

Creating on-set safety for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour

Good storytelling is a measure of a production's success. What happens when the story says "I don't see colour?" Alleged blindness of people's skin colour discounts the real, lived experiences of those in BIPOC communities. Real life harm happens overtly through racial prejudice. It can also sneak in when some people are paid less than others or fail to get the job, not because they are less experienced, but because biases affect how we see them.

Like other industries, we often focus our attention to bringing diverse people on board, but that is where efforts stop. Keeping diverse people in the industry depends on creating

spaces for safety, opportunity, and growth. That starts with seeing people who they are and what they can do, now and in the future.

Make Treaty or land acknowledgments part of everyday work. Remembering place respects Indigenous Peoples and grounds us in action we commit toward reconciliation with people and place. Learn about the place where you are filming. Use Treaty or land acknowledgments even if Indigenous people are not in the room. Saying it aloud sets an intention.

Listen when cast or crew talk about microaggressions and microinvalidations.

Microaggressions are an expressed assumption about a person based on their skin colour or ethnicity, like being surprised they have a university degree or commenting on stereotypical behaviour. Microinvalidations deny the experiences people feel. These are real experiences that need to be addressed to create on-set safety. Team members will only share if they believe the inequities they experience will be addressed.

Practice calling in or calling out incidents of racism. Calling in can be a private, one-on-one conversation with someone who is ready to do things differently. Calling out is a public acknowledgement that someone has caused harm and it is not acceptable. If an incident is bigger, calling out is the right way to go to show where you stand. For public announcements, make sure people authorized to speak on behalf of the project are calling out, as appropriate.

Hire professionals who know how to work with different skin tones and hair textures. These professionals include makeup artists, hairstylists, lighting technicians, and costume designers.

Avoid hiring cast based on stereotypes i.e. choosing people of certain ethnicities or with a certain look to be the enemy or to play an overly sexualized character, unless it is germane to a non-fictional account. Playing into a stereotype helps to solidify incorrect assumptions, on set and with audiences.

Secure sufficient funds to hire interns and apprentices of different backgrounds

to help bring new talent into the industry.

Be aware of Alberta's population diversity. 2021 census results show about one- quarter of residents in Alberta identify as a visible minority. In Edmonton and Calgary, that number is closer to two in five or 40 per cent. Does your set reflect this diversity?

Celebrate the cultures shared in the stories you tell. Help the cast and crew understand more about those cultures, so they can accurately represent them and, even better, build personal understanding. They may even have direct experience to help shape stories even more authentically.

Recognizing the experiences our colleagues and staff experience creates safer spaces. Safer spaces help us all to be more creative and willing to take chances to make the best film possible. Giving voice to people who are often unheard brings out richer stories about the worlds inside the people around us. For an industry responsible for showing audiences new worlds, this opportunity to listen and learn is an exceptional gift.

Dig deeper

- How to create an effective and personal Land Acknowledgment
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JeZzZCXX84w>
- Interrupting racism: calling in vs. calling out https://mytrainingbc.ca/anti-racism_course/module7.4.html
- The Micropedia of Microaggressions - <https://www.themicropedia.org/>
- Microinvalidations are real and they can have a big impact
<https://www.teenvogue.com/story/microinvalidations-are-real>
- Supporting and developing the Indigenous screen-based industry in Canada -
<https://cmf-fmc.ca/now-next/research-reports/supporting-and-developing-the-indigenous-screen-based-industry-in-canada/>
- Black Screen Office - <https://bso-ben.ca/>