectives or guest-curated programs, as determined by the imagineNATIVE Festival Director and guest curators.

Live Action Short Films accepted into our Festival are automatically considered for our Live Action Short Award, which counts toward consideration for the Academy Awards. To be eligible for this award at the 2026 Festival, live action short films **must be completed on or after October 1, 2025.**

Language

The Festival presents to a primarily English-speaking audience. Non-English language works with dialogue must have English closed-captioning to be eligible.



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As an exception, closed-captioning is not necessary if the Artist intends to present the film or piece therein in the original language version without English subtitles for artistic or cultural reasons. If applicable, specify in the submission form.

Please note, imagineNATIVE has an ongoing commitment to reducing barriers and increasing accessibility. As part of this commitment, we strive to provide closed captioning for all of our programming. Artists will be required to work with the Programming team to facilitate closed captioning.

Film + Video

The Programming Selection Committee may prioritize Film + Video works not permanently and publicly accessible for viewing via the Internet, subscription/video-on-demand (S/VOD) outlets, other media service providers, or distribution channels.

Film + Video works screened at other festivals are eligible regardless of location. Film + Video works broadcast on television outside of Canada are accepted. Priority may be given to works that have not yet had a Festival screening in Toronto or broadcast on television nationally in Canada, provincially in Ontario, or locally in Toronto. Film + Video submissions are subject to the two-year production criteria.

Music Videos

Music videos are eligible for submission to the Festival, regardless of their Canadian broadcast status. We recognize that media strategies for music videos require the release of video content publically. Music video submissions are subject to the three-year production criteria.

Episodics

Episodic films and television series of any length, as well as dramatic and documentary episodic web series are eligible. *Showrunners do not have to be Indigenous, however at least 50% of the Directors or Writers or Producers have to be Indigenous.*

Eligible projects must have at least 50% Indigenous Key Creatives. For the purposes of this submission, "Key Creatives" includes Showrunners, Producers, Directors and



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Writers. This eligibility applies to only individual submitted episode credits, as opposed to full series credits.

However, consideration will be given to the works' domestic and international broadcast status and licensing. Works that have been broadcast or have a broadcast license in Canada (which have or will have the support and opportunity to reach a public audience either locally, provincially, or nationally in advance of the Festival) are evaluated on a case-by-case basis by the imagineNATIVE Programming team. Television pilots that have not yet been aired before the Festival and do not have a confirmed broadcast date are eligible. Television submissions are subject to the three-year production criteria.

Other episodic television series such as news reports, extended reportage, television magazine formats, and information programming or segments (such as PSAs) are not eligible.

Web Series

Web series (episodic shows independent of broadcast licensing, and not available online before the Festival in Canada) are eligible for Festival programming inclusion. Web series are subject to the three-year production criteria.

Digital + Interactive

Digital + Interactive media works are eligible for consideration regardless of prior exhibitions in galleries, presentations, or online. These include artistically based work on all digital platforms and devices; work does not need to be presented exclusively for cinema or monitor screens. Digital + Interactive work is subject to the three-year production criteria.

Digital works are projects that have no interaction (360 Video, static VR, etc), or only as much interaction as a modern website.

Interactive works are projects that have more interaction or player input than an average website (video game, choose-your-own-adventure experience, VR game, etc).



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Audio

The Festival separates Audio works into **Audio Art + Fiction** and **Audio Non-Fiction**. We recognize that audio-based pieces are broad and multi-faceted. We support their inclusion in the Festival as audio remains a vital medium of communication, entertainment, and artistry for Indigenous people and communities.

Audio Art + Fiction includes, but is not limited to soundscapes, sound art, radio plays, narrative (fiction-based) storytelling, fiction audiobooks, and narrative (fiction-based) podcasts.

Audio Non-Fiction encompasses works that include, but are not limited to non-fiction podcasts, documentary podcasts, non-fiction storytelling, and non-fiction audiobooks. News reports, extended reportage, and information programming or segments (such as PSAs) are not eligible.

Works made for radio broadcasts submitted to the Festival are eligible regardless of their broadcast status or availability. All productions in both categories are subject to the three-year production criteria.

Installation

Installation works are not accepted as regular submissions but are selected through a project-based curatorial initiative at the Festival, instigated and solicited by imagineNATIVE.

Awards

With the exception of our Audience Choice awards, the annual imagineNATIVE Awards are adjudicated by independent juries at arm's length from the organization and are determined by consensus. The juries consist of industry and community peers, with the majority being Indigenous. All of the works selected and programmed from the Call for Submissions are presented to the juries to determine award recipients, based on excellence and each category's respective criteria. The Awards support innovation in form and content: works which contribute to new aesthetic languages and that contain unique ways of telling stories, specifically from Indigenous perspectives. Award recipients receive a gift of commemoration, as well as cash and in-kind prizes through partnerships with sponsors and stakeholders.



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ARTISTIC PROGRAMMING

GUEST-CURATED PROGRAMS

On an annual basis, the Festival Director invites guest curators to program a film/video screening. They work directly with the Festival Director to determine overarching themes. Programs may consist of a series of films, a panel discussion, and an essay. Curators and artists must be Indigenous and the work can be outside of the Call for Submissions production dates. The imagineNATIVE strategic plan guides priorities for artistic programming.

PARTNERSHIP EXHIBITIONS

The Festival Director collaborates with local artist-run centres in Toronto to present Indigenous exhibitions, both group and solo. Exhibition themes are led by each organization in collaboration with imagineNATIVE. Curators and artists must be Indigenous and the work can be outside the Call for Submissions production dates. Partnership Exhibitions are included in the annual Art Crawl and consist of artist exhibitions, artist talks, essays, and screenings.

ONLINE VIEWING

imagineNATIVE will be hosting all screen-based and audio works online from June 8th - 14th, 2026 as part of the digital presentation of the Festival. This online platform will be made available primarily to Festival pass holders. The space may be accessed by Festival programmers, broadcasters, curators, and buyers by request for the purposes of creating opportunities for acquisition and presentation.

SPECIAL INITIATIVES

Special initiatives presented during the Festival are curated by imagineNATIVE staff and independent curators. The work presented must be made by an Indigenous artist and can be outside the Call for Submissions production dates.



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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

imagineNATIVE supports Indigenous artists' work, including those who give their time, insight, and talent as Board members, staff, contractors, and volunteers.

The Indigenous film and media arts community is a small one. We value Indigenous artistic practices and representation within our organization. We cannot disadvantage Indigenous artists who give their time to imagineNATIVE by excluding them from Festival presentation opportunities or awards.

These artists are eligible to submit their work to the Festival. They are not present for programming discussions and decisions about their work, nor do they have input into the scheduling. These artists are also eligible for the annual imagineNATIVE Awards, as they are adjudicated by independent juries at arm's length from the organization and adhere to a consensus decision-making process.

NOTE FROM THE PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE

We, the Programming Committee, composed of peers and imagineNATIVE staff, appreciate the dedication of all the artists who feel that their work complements the artistic mandate, vision, and imagineNATIVE's Artistic Policy. The process of programming the Festival is very involved and challenging. The selection process is composed of a Programming Committee that considers and prioritizes work through a consensus decision-making process.

With considerable thought and deliberation of our eligibility terms, the programming considerations include but are not limited to:

- A balance of unique and new perspectives expressed within the content of the work;
- A cultural, artistic, and social significance to Indigenous peoples and communities;
- Diverse representation that reflects local, national, and international perspectives;





- A creative approach to form characterized by innovative representations, content, aesthetic form, and genre;
- The relevance of form and content, with consideration to emerging themes and issues that present themselves during the programming process which inform the overall program's artistic framework;
- Consideration to overall available programming slots, scheduling, and budget.

We receive hundreds of submissions annually. If a work is not programmed, it does not comment on individual achievements or relationships, nor does it reflect the work's artistic value. Due to the volume of submissions we receive, we are unable to provide feedback or notes on unsuccessful applicants. The process of accepting and declining works is an emotional but necessary experience for all involved; as artists ourselves, we understand how difficult it can be to receive such news. We appreciate feedback on our processes, and in return, are pleased to suggest [alternative exhibition strategies](#) for your work beyond the Festival. We hope to continue to receive your work and look forward to meeting you at the Festival.

If you have any questions or require any clarification, please contact programming@imagineNATIVE.org.



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