

New Narratives Fund – Fund Guidelines

Amplifying the work of Muslim artists in pop culture

February 27, 2025

FUND OVERVIEW

Inspirit Foundation’s inaugural New Narratives Fund supports the **marketing, distribution, audience development and presentation** of ambitious, impactful, and uniquely creative works by Canadian Muslim artists. The Fund **does not** provide grants for content creation; instead, it aims to amplify and strengthen authentic, complex, narratives that are ready to launch. The projects must use a pop culture lens and be designed to reach broad and diverse audiences.

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Inspirit Foundation is a public foundation with a mission to advance racial, social and economic justice by investing our assets and funding media and arts for change. One of Inspirit’s priorities is addressing Islamophobia in Canada through narrative change.

Muslims in Canada have endured one-dimensional, racist, and Islamophobic portrayals for decades. Inspirit Foundation’s Narrative Change Lab supports the development of infrastructure to create narratives grounded in the experiences of Muslim Canadians that directly and indirectly challenge negative stereotypes.

In 2022, the Foundation developed a cohort program that brought together Canadian Muslim creatives and content creators over five months. The cohort explored narratives, ideas, and cultural norms that shape worldviews and behaviors that contribute to Islamophobia. It also generated frameworks to advance fuller, more accurate portrayals of Muslims in Canada from a place of strength and agency, while acknowledging that no one narrative can speak for all Canadian Muslims.

Based on Inspirit Foundation’s own research and expertise, feedback from our Narrative Change Lab cohort, as well as external consultant recommendations, we are launching this fund to harness the power of Muslim-led narratives in arts and media to shift public perceptions through the power of pop culture.

The core objectives of the fund are to:

- Elevate and celebrate the work of Muslim artists in Canada;
- Support Muslim-led narratives that challenge and confront Islamophobia directly & indirectly;
- Engage with a wide, diverse audience **with the intention** to spark narrative shifts through the multiplicity of Muslim-led stories.

WHAT THIS FUND IS FOR

We know that there are projects by Muslim artists that have the potential to make long-lasting impact on Muslim audiences, as well as other audiences of diverse backgrounds and identities. The New Narratives Fund will amplify projects that are ready to be launched into the world through the support of **marketing, distribution, audience development, and presentation activities based in Canada.**

Successful applications must demonstrate two key components:

- A screen-based media, digital, or performing arts project that is ready to launch in 2025.
- A clear, creative vision and demonstrable plan to conduct substantial outreach with the goal of showcasing the work to a wide and diverse audience.

We are excited to work with artists on projects that have the potential to create a substantial impact within their communities and beyond through a clear audience engagement strategy to draw and grow an audience for their work.

ELIGIBLE PROJECTS

Scripted & Unscripted Digital & Screen-based Projects

- Feature film (41 mins +)
- Short film (up to 40 mins)
- Web series (Total length of 60 mins or less)
- TV pilot (TV hour or less)
- Scripted podcast series (Total length of 120 mins or less)

Scripted Performance-based Projects

- Theatre

- Spoken word or poetry
- Comedy (sketch comedy, storytelling)
- Music

Multi-disciplinary Projects

- Projects that incorporate more than one of the above disciplines are also eligible. For eligible activities and expected completion dates, multi-disciplinary projects will be assessed based on the stream key creatives identify as their primary project category.

Activities Eligible for all Projects

- Venue rentals (performance spaces, screening spaces etc.)
- Equipment rentals (tied to public events)
- Event photography & videography (for promotional purposes)
- Marketing & ad campaigns (digital and/or print)
- Development of marketing materials (website, branding etc.)
- Public relations
- Accessibility expenses (tied to public events)
- Child/dependent care costs (to carry out proposed activities)
- Transportation / accommodation for presentation activities

Activities NOT Eligible for Scripted & Unscripted Digital & Screen Based Projects

- Any costs already incurred, including artist fees
- Professional development
- Festival / conference passes
- Production / post-production
- Technical fees (editor, copywriter, colour correction, music composition)
- Projects that fall outside of the eligible project streams

Activities NOT Eligible for Performance Based Projects

- Any costs already incurred, including artist fees
- Development / pre-production
- Professional development
- Festival / conference passes
- Rehearsal space rentals
- Projects that fall outside of the eligible project streams

OTHER ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Digital & Screen-based Projects – Must be completed or in post-production with funding secured and ready to premiere by the end of 2025 to be eligible for this fund.

Scripted Performance-based Projects - Must be completed, or you must clearly demonstrate that the project will be completed by the end of 2025 and ready to launch in 2025 to be eligible for this fund.

FUNDING INFORMATION

Funding Amount

Grants of up to **\$50,000 CAD*** are available. Although there is no minimum request, we ask that applicants scale their budgets to align with the scope of their projects and distribution plans.

**Please note: successful applicants may not receive the full requested amount depending on the number of grants awarded. The review committee will review budgets according to the scope of the project and grantees may be awarded between 80-100% of their request.*

Additional funding of up to \$5,000 CAD may be available if members of your key creative team require accessibility support. Please explain and specify the amount that will be allocated in your main budget sheet.

Eligibility:

- individuals who identify as Deaf or as having a disability
- ad hoc groups and collectives with one or more members who identify as Deaf or as having a disability
- incorporated not-for-profit organizations that have a mandate to serve Deaf artists and artists with disabilities **and** are led by board and/or staff members who identify as Deaf or as having a disability
- *Please note: information you provide in your request will not be used to assess your project application.*

Who can apply?

Canadian-based lead creatives and producers, including:

- Performers
- Directors
- Collectives (performer/director or director/writer/producer teams)

NOTE: Applicants can apply as individuals, teams, and/or in partnership with a non-profit or charitable organization, or production company if you meet the criteria of Canadian-based lead creatives and producers. Please remember that our objective is to fund artists' projects and not operational costs for organizations.

In your application, please specify the lead applicant contact and co-applicant. Where possible, we encourage applications that are co-written by two or more members of the project team to ensure that both creative visions and operational plans are clearly articulated by team members responsible for each.

Who cannot apply?

- Non-Canadian applicants
- Teams where key team members are based outside of Canada

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

- **Artistic Statement**
 - An artist statement encapsulating the artist's background and the artistic vision behind their past work and the project that is seeking funding.
- **Project Details**
 - Submission of the completed (or near-completed) work for which the applicant is seeking marketing, distribution, and audience development funding.
 - Budget & financing plan for the project indicating the marketing, distribution, and audience development expenses for which this fund will be used, as well as contingency measures.
- **Project Team**
 - Details of key team members. Please note that the lead applicant must identify as Muslim. Preference for applications where other key team members also identify as Muslim.
- **Marketing, Distribution, and Audience Development Plan**

- Details on how the funding will be used for the marketing, distribution, audience development, and presentation of the project.
- **Past Artistic Examples:**
 - Submission of one or two artistic examples demonstrating an ability to bring a project to the dissemination phase.
- **Support Materials:**
 - Resume
 - Website

IMPORTANT DATES

February 26, 2025:	Applications open
March 13, 2025:	Information webinar
April 10, 2025:	Application deadline
Week of May 15, 2025:	Grantees notified
Week of June 16, 2025	Public announcement AND event in Toronto

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Artistic Vision - How does the artistic vision align with the project being proposed? Does it show cohesion and build on previous work? What role does pop culture play in the vision?

Ambition & Impact - Does the team have a good idea of how and where their project can create an impact through pop culture within and beyond their community? Have they identified their audiences and a clear way of reaching them?

Viable Workplan – Are the activities feasible to be carried out within the timeframe proposed?

Budget & Financing – Does the budget ‘match’ the scope of activities? Does it show other sources of in-kind or matching funds?

Support Material – Does past work demonstrate appropriate experience to carry out the proposed work?

FUNDING DECISIONS

Successful applicants will be chosen by an external review committee with backgrounds in screen-based, digital media and/or performance arts. The review committee will be made public after the review process is completed. All decisions will be final.

FUNDING SCHEDULES

Funding will be dispersed in two to three installments depending on the project.

For example:

- 25% in advance
- 60% upon project plan and launch
- 15% on the delivery of a final report.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

We accept applications in English or French.

Nous acceptons les candidatures en anglais ou en français.

Acknowledgement of financial assistance

We request all grantees to acknowledge Inspirit Foundation's support where possible.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. The completion date for my project is January 2026, can I still apply?

Unfortunately, no. We require all projects to be completed and ready to launch by or before December 2025.

2. I do not have a team in place, can I still apply?

If your project does not *require* a team and you are holding multiple roles, please describe how the creative and logistical aspects of the project will be handled. If your project requires a team but you do not have one in place yet, your project will

not be eligible for funding as we are looking for projects that are completed or near-completion.

3. What do you mean by outreach and marketing?

Outreach marketing is the process of reaching out and building relationships with people, groups, and organizations in your target audience to boost the visibility of your project, build momentum around the launch, and promote your team, story, and vision.

4. Do I need to have matching funding?

No, matching funding is NOT required to apply.

If you have secured funding or Inspirit funding will trigger matching funding, please let us know in your budget submission.

5. If I do not receive funding, will I receive feedback on my application?

Depending on the volume of submissions, we will try to provide brief, constructive feedback for applications that make it to the shortlist stage.

6. How many grants are available in total?

We expect five (5) to ten (10) projects will be funded.

7. Why are you only funding the marketing/distribution/audience development component of projects instead of other stages?

While development (in all disciplines) and production/post-production funding (for screen-based, performance and digital arts) are important, the inaugural fund is focused on projects that are ready or near-ready to be presented to audiences.

8. Who are the people on the review committee?

Names of the review committee members will be made public when the review process is completed.

9. What is a 'key 'creative team member?

Someone who holds a decision-making position on the project, i.e. Executive Producer, Producer, Director, and/or Writer.

10. I expect my project to be completed by the required timeline i.e. by or before December 2025 but there may be slight changes from the time of application to project launch, is this permissible?

We encourage applicants to submit projects that will undergo few, if any, changes. In the event that your project changes from the one you describe in your application, we will require a detailed update and rationale.

11. Can I budget for my organization’s operational funding and/or staff fees?

No, this fund is specifically for projects and is not for general organizational operational expenses such as staff salaries or company overheads.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Narrative Change

Narratives are shared stories which help to shape our consciousness and how we navigate our way through the world. These stories can influence beliefs, behaviors, and norms. Narrative change is about long-term efforts to elevate certain values – in our case these are related to racial justice, community, and safety – and diminish others so that we can engage different audiences and decision makers.

Impact

While traditional metrics of reach—how many people watched, listened to or otherwise experienced a story or production, are certainly important to an extent, high-impact media projects don’t necessarily only mean the projects with the biggest audiences. Tracking community engagement, media coverage, social change, community change, positive policy outcomes, increase in diversity and representation, community empowerment, attention from influential people, and internal capacity building can all be ways to measure the impact of a particular narrative.

Diverse Audience

Diverse audiences refer to a wide range of individuals with varying backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives who engage with cultural and artistic content.

Pop Culture

Refers to the set of ideas, practices, beliefs, and objects that are prevalent and widely engaged in mainstream society at a given time. It is often shaped by mass media,

technology, and trends, making it dynamic and ever evolving. This cultural phenomenon influences and is influenced by societal values and norms.

Multi-disciplinary

Refers to projects that incorporate multiple disciplines. For example, a music performance that incorporates video art.

Scripted podcast

A scripted podcast is a podcast that uses a written script for each episode. Scripted podcasts are also known as fiction podcasts or audio dramas.