



INCLUSIVE FILM SETS REPORT

MARCH 2026

Washington
Filmworks

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THE WORK 3

DEFINITIONS 4 - 5

EQUITY WORK TIMELINE 6 - 7

FOCUS GROUPS 8 - 15

**MISSION VISION
VALUES** 16



ABOUT THE WORK

Washington Filmworks (WF) is a legislatively commissioned non profit organization that manages the Motion Picture Competitiveness Program as well as a variety of resources for the creative industries in Washington state.

WF is committed to building a thriving creative economy where film and media production fuel equitable job growth, encourage investments, and create pathways to opportunity for all Washington communities. This commitment is reinforced by the state legislature's declaration that Washington's film sets and stories should reflect the diversity of the state's residents.

Before starting the initiative, WF staff collaborated with the Equity Co-Chairs and the full Board of Directors to draft an [Equity Charter](#), ensuring the work was conducted authentically. With the Charter approved by the [Equity Committee](#) and the [Board of Directors](#), the organization recruited 77 film industry professionals across the state to participate in ten regional focus groups in 2024-2025 to explore strategies for creating more inclusive film sets.

While all participants demonstrated commitment to inclusivity and identified concrete practices that work, they also highlighted systemic challenges that require structural change. Participants made clear that achieving real inclusivity requires action on multiple levels, from individual behavior change to industry-wide policy reform. They emphasized that this work must engage not just champions of equity, but those who have historically not been willing to challenge the status quo. Given WF's leadership role in the statewide film industry, the organization is uniquely positioned to translate this community feedback into tools for measurable change. This report details those findings and outlines the initial action plan to ensure opportunity in Washington State is not limited by geography or lived experience.

DEFINITIONS

In an effort to foster shared understanding, WF leadership team worked with the Equity Committee Co-Chairs and an equity consultant to draft the following definitions which were ratified by the full Equity Committee.

MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

The term “marginalized communities” refers to groups of persons who have been relegated to an unimportant or powerless position such that they are prevented from participating fully in decisions affecting their lives. People may experience further marginalization because of their intersecting identities.

These groups are often communities or populations that face systemic economic, political, social, and cultural barriers, many of them embedded in local laws and norms. The term encompasses communities with a shared experience of marginalization stemming from circumstances beyond their control.

Marginalized communities often include Black, Latino, Indigenous and American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian, Asian Americans, and

Pacific Islanders, and other persons of color, members of religious minorities, refugees, migrants, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQIA2S+) persons, rural communities, formerly incarcerated persons, persons experiencing homelessness, and persons with disabilities.

*Note: ESHB 1914, which passed during the 2022 legislative session, acknowledges the Equity Committee and names marginalized communities a priority group for the organization’s equity work. As a result of feedback from community members, WF prefers using the term “**historically underrepresented communities**” in place of the term “marginalized communities.”*

DIVERSITY

The range of human differences, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, physical ability or attributes, religious or ethical values systems, national origin, political beliefs, and cultures. Cultivating diversity means more than just acknowledging and/or tolerating difference. It’s a set of conscious practices that seek to understand and appreciate the interdependence of humanity, cultures, and the natural environment.



An inclusive institution promotes and sustains a sense of belonging; it values and practices respect where all people are recognized for their inherent worth and dignity, talents, beliefs, backgrounds, and ways of living.

EQUITY

The work to support access for everyone to the resources needed to be successful, and identifying and eliminating barriers that have prevented the full participation of communities most impacted by systemic oppression. Advancing equity involves increasing justice and fairness within the procedures and processes of institutions and systems, as well as in the distribution of resources. Addressing equity issues requires an understanding of the root causes of outcome disparities within our society and institution and the work to undo them.

Equity differs from equality. Equality refers to treating everyone the same, but does not necessarily lead to equitable outcomes because diverse communities have diverse needs and have faced varying obstacles and inequities.

INCLUSION

Ensuring that people of all backgrounds, identities, abilities, perspectives, and beliefs have an equal opportunity to belong, achieve, and contribute to their communities. An inclusive institution promotes and sustains a sense of belonging; it values and practices respect where all people are recognized for their inherent worth and dignity, talents, beliefs, backgrounds, and ways of living.



EQUITY WORK TIMELINE

February 2020

WF began its equity consultant search, signing a contract with [Epiphanies of Equity](#) (EoE) later that year.

August 2021

WF and EoE conducted a survey of the statewide film industry to explore how the organization could improve its support for underrepresented and underserved communities within the film community.

October 2019

The WF Film Leadership Council (FLC), an advisory group of professionals, emphasized the importance of accessibility in redesigning the Innovation Lab program to enable broader participation from individuals across various communities in Washington State.

November 2020

WF launched the Media Mentorship Pilot Program. Focused on training production assistants from underrepresented groups, this entry level program offered education, one-on-one mentorships and opportunities to work as a paid production assistant on approved WF productions.

April 2022

ESHB 1914 Signed into law which states the intent “that the legislature is committed to ensuring that ...motion picture production sets and stories reflect the diversity of Washington residents.” The law also codifies the Equity Co-Chairs and FLC Co-Chairs as voting WF Board Members, mandates workforce development programming focused on individuals from underrepresented communities, and introduces the enhanced incentives for telling the story of underrepresented communities.

December 2023

WF expanded the Equity Committee with new members.

Autumn 2024

WF hosted 10 Regional Focus Groups facilitated by [Sarah Cotton Rajski](#).

October 2021

WF announced the Governor’s Appointment of Equity Co-Chairs Myron Partman and Malcom Pelles to develop our social and racial equity goals to support an inclusive and sustainable motion picture industry in Washington State.

March 2023

WF Board of Directors adopted the Equity Charter.

February 2024

The Equity Committee identified inclusive films set focus groups as a priority for the annual workplan.

Spring 2025

WF hosted *Bounce Back* sessions reflecting focus group results to focus group participants and allies.

FOCUS GROUPS

APPROACH

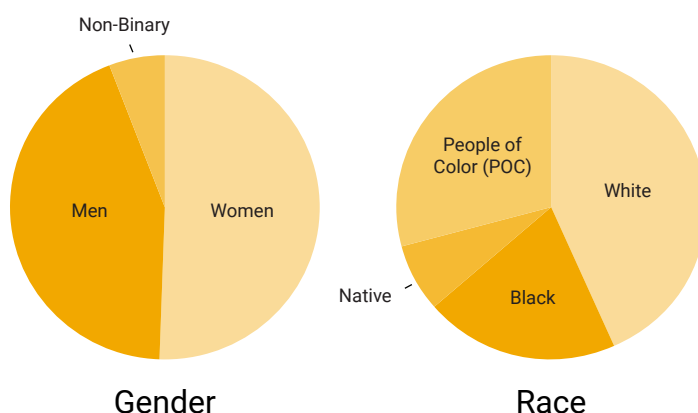
One of WF's stated goals is to lead the country in building inclusive film sets. To move towards this goal, WF hired Sarah Cotton Rajski to facilitate a series of 10 focus groups across Washington State with individuals working in film production and post-production with a focus on recruiting individuals from underrepresented communities. The feedback gathered has been used to build policies, programs, and resources for the statewide film industry.

All participants were deeply engaged and eager to contribute to discussions about the film industry in general and specifically about creating a more inclusive film industry. They appreciated having a platform to share their experiences and voiced a collective commitment to improve inclusivity. Seventy-seven people provided feedback. Sixty-nine people participated in 10 focus groups; six focus groups were in-person, four were virtual, and eight people participated by providing written feedback. The focus groups were organized regionally for "below the line" crew and there was one virtual

session for "above the line" film industry professionals. In-person focus groups were in Seattle, Spokane, Tacoma, and Olympia. Virtual focus groups included participants from Seattle, Spokane, Tacoma, Walla Walla, and communities across the state.

Demographics:

- Gender: 35 men, 30 women, 4 identify as non-binary
- Race: 30 white, 14 black, 5 native, 20 People of Color (POC)
- Seven people shared they were disabled
- Eleven people shared they identify as queer



KEY FINDINGS

Opportunities To Build More Inclusive Film Sets

Champions of Inclusivity Exist: All focus group participants are committed to building a more inclusive film industry.

- *People Want Diverse Sets:* All focus group conversations surfaced a preference for working on diverse sets.
- *Avoid Creating an Echo Chamber:* Participants expressed concern that those who most need to change were not involved in the focus groups. Inclusivity should not be limited to just those already supportive but should challenge everyone to examine and change their behaviors.

Leader Influence: Leaders have the authority to make changes that result in a more inclusive set.

- *Leadership Plays a Critical Role in Shaping an Inclusive Film Set:* People in leadership positions have the authority to make decisions about who they hire, set expectations for behavior, and an opportunity to model what inclusive leadership looks like.
- *Don't Over-Rely on Leadership Alone:* While leadership commitment is essential, it's important to remember that inclusivity must be a shared responsibility. Relying too heavily on leaders to implement and monitor inclusivity can unintentionally leave team members disengaged

or feeling that they are not active participants in the process. Foster a culture of shared responsibility where everyone has a role to play in building an inclusive environment.

Diversity at the Top Creates a More Positive

Experience on Set: Participants repeatedly shared that their most positive experiences on set was when there was diversity in leadership.

- *Diverse Leadership, Diverse Staff:* Participants shared that the presence of diverse leadership (e.g., female, queer, Native, and POC leaders) leads to greater inclusivity and diversity throughout the production set.
- *Comfort In Community:* There is a strong preference for working on diverse sets where individuals can see themselves reflected in the team; the familiarity of working with others who share similar identities (e.g., female/female or queer/queer leadership)
- *Reach a Critical Mass:* People described a goal of having more than 51% of individuals on set from diverse backgrounds—a “tipping point” intended to create meaningful change.
- *Connect with Diverse “Bubbles”:* Although there is a strong preference for working with diverse groups, there is concern that these teams can become insular “bubbles,” limiting broader, intersectional inclusion. Participants emphasized that the responsibility lies with the dominant culture to learn from and engage with these communities—not the other way around.

Challenges to Inclusivity

On Par With Society: The film industry reflects the same challenges as broader society—it is not ahead of it. People on set continue to experience sexism, racism, ableism, and transphobia. As society evolves, progress in one area (such as racial diversity) can occur while other historically underrepresented communities (such as trans or disabled individuals) remain vulnerable to exclusion or discrimination.

- *Tokenism Exists:* Participants reported their experience being the “diverse” person on set and their complicated feelings about it; they were happy to have the job but uncomfortable being “the only” on set. They sometimes experienced tokenism and felt diversity was pursued solely for appearances or to “check a box” without a genuine commitment to inclusion. People don’t want to be part of a symbolic action.

Addressing External Pressures, Accountability, and Engagement: Participants expressed frustration about barriers to inclusion including overcoming external pressures, fostering accountability, balancing structural change with personal responsibility, and engaging those resistant to change.

- *External Pressures Override Desire to Change:* They noted that despite the desire for more inclusive practices and diversity in leadership, external pressures (e.g., production demands, cost) make it challenging to push for meaningful shifts.
- *Lack of Accountability:* Participants are concerned there isn’t an accountability structure in place to create and sustain real change.

- *Balance Structural Changes with Personal Responsibility:* While addressing structural issues is crucial, individuals must take ownership of their behaviors, learn about their biases, and engage in self-reflection. A truly inclusive environment is built not just on policies but also on individual actions and attitudes that support those policies.
- *Need to Reach People Committed to the Status Quo:* This work requires participation from everyone, not just champions of equity. Participants seemed unsure of how to reach a broader group in the industry.

Network-Based Industry: The film industry has traditionally existed as a close-knit community which limits opportunity for diverse candidates outside of the community to break into the industry.

- *Problematic Hiring Practices:* The film industry has historically been dominated by white cisgender men, and their networks often mirror this demographic. Leaders are often reluctant to expand beyond their familiar circles, frequently hiring through personal connections and word of mouth.
- *Traditionally Gendered Roles Persist:* Positions such as grip and electric continue to be predominantly male-dominated, while roles like hair and makeup are still more commonly filled by women.

WA State Film Industry Needs Consistency:

Participants are challenged by the lack of consistent, year-round work

- *Scarcity Mindset and Limited Opportunities:* Participants felt a tension between the desire for more inclusive practices and anxiety about the limited opportunities available, as the local industry may not offer sufficient work or resources to sustain a thriving, diverse workforce. Participants shared that many small sets are not able to pay all positions and rely on volunteers, which is not a sustainable option for people trying to make a living.
- *General Public has Limited Industry Awareness:* Participants emphasized the need for the broader community to gain a deeper understanding of the film industry, including the variety of roles it offers. They expressed concerns about an aging workforce and the lack of awareness among young people in Washington State about film as a viable career path.
- *Unions Lack Diversity:* Many productions hire primarily through unions, yet significant barriers to entry—such as financial costs and required workdays within a set time frame—mean that people from underrepresented groups are less likely to be union members. Unions need to have a diverse pool of candidates.

Unique Challenges Exist in Different Communities:

- Spokane is a smaller community and industry; people are required to hold multiple roles and it is harder to specialize. It is also a more homogenous community. One participant shared that the sets they have worked on in LA are more diverse, in part because LA's population is more diverse.
- Walla Walla produces almost exclusively independent films. Being a rural community means there is inconsistent internet quality and low access to industry standards and skills in technology.

Unlearning Is Required and Challenging: Shifting the film industry to be more inclusive requires people to do things differently. The process of unlearning “the way it is” and how people show up will be hard for everyone, even champions of equity, and will take time.

- *We Have Been Socialized:* Creating an inclusive set involves not only learning new practices and behaviors but also unlearning harmful socialized behaviors that have been ingrained over time. This process can be slow, uncomfortable, and nonlinear, particularly for those who are accustomed to a dominant, often exclusive, culture.

Emerging Best Practices

(Based on When Participants Feel Safe and Included on Set)

Start With Leadership: Effective inclusion starts at the top. Leadership must model inclusive behaviors and work to build trust with their team. Leaders should be visible champions of inclusive practices and create an environment where all team members feel valued and heard.

- *Embed Inclusivity:* Leaders must include inclusivity in hiring practices, decision-making, daily operations, and make it explicitly part of the culture on set.
- *Modeling:* Modeling inclusive behavior consistently is crucial for creating an environment that values diversity.

Respectful Hierarchy: While a clear hierarchy is useful, it should never be oppressive.

- *Everyone Has a Voice:* Participants acknowledged that hierarchy can be useful when done right. They emphasized the desire for team members at all levels to have their voices heard, their input valued, and to feel that they can approach leadership with concerns or suggestions without fear of retaliation.

Establish Clear Policies: Set policies that emphasize inclusivity and respect.

- *Proposed Policies:* Policies might include anti-discrimination measures, guidelines for respectful communication, and practices to

provide reasonable accommodations for team members with disabilities or other specific needs.

Inclusive Hiring: Strive to build teams that reflect a wide range of backgrounds, perspectives, and skills. This broadens creative ideas and improves the overall work environment.

- *Need for Accommodations:* People shared their experience with physical health conditions and/or disabilities and that traditionally accommodations have not been provided. Examples included: a lack of chairs on set, meals that aren't sensitive to food allergies, and not having appropriate time or space to manage diabetes.

Unity Around a Shared Vision: A shared goal for the film ensures that everyone is working towards the same objective.

- *Alignment:* Align everyone on a shared goal, both creatively and culturally. Ensure that all team members understand that the success of the project relies on inclusivity and collaboration.

Handling Conflict: Production environments are often high-pressure with tight deadlines which can lead to conflict.

- *Rules of Engagement:* Set expectations for how to handle conflict promptly and who on set is a resource for support. Participants have had positive experiences when a set designates a person for staff to go to with concerns, complaints, and/or conflicts.

Build an Intentional Culture: Develop a set where people feel safe being themselves, free from discrimination. This involves creating spaces for all team members to contribute, ensuring that the set feels by and for the people working on it.

- *Foster a Learning Environment:* Set the expectation that learning is an essential part of being on set, which includes giving and receiving feedback to create the best film possible. A culture of learning, where perfection is not the goal, also encourages people to take risks. You can't learn if the standard is perfection.
- *Build in Accountability:* Regularly assess the effectiveness of policies through feedback and create systems of accountability.
- *Cultivate Respect:* Respect should be central to the culture. It means honoring each person's identity, opinions, and contributions.

Specific Recommendations From Participants Include:

- *Pre-Production Questionnaire:* To better understand and accommodate team members' needs, distribute a questionnaire at the start of the project. Ask about abilities, potential support needed (e.g., physical accommodations, mental health resources), food allergies, or any personal requirements that could affect their participation.
- *Use Working Agreements:* All team members sign off on working agreements that set expectations for behavior.
- *Start with Centering Conversations:* Begin each day with a collective centering or grounding conversation to set a positive, intentional tone.

This gives the team an opportunity to focus on shared values and create a mindful, respectful atmosphere.

- *Provide Technical Assistance:* Support those who have not received incentive funding by providing guidance and resources to strengthen future applications.
- *Diversity in Storytelling Incentives:* Funding for projects that challenge stereotypes and highlight stories from diverse cultural perspectives.

Other Ideas To Increase Inclusion

Develop Champions: Identify and support leaders who can showcase successful practices for creating diverse sets.

- *Incentivize Public Commitment:* Create a public pledge or commitment to inclusivity across the industry.

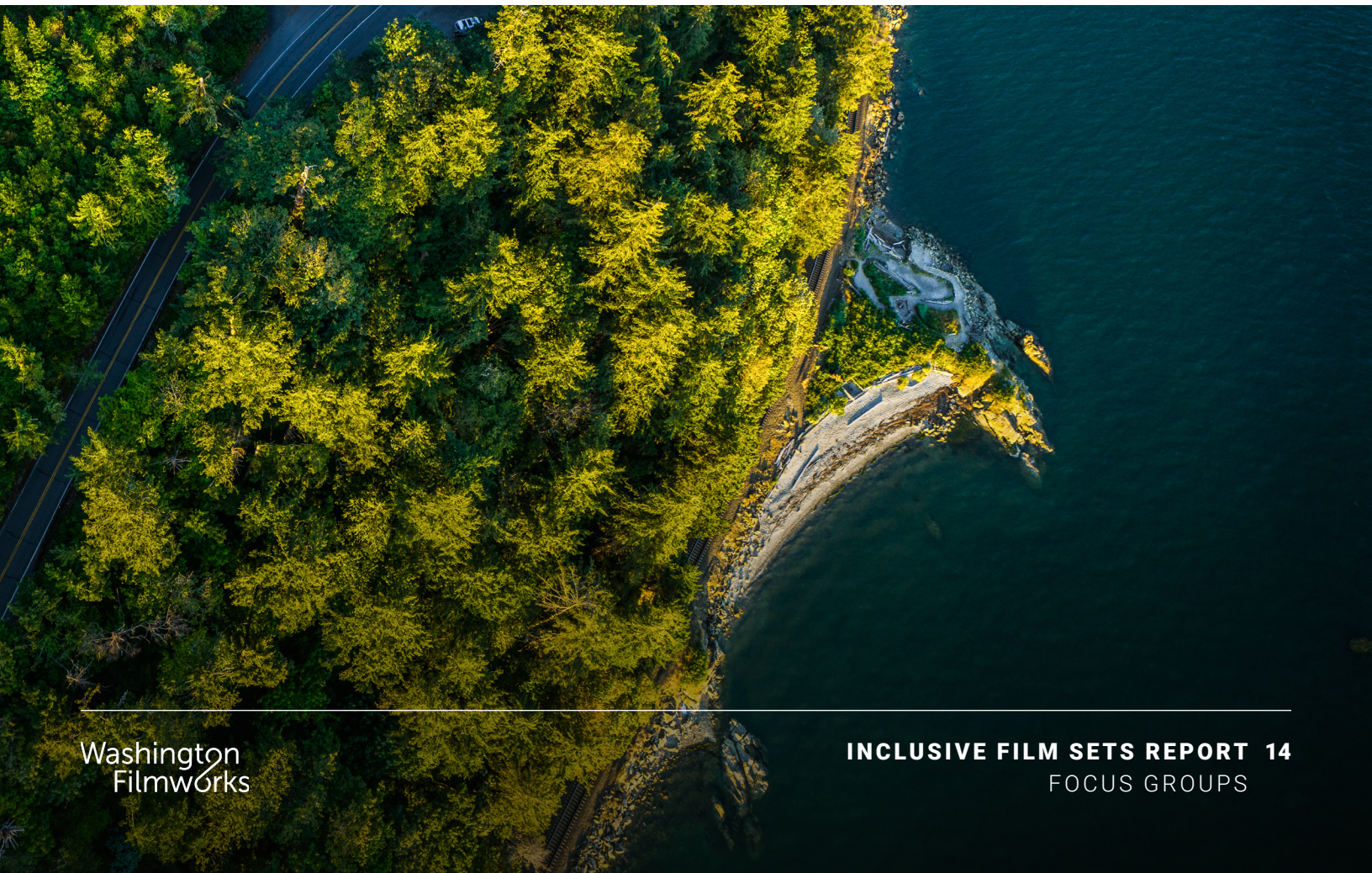
Expand Networks: Create opportunities for networking and expand connections in the film industry.

- *Workshops:* Focus on understanding and addressing bias, with actionable outcomes that are specific to the film industry.
- *Mixers:* Facilitate connections by hosting events where underrepresented filmmakers can connect with industry leaders, financiers, and collaborators.
- *Talent Database:* Create access to a centralized database of staff at all skill levels including new and seasoned staff.

- *Set Visits*: Provide opportunities for underrepresented individuals to observe and engage with sets during production.
- *Connect Communities*: Actively bridge gaps between dominant groups and historically underrepresented communities, who might operate “underground” or in “bubbles,” to ensure visibility and inclusion.
- *Mentorship*: Pair emerging filmmakers from historically underrepresented communities with established professionals to provide real-world experience and industry connections in the form of mentorship or apprentice programs.
- *Shift Dynamics*: Create opportunities and expectations for white professionals to participate in and integrate into projects led by people from underrepresented communities.

Work With Unions To Change: Collaborate with unions to change policy and practices that expand inclusion.

- *Shift Policy*: Participants talked about union policies that prevent inclusion including the high cost to join the union and the number of and timeframe of required union workdays.
- *Benchmarks*: Set benchmarks for inclusion, such as requiring unions to maintain robust and diverse hiring pools. Advocate for union rosters to reflect diverse demographics.



CONCLUSIONS

Focus group discussions affirmed the desire and need for more inclusive film sets. WF should continue to prioritize this work and lift up learnings about what is working to make inclusive film sets. Additionally, WF should continue to create opportunities for the community to provide feedback and collaborate on solutions.

BOUNCE BACK EVENTS

WF hosted Bounce Back events in the production centers of Seattle and Spokane, as well as virtually, to share out findings of the focus groups, debut the initial plan of action by WF, and create a space for continued conversation, community engagement, and sharing.

ACTION PLAN

Using the feedback from the community, WF has designed an action plan to drive the work in the immediate future which includes the following items:

Publish Focus Group Outcomes

Inform and Empower With Resources

- Glossary of Terms
- What is inclusivity, and why is it important?
- What can I do on set today to make a difference
- Recommendations around hiring, accommodations, and legal topics

- Conflict Resolution or de-escalation tactics for the workplace
- Examples that have worked on other sets

Organize Learning and Networking Events

- Leaders from the community who have adopted inclusive film sets share experiences
- Solution-based, bring a problem and leave with a solution
- Half facilitated/half open networking
- Focused on production centers, initially

Organizational and Programmatic Inclusion

- WF will work to distribute information about inclusive film sets both internally and externally with community partners and within the organizations programming / committees.
 - Workforce Development Programs
 - Small Budget Production Initiative and Production Incentive Funding Recipients
 - WF Film Leadership Council / Equity Committee
 - WF Social Media Channels
 - Wheelhouse Social Media Channels



MISSION VISION VALUES

As a result of this impactful work, WF's Board of Directors revisited the Mission, Vision and Values of the organization for the first time in nearly two decades. The Board worked with the leadership team at [Reclaiming Us](#) and below was the outcome of the work

VISION

WF envisions a thriving creative economy in Washington where film and media production fuel equitable job growth, drive statewide investment, and showcase the state as a premier destination for production.

MISSION

WF strengthens the statewide film industry by advancing economic development, building career pathways, and connecting communities to opportunity. Through strategic partnerships, financial incentives, and statewide advocacy, we serve as a catalyst for sustainable job creation, local business growth, and inclusive workforce development in film and creative media.

VALUES

Economic Impact With Purpose

We exist to grow Washington's economy. Our work creates living wage jobs, supports local businesses, and attracts investment across urban and rural communities.

Fair Access and Inclusive Growth

We work to ensure that opportunity is not limited by geography, background, or access to resources. Our programs are designed to reach communities across the state, support historically underrepresented creatives, and create pathways into the industry for those who have been left out in the past.

Connector, Bridge-Builder, Advocate

We act as a hub—linking filmmakers, crew, businesses, policymakers, and the public. Our role is to strengthen the entire ecosystem by championing what's working and pushing for what's next.

Sustainable Practice

We take the long view—investing in infrastructure, building repeatable success, and growing a resilient statewide industry.