



To: Randy Engstrom, Director, Office of Arts & Culture
Bobby Lee, Director, Office of Economic Development

From: Karen Hirsch, Partner, The Ostara Group

Date: August 2, 2019

SEATTLE FILM INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS AND PRIORITIES REPORT

In March of this year, the Office of the Mayor requested that the Office of Film + Music (OFM), in partnership with the Office of Arts & Culture (ARTS) and the Office of Economic Development (OED), develop a set of recommendations for short-term, mid-term, and long-term potential strategies to grow Seattle's local film industry.

In May and June, The Ostara Group, in partnership with project advisors and lead community connectors Vivian Hua (Executive Director of Northwest Film Forum) and Amy Lillard (Executive Director of Washington Filmworks), hosted nine focus groups with stakeholders from across Seattle's film industry and community. Over 70 film community and industry professionals attended the sessions.

This document summarizes the priorities heard across those focus groups. To see these findings in additional detail, please see the "Film Stakeholder Priorities Timeline".

Core Themes

Three core themes emerged from this process. Stakeholders requested that the City link all of the work of the Film Office to these three themes moving forward.

- 1) Embed the City's Race and Social Justice Initiative in all functions of the Film Office
 - 2) Recognize the film industry as a City priority since the film industry is the cornerstone of the local creative economy
 - 3) Establish a dedicated funding source to increase the City's support of the film industry
-

Goals and Strategies

Goal: Embed the City's Race and Social Justice Initiative in all functions of the Film Office

Why? People of color do not have equal opportunity for building careers in film. Not unlike national film and other industries, sexual harassment of women, men, and gender non-conforming people occurs on film sets.

Strategies:

- Mayor Durkan to make a public announcement linking Film Office with Race and Social Justice Initiative
 - Increase diversity among Film Office staff
 - Connect Seattle Youth Employment Initiative, Creative Advantage, and other City educational and training programs with opportunities in film industry
 - Provide adequate staffing to prioritize support for career pathways for people of color in film/media and offer racial equity training for area leaders in film
 - Create business incentives and access to money for women and minority-owned film/media businesses
 - Film Office to promote that Seattle has zero tolerance for sexual, gender non-conforming, and racial harassment in the film industry
 - Film Office to promote accessibility in the film industry for differently-abled people
-

Goal: Recognize film as a City priority since the film industry is the cornerstone of the local creative economy

Why? At present, film is not a priority for the City of Seattle which limits the economic opportunity and growth of the local creative community and film industry. Film production represents a microcosm of local creative industries, from content creation to consumer delivery.

Strategies:

- Mayor Durkan announces that the film industry is a City priority
 - Create a Seattle Film Commission and advisory board
 - Prioritize the Film Office by providing staffing structure that not only supports the film permitting process but that has a leadership position with time and authority to implement other initiatives of the Film Office
 - Rewrite film ordinance - which has not been updated in 25+ years - to include industry priorities reflected in this process
 - Develop 5-10 year strategic plan reflecting how film fits into the larger creative economy
-

Goal: Improve film permitting process in Seattle

Why? Film Office does not have adequate authority to approve permits. Differing priorities or staffing restrictions of other City departments impede the permit process. The inefficiencies lead to a local and national reputation that the City of Seattle can be a difficult place to film.

- Give the Film Office the authority to approve permits
 - Create efficiencies with other City departments so permitting process happens in sync with the speed of business - within 1-2 days
 - Increase permitting staff to maximize responsiveness with a sustainable staffing structure
 - Prioritize film production in use of City Parks and right-of-way (for example, construction stops for Special Events, but not for film production)
-

Goal: Tell the story of film in Seattle by investing in marketing initiatives and create opportunities for film industry growth by investing in business development

Why? City has distinct qualities that make it great place to do business in film, but currently the City is not making sufficient investments to sustain or grow the local film industry.

- Identify team to design a marketing plan backed by matching fund from the City
 - Initiate marketing campaign (like 2012 *Commercialize Seattle* initiative) to attract business from *outside* Seattle
 - Commit to marketing campaign *within* Seattle to increase knowledge about film industry among the media, residents, neighborhood agencies, and other city departments
 - Amplify stories of local filmmakers in diverse communities
 - Invest in marketing consistently over time
 - Establish a dedicated funding source to support the film industry
 - Identify and provide a city-owned properties for co-working spaces, production offices, and filming locations
 - Long-term, offer production truck and large equipment storage locations
 - Film Office and City of Seattle to advocate for a sound stage in or beyond City limits
-

Goal: Develop City policies and advocate for the film industry

Why? The City has existing public programs and relationships in the business community that are not being leveraged to support the film industry, and a film industry ordinance that is outdated.

- Prioritize film industry within Seattle's affordability initiatives to protect and keep creative professionals and businesses in Seattle
 - Connect the dots of the City's film-related investments like Visit Seattle; identify and leverage relevant resources in other City departments including the Seattle Channel, which offers a showcase for local productions and opportunities for career pathways
 - Rewrite/update film ordinance
 - Work to bridge the gap between major Seattle tech firms and film industry
 - Rewrite/update film ordinance
 - Develop quantitative data that accurately reflects the true size and full economic impact of the film industry in Seattle
 - Film Office and stakeholders partner with Office of Labor Standards to prevent wage theft; connect this work with related State and County efforts
 - Partner with the State of Washington to grow the film tax incentive program
-

Goal: *Strengthen Seattle's film industry through education initiatives and community building*

Why? The Film Office plays a crucial leadership role in connecting various stakeholders in the film community, providing and promoting educational opportunities and strengthening the film workforce.

- Help connect crew with jobs e.g. by investing in a jobs board (in partnership with Washington Filmworks)
- Build and share comprehensive list of production services and companies in Seattle
- Host inclusive events to connect and unite the local film industry
- Build workforce talent pipeline including "below the line" positions (such as catering, camera and crew)
- Produce and promote workshops and trainings on topics such as wage theft law education, how to promote content digitally, creative business tactics, educating film investors
- Deepen working relationship between OFM and County/State, and with film agencies (NWFF, SIFF, etc.)



MEMO

To: Randy Engstrom, Director, Office of Arts and Culture

Bobby Lee, Director, Office of Economic Development

From: Karen Hirsch, Partner, The Ostara Group

Re: Former OFM Director Interviews

Date: September 16, 2019

Introduction

Between March and July of 2019, Karen Hirsch of The Ostara Group facilitated a series of nine sessions with representatives from Seattle's film industry on behalf of the Office of Arts and Culture. Ostara shared the findings from these listening sessions in two key documents:

1. *Summary – Film Focus Group Findings and Priorities*
2. *Film Focus Group Recommendations*

Chris Swenson, Film + Special Events Program Manager, contacted Ostara in August 2019 with the following request: to conduct interviews with the three former OFM directors. In the first week of September, 2019, Swenson and Hirsch conducted interviews with former OFM directors Donna James (1991-2005), James Keblas (2005-2014), and Kate Becker (2014-2019).

This document is a high-level summary of the responses of the former OFM directors to the two documents listed above. Detailed notes from the interviews, including email responses from the former OFM directors to the Summary and Recommendations, are also available for review.

Themes

The following themes emerged as the former directors reflected on the project documents:

Importance of commercials is missing: Across the interviews, the past directors emphasized that Seattle's film business centers around television commercials. The directors believe the summary documents did not adequately emphasize this point and that the greatest potential for growing the current film industry lies in commercials and efforts to increase commercial production work.

Incentives are vital city tools for economic growth: The past directors noted that incentives are a central, if not THE central way that cities attract film business. It is not a tool that Seattle has yet accomplished. They wanted to see more emphasis on the power of incentives as an economic driver.

New technologies are absent. The past directors believed this outreach process did not adequately address or involve people working in new media technologies, which are an important part of Seattle's film and media ecosystem.

Sales function of the office is key: Past directors put significant energy into selling Seattle to studios, producers, and ad agencies. OFM has a sales function and when it is strategic, it has proven to be highly successful in bringing business to Seattle. The sales and marketing role of OFM is mentioned in the summary documents, but not emphasized enough, in the eyes of the past directors.

Need for Film Commission: Both James and Kate emphasized the importance of establishing a Seattle Film Commission to support and elevate the film industry over time.

Former Director Recommendations

The former directors offered the following recommendations:

Structure: Having a cabinet-level Film + Music director was tremendously hard won; all three former directors believe that absorbing OFM into ARTS or OED does the opposite of elevating the film industry profile.

Get Industry Buy-In Before Making Changes: This process is moving very quickly. Does it need to move this quickly? Don't restructure Film Office until after the need for change is articulated and is supported by the industry.

Diversifying Seattle's Film Industry: If increasing diversity in the film business is a City goal, the way to move this forward is in partnership with the unions.

Film Industry Stakeholder Recommendations			
GOALS	SHORT-TERM (2020)	MID-TERM (2 to 5 years)	LONG-TERM (5+ years)
Embed the City's Race and Social Justice Initiative in all functions of the Film Office	Mayor Durkan to make a public announcement linking film office with Race and Social Justice Initiative	Create business incentives and access to money for women and minority-owned film and media businesses o Film Office to promote that Seattle has zero tolerance for	Continue to support business incentives and access to money for women and minority-owned film and media businesses
	Increase diversity among Film Office staff	Increase diversity among Film Office staff	Continue to increase diversity among Film Office staff
	Connect Seattle Youth Employment Initiative, Creative Advantage, and other city educational and training programs with opportunities in film industry	Provide adequate staffing to prioritize support for career pathways for people of color in film/media and offer racial equity training for area leaders in film	Link future city programs and initiatives that promote access and equity with film
		Increase diversity among film office staff	Continue to increase diversity among film office staff
	Film Office to promote that Seattle has zero tolerance for sexual, gender non-conforming, and racial harassment in the film industry	Develop a mechanism (such as part of the permitting process) to have film professionals put in writing that they will not tolerate harassment	Sustain commitment to zero tolerance for harassment in the film industry
	Film Office to promote accessibility in the film industry for differently-abled people	Film Office to promote accessibility in the film industry for differently-abled people	Film Office to promote accessibility in the film industry for differently-abled people
Recognize film as a City priority since the film industry is the cornerstone of the local creative economy	Mayor Durkan announces that the film industry is a City priority		
	Create a Seattle Film Commission and advisory board		
	Prioritize the Film Office by providing staffing structure that not only supports the film permitting process but that has a leadership position with time and authority to implement other initiatives of the Film Office	Develop 5-10 year strategic plan reflecting how film fits into the larger creative economy	Implement 5-10 year strategic plan reflecting how film fits into the larger creative economy
		Rewrite film ordinance - which has not been updated in 25+ years - to include industry priorities reflected in this process	
Improve film permitting process in Seattle	Give film office the authority to approve permits	Reassess permits structure (in terms of cost and types)	
	Create efficiencies with other City departments so permitting process aligns with the speed of business (within 1-2 days)		
	Increase permitting staff to maximize responsiveness with a sustainable staffing structure		

	Prioritize film production in use of City Parks and right-of-way (for example., construction stops for Special Events, but not for film production)		
Invest in marketing and business development initiatives	Identify team to design a marketing plan backed by matching fund from the City		
	Initiate marketing campaign (like 2012 <i>Commercialize Seattle</i> initiative) to attract business from outside Seattle	Invest in marketing the industry and office consistently	Invest in marketing the industry and office consistently
	Commit to marketing campaign within Seattle to increase knowledge about film industry among the media, residents, neighborhood agencies, and other city departments		
	Amplify stories of local filmmakers in diverse communities	Amplify stories of local filmmakers in diverse communities	Amplify stories of local filmmakers in diverse communities
	Establish a dedicated funding source to support the film industry	Sustain a dedicated funding source to support the film industry	Sustain a dedicated funding source to support the film industry
		Identify and provide a city-owned properties for co-working spaces, production offices, and filming locations	Identify and offer production truck and large equipment storage locations in City limits
		Film Office and City of Seattle to advocate for a sound stage in or beyond City limits	
Develop City policies and advocate for the film industry	Prioritize film within Seattle's affordability initiatives to protect and keep creative professionals and businesses in Seattle		
	Connect the dots of the City's film-related investments (like Visit Seattle); identify and leverage relevant resources in other City departments including the Seattle Channel		
		Rewrite/update film ordinance	
	Work to bridge the gap between major Seattle tech firms and film industry		
		Develop quantitative data that accurately reflects the true size and full economic impact of the film industry in Seattle	
		Film Office and stakeholders partner with Office of Labor Standards to prevent wage theft; connect this work with related State and County efforts	

		Partner with the State of Washington to grow the film tax incentive program	Partner with the State of Washington to grow the film tax incentive program
Strengthen Seattle's film industry through education initiatives and community-building	Help connect crew with jobs e.g. by investing in a jobs board (in partnership with Washington Filmworks)	Build workforce talent pipeline including "below the line" positions such as catering, camera, crew	
	Build and share comprehensive list of production services and companies here in Seattle		
	Host inclusive events to connect and unite the film industry		
	Produce and promote workshops on industry best practices and new technologies		
	Deepen working relationship between OFM and County/State, and with film agencies (NWFF, SIFF, etc)		