IMPACT THINK TANK
2025 REPORT

BUILDING INCLUSIVE CO-PRODUCTIONS: BEST PRACTICES FOR PRODUCERS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The EAVE Impact Think Tank was launched in 2019 at <u>WEMW</u> in Trieste as part of EAVE's broader commitment to driving meaningful change in the international screen sector and empowering our network of producers to act as agents of transformation. Each year in Trieste, we bring together a handpicked group of global industry leaders and changemakers to confront structural challenges, explore new screen industry models, and shape a more inclusive and sustainable future for independent screen content.

In 2025, amid rising financial pressures, shrinking cultural funding, and a noticeable reduction in commissioning opportunities across many regions, the need for thoughtful and inclusive co-production has become more urgent than ever. Today, co-productions are not only a vital means of cultural exchange—they have become a crucial strategy for sustaining content creation in increasingly challenging conditions.

This year's Think Tank builds on the success of our widely circulated 2024 report on <u>Inclusive Co-Productions</u>, offering deeper insights, practical tools, and guidance for implementing equitable models. With generous support from the Canada Media Fund, Telefilm, and IEFTA, the 2025 edition expanded the conversation, welcoming not only a broader cohort of producers but also distributors, bringing valuable perspectives into the room.
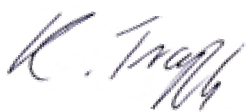
At the core of this year's gathering was a single, driving question: **How can producers embed inclusive practices throughout every stage of their co-production workflows**?

In response, participants co-created a comprehensive guide highlighting actionable strategies for both domestic and international co-productions, reflecting a wide range of production realities and contexts. To ground this work, the group articulated a set of **Guiding Principles** for inclusive co-production. These principles reflect a shared commitment to reshaping not only what stories are told, but how we tell them—and with whom:

- **Embed Inclusion from the Start**: Inclusion isn't an add-on—it must shape every stage of the process.
- **Share Power & Access:** Be transparent with budgets, rights, and roles. Ensure all collaborators can fully participate, including through travel, with support for language accessibility and other inclusion needs.
- **Stay Close to the Community:** Prioritize resources, talent, and distribution strategies that benefit the people and places at the heart of the story.
- **Value More Than Money:** Recognize cultural, creative, and community contributions—not just financial ones.
- **Build Mutual Benefit:** Co-productions should uplift everyone involved, especially partners in low-capacity or historically marginalized regions.
- **Disrupt the Default:** Use co-productions to challenge industry norms and center new voices and narratives.

We encourage you to read this guide with an eye toward what is most relevant and supportive to the work you are doing. Not every recommendation will apply to every project—but many will. These recommendations offer practical, accessible strategies for all producers—whether seasoned professionals, those from low-production capacity regions and marginalized communities, or both. We hope this guide supports your process, serving not only as a roadmap for best practices but also as a collective call to action to foster more ethical and impactful international co-productions.

Warm regards,

KRISTINA TRAPP
CEO

KEY TERMS

- **Marginalized Producers:** Include those from the Global Majority, stateless and religious minority communities, 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, and people with disabilities.

- **Global Majority:** A term referring to people from regions traditionally underrepresented in Western screen industries (African, Asian, Indigenous, Latin American), despite making up the majority of the world's population.

- **Equity**: Addressing systemic barriers and redistributing power, opportunities, and resources to ensure fair outcomes for historically marginalized and low-production capacity producers.

- **Inclusion**: The intentional practice of ensuring equitable access, representation, and participation of marginalized communities across all aspects of content creation, production, and distribution.

- **Ethical Co-Production**: A framework that prioritizes fairness, transparency, and mutual respect in international partnerships, ensuring that all collaborators—especially those from low-production capacity regions or marginalized communities—benefit equitably.

- **Originating Producer:** The producer who initially formulated the idea for the project or optioned the intellectual property (IP).

- **Positionality**: The relationship between a creative team's lived experience and the community the content represents.

- **Systemic Racism:** Policies, practices, and societal structures that unfairly advantage certain racial groups while discriminating against others.

- **Low-Production Capacity Countries:** Regions with limited public/private resources, weak infrastructure, governance irregularities, or restricted access to international markets.

- **High-Production Capacity Countries**: Countries with well-developed screen sector ecosystems, stable economies, and access to public/private financing tools.

- **Asymmetrical Co-Production**: Production characterized by structural imbalances between partnering entities, often reflecting disparities in financial resources and access to global markets.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide offers a practical, step-by-step framework for implementing ethical, inclusive, and fair co-production practices—particularly in collaborations involving Global Majority creatives and producers from Low-Production Capacity Countries. Grounded in real-world experience, the strategies shared here are flexible, field-tested, and applicable across diverse production contexts.

Each phase of content creation—from development to distribution—presents distinct challenges. This guide addresses them holistically, ensuring that inclusion, cultural sensitivity, and financial transparency are embedded throughout. True inclusion requires more than good intentions: it demands early and sustained dialogue, clear deal structures, and safeguards against the power imbalances that often marginalize originating producers, particularly those from low-production capacity contexts.

This resource is intended for a wide range of industry stakeholders:

- **For producers from marginalized communities and Low-Production Capacity Countries**, it offers tools to navigate barriers in financing, creative control, and distribution.

- **For producers from High-Production Capacity Countries**, it provides guidance on building equitable, mutually beneficial partnerships.

- **For funders, policymakers, festival programmers, and distributors**, it highlights structural pathways to support inclusive storytelling through more equitable funding models, policies, and market access.

While relevant to all forms of co-production, the guide focuses on asymmetrical partnerships—such as those between high- and low-capacity countries, or across Global North–South and East–West divides—and emphasizes approaches that build reciprocal, lasting value in collaborations with marginalized communities.

A NOTE ON SELECTING PARTNERS

The success of these best practices does not rely on processes alone—it also depends on the partners we choose to work with. Selecting co-producers who align with or are willing to learn and grow in their ethical and inclusive production approach is crucial to fostering a truly collaborative environment. Early and continuous discussions on shared goals, values, and approaches to community engagement help ensure alignment and prevent conflicts later in the process.

Working with partners who embrace equitable values or demonstrate a genuine commitment to evolving their production practices ensures that these principles are upheld throughout the project, rather than being met with resistance or tokenistic engagement. Conversely, choosing partners who dominate decision-making, resist change, or devalue marginalized voices can undermine even the most well-intentioned efforts. Establishing clear expectations and securing commitment to these principles from the outset is essential to creating fair, sustainable, and meaningful co-productions that respect both creative and cultural integrity.

ROADBLOCKS TO INCLUSIVE CO-PRODUCTION

Producers seeking to create screen content through an inclusive lens face barriers that span societal, economic, institutional, and political levels. These challenges are deeply interconnected, reinforcing industry norms that limit equitable access, representation, and creative autonomy.

For producers from Low-Production Capacity Countries, the Global Majority, and Indigenous communities, these challenges are even more pronounced due to limited funding access, exclusionary co-production agreements, and lack of institutional support. Addressing these disparities requires structural change, not just individual adaptation.

1. Systemic and Structural Barriers
- Colonial legacies and Western-centric industry frameworks privilege Northern/European producers over Global Majority producers.
- Systemic racism, classism, and entrenched power structures create barriers to trust in the ability of marginalized producers to lead and deliver projects.
- Issues of positionality result in narrative dilution when producers and creative teams lack lived experience with the story's subject matter.

2. Economic and Financial Barriers
- Funding is concentrated in High-Production Capacity Countries, making it difficult for originating producers from low-production capacity regions to secure equitable financial support or access the international funding ecosystem.
- Co-production financing and rights models – often dictated by high-production capacity partners – prioritize monetary investment over the value of intellectual and cultural contributions, reinforcing power imbalances.
- Lack of equitable intellectual property (IP) ownership, revenue-sharing, and financial control sidelines originating producers from marginalized communities or low-production capacity regions.
- Rigid funding policies and restrictive co-production treaty regulations favour high-production capacity country partners over creative and financial fairness.

3. Producer Collaboration and Co-Production Practices
- High-production capacity partners often dictate the terms of co-productions, leading to unbalanced decision-making structures.
- Tokenism results in marginalized producers being symbolically included rather than given meaningful creative, financial, or ownership control.
- In Low-Production Capacity Countries, a lack of training and educational support (i.e. legal, business affairs and financing) limits producers' ability to negotiate equitable deals.

4. Global Power Dynamics and Political Barriers
- Content creators in politically volatile regions face additional risks, including censorship, regulatory uncertainty, and funding instability.
- The reduction of public funding in some regions and the reduction of funding targeting marginalized producers have created an atmosphere of scarcity, disproportionately affecting marginalized producers.

DEVELOPMENT

The development phase is critical to ensuring that co-productions are ethically structured, financially equitable, and culturally inclusive. This stage demands early and sustained community engagement, transparent and fair deal structures between co-producers, and safeguards against power imbalances that often disadvantage originating producers.

Meaningful inclusion and financial equity must be prioritized, particularly when the originating producers—or those attached due to the content's connection to their community—come from low-production capacity countries or marginalized backgrounds. Their authority should be structurally embedded rather than symbolic, with explicit recognition and decision-making across all stages of production.

Establish Strategic Alignment Between Co-Producers

A lack of shared vision between co-producers on content, process, audience, and market positioning can lead to creative and ethical compromises later. To prevent this, start with a shared commitment to values and approach, including:

- Conduct early visioning sessions to define shared artistic goals and how the content will be made, ensuring alignment on:
  - Who will tell the story, and how will key creative roles be determined to uphold cultural integrity
  - The co-producers' vision for working together defines the experience they wish to foster for the crew and talent jointly
  - How the producers plan to engage with communities (related to the content or shoot location)
- Discuss how to ensure that creative control aligns with the values and expectations of the originating producer and the community represented.
- Define and agree to a definition of success, clarifying expectations for the content's impact and release, including:
  - Mapping out the agreed-upon target audiences for the content
  - Target festivals, audiences, and markets that align with the content's vision and purpose
  - Preferred broadcasters, platforms, or distribution models to maximize reach
  - Long-term goals for cultural, social, or community impact beyond commercial success

These discussions should be documented and agreed upon as an attachment to the development deal memo and, later, the co-production agreement, ensuring accountability, transparency, and alignment throughout the production and release process.

Engage Communities Early & Continuously

Early and continuous engagement with communities where production occurs, or stories are set, is essential for ethical storytelling and building trust.

- Schedule pre-script development onsite professional visits as an integral part of the production setup of a project for all key crew and co-producers with the community to foster relationships and genuine community connections rather than simply scouting locations or engaging in tourism. [1]
- These visits should also serve to assess whether the production has the ethical grounds to portray the community and its broader reality. If meaningful engagement and accountability cannot be established, it may be more responsible not to shoot in that context, in order to avoid superficial or extractive representations.
- Meet with cultural advisors, elders, and community leaders to listen and discuss expectations, sensitivities, and concerns.
- Document agreements and commitments with communities to ensure transparency and prevent conflicts.
- Integrate structured feedback loops from development to release to ensure ongoing community input beyond initial consultations.

Formalize a Reciprocity Plan

Ensuring long-term benefits for the community is a fundamental component of ethical co-production and must be guided by a do-no-harm approach. Reciprocity should extend beyond symbolic gestures, instead fostering sustainable, mutually beneficial relationships that contribute to economic or community growth based on local priorities.

- Engage community elders and leaders early to assess potential social, environmental, and economic impacts of production, co-designing mitigation strategies that align with community needs within a do-no-harm framework to prevent exploitation, displacement, or disruption of well-being, cultural practices, or natural environments.
- Allocate budgetary resources for impact mitigation, training, mentorship, and capacity-building initiatives that support local economic opportunities or community-led initiatives.
- Prioritize hiring and upskilling local crew members for both on-set and off-set roles, ensuring opportunities extend beyond temporary employment and contribute to economic empowerment.
- Provide tangible, long-term support, such as equipment donations, funding for community programs, or infrastructure investments, as determined by the community itself.

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1. The Indigenous concept of "visiting with communities" is a relational approach based on respect, reciprocity, and accountability. It prioritizes deep listening, presence, and mutual exchange, ensuring communities are active participants rather than passive consultees. Visiting means spending time without an agenda, honoring protocols, and recognizing storytelling as a shared responsibility rather than an extractive process.

Respect Story Ownership & Cultural Authority

Ensuring communities retain control over their narratives is critical to ethical storytelling. Before moving forward with development, assess the content for potential unintended harm to communities, cast, or crew—whether through the subject matter itself or the writing, production, and editing processes.

Consider the following:

- Could the content misrepresent contemporary or historical events?
- Might it reinforce harmful stereotypes?
- Is there a risk of retraumatization or unintended triggering for specific groups or individuals?
- Does the positionality of the creative team affect how the story is framed or received?

If any of these concerns arise, identify necessary interventions to ensure an ethical, accurate, and respectful portrayal that aligns with the communities represented. Recommended strategies include:

- Ensuring key creatives have a well-aligned positionality with the content, meaning they have the lived experience, cultural knowledge, or deep engagement necessary to tell the story responsibly.
- Securing agreements that grant Global Majority key creatives or community partners final approval over sensitive edits.
- Implementing Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)[2] at key stages - including treatment, scripting, and rough-cut reviews - ensures ongoing community input.
- Developing cultural safety guidelines to prevent misrepresentation, exploitation, or extractive storytelling practices.
- Extending final approval considerations beyond the script and edit to casting, distribution, and promotional materials to safeguard cultural integrity throughout the project.

Appoint a Cultural Authenticity Steward

A Cultural Authenticity Steward from the community where the story is set should be appointed in a position of authority to safeguard narrative integrity and ensure cultural representation remains accurate from development through release. This role serves as an advisor and decision-maker, ensuring that cultural elements are handled respectfully and authentically.

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2. FPIC is a human rights principle rooted in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (2007) and ILO Convention No. 169 (1989). It was developed to protect Indigenous Peoples' rights over their lands, resources, and cultural heritage by ensuring they have the power to give or withhold consent before any external projects affect them. In screen production, FPIC ensures that communities retain control over their stories and representation. FPIC prevents misrepresentation and extractive storytelling, fostering ethical, collaborative content creation that respects cultural integrity and creative agency.

- Embed the steward's role across all stages of development, production, and editing to provide continuous guidance rather than retroactive consultation.
- Ensure the steward has direct influence over editorial, casting, music selection, and distribution decisions to prevent misrepresentation or dilution of cultural narratives.

Support the steward with a dedicated budget and access to key production and post-production discussions, ensuring their input is actionable and respected.

Supporting Local & Marginalized Writers

Ensuring that local and marginalized writers have meaningful authorship over their stories strengthens authenticity, prevents tokenistic inclusion, and builds sustainable creative ecosystems. True collaboration requires fair compensation, decision-making authority, and support structures that acknowledge systemic imbalances while also prioritizing writers' well-being.

- Hire local and marginalized writers or showrunners to center authentic perspectives during the development phase.
- Run pre-development labs where key creatives and local communities shape and inform narratives before external involvement.
- Provide fair and transparent compensation for cultural contributors, ensuring industry-standard rates for cultural consultancy and story rights.
- Guarantee proper credit for all writers or co-writers, preventing their contributions from being diluted or reduced to symbolic recognition.
- Establish a streamlined and equitable notes process that respects the workload of writers across all co-producing partners.
- Develop a clear and balanced notes process that integrates feedback from multiple sources while respecting the workload and creative autonomy of writers.
- Provide structural and logistical support for writers facing systemic barriers, including mentorship, funding for extended writing periods, and access to industry networks.

FINANCING & CONTRACTING

Equitable financing structures ensure that all co-producers—particularly those from Low-Production Capacity Countries or marginalized backgrounds—have fair access to funding, financial control, and long-term economic benefits. Traditional models often favour High-Production Capacity Country producers, limiting originating producers' control and financial returns. Fair budgeting, transparent contracts, and balanced rights agreements are key to preventing extraction and ensuring sustainable collaboration, revenue sharing, and industry growth across asymmetrical co-productions.

Utilize Transparent & Fair Contracts

A well-structured development deal memo and production contract ensures clearly defined roles, decision-making power, and transparency from the outset and upholds fairness, cultural integrity, and financial equity, particularly in projects representing the Global Majority or historically marginalized communities.

- Contracts should include a cultural preamble to acknowledge community rights and responsibilities and detail the genesis of the project.
- Formalize leadership roles for originating producers to ensure real authority over creative and business decisions.
- Establish equitable crediting, ownership and revenue-sharing models that recognize both financial and non-financial contributions, ensuring fair profit distribution.
- Define decision-making thresholds to prevent dominant co-producers from sidelining originating producers or key creatives, particularly in narrative direction, funding allocation, and hiring.
- Ensure sustained participation of originating producers beyond development, preventing their replacement or marginalization as the project progresses.
- Ensure that producers in Low-Production Capacity Countries have access to legal support during negotiations
- Critically assess the "governing law" clause in all agreements. Defaulting to the legal jurisdiction of a high-production capacity country can create insurmountable barriers to justice and accountability. Wherever possible, choose a neutral jurisdiction or one that reflects the originating producer's context, or establish a shared arbitration framework.

Ensure Fair and Equitable Producer Compensation

Producers must align early on clear and fair financial structures to prevent disparities in compensation, particularly for those in low-production capacity regions where fundraising potential may be lower. Compensation should reflect the actual division of labour and responsibilities rather than being dictated solely by the percentage of financing raised in a given country.

- Set an agreed-upon percentage for overhead costs at the outset of the project to ensure financial transparency.
- Discuss the division of labour and responsibilities to ensure producer fees reflect the actual balance of work rather than being tied strictly to the percentage of funding raised in each country.
- Prevent underpayment of producers from low-production capacity countries by structuring fees equitably and recognizing the value of creative, logistical, and strategic contributions beyond financial investment.

Secure Profit-Sharing & Backend Equity for Originating Producers

Many co-production structures fail to provide financial benefits to originating producers, particularly when high-production capacity partners control larger territories, distribution rights, or revenue streams. To ensure financial equity, revenue-sharing agreements must prevent dominant co-producers from disproportionately benefiting at the expense of the originating producer.

- Structure revenue-sharing agreements in proportion to the value given to the content to ensure equitable profit distribution among all co-producers.
- High-production capacity producers often retain the most valuable territories, leading to disproportionate revenue shares. Avoiding such splits is key to ensuring fairer market access and benefits for low-production capacity partners.
- Guarantee a fixed percentage of revenue for the originating producer as a base share, ensuring they receive a minimum return on their creative, cultural, and intellectual contributions, regardless of recoupment structures.
- Use independent third parties to manage revenue collection and distribution, ensuring transparency, preventing financial mismanagement, and mitigating conflicts.
- Define backend equity terms upfront, specifying how revenues from licensing, streaming, international sales, and territories will be distributed among co-producers.
- Prevent financial disadvantages in distribution by ensuring that cross-collateralization is not used to absorb profits from successful markets into underperforming ones unless explicitly agreed upon.
- Adopt pari passu recoupment structures so that all investors and stakeholders within the same tier recover their investments proportionally and simultaneously, preventing priority recoupment that disadvantages smaller producers.

Build Inclusion into Financing & Financial Management

Financing must be structured to prevent financial dominance, ensure fair valuation of all contributions, and align funding distribution with where activities occur. Maintaining financial transparency prevents power imbalances by ensuring all co-producers have equal access to budgetary decisions, expenditures, and revisions throughout the project lifecycle.

- Embed financial decision-making rights into contracts, preventing unilateral changes and ensuring equitable financial control.
- Collaborate on funding applications, ensuring all co-producers review and agree to terms before signing agreements.

- Recognize non-financial contributions (e.g., cultural expertise, creative IP, in-kind resources, unpaid development work) alongside monetary investment in development, production or impact/distribution budgets.
- Ensure equal participation in budget revisions across all stages of production, requiring joint approval for significant reallocations to ensure financial decisions reflect all co-producing partners' needs.
- Structure payment schedules to prioritize equitable cash flow for all partners.
- Prevent financing terms that delay payments to low-production capacity partners while prioritizing financiers and high-production capacity producers.
- Ensure production cost distribution reflects actual spending needs rather than benefiting administrative teams in high-production capacity countries.
- Use a shared financial reporting system and budgeting tools for real-time expense tracking and cash flow management, ensuring visibility, accountability, and transparency in fund distribution and payments.
- Ensure the production budget includes gender-sensitive and community-sensitive allocations – such as childcare, safety, wellness, and culturally appropriate care – so that the associated costs do not fall disproportionately on the originating producer or Low-Production Capacity Country.

Protect Against Currency Exchange, Banking & Taxation Challenges for Producers in Low-Production Capacity Countries

Producers from Low-Production Capacity Countries often face significant financial losses due to currency conversion fluctuations, banking restrictions, heavy taxation on grants, and limitations on making international payments. These barriers can delay payments, reduce available funds, or prevent producers from accessing their financing altogether. To address these challenges, financing structures must be designed with protective mechanisms that ensure equitable access and stability:

- Account for currency conversion risks by incorporating risk-sharing mechanisms that protect producers from losses caused by exchange rate fluctuations.
- Fix the value of local contributions in agreements using the local currency, ensuring the amount remains stable regardless of exchange rate changes. This respects the value of in-country contributions in their economic context and protects producers from local currency devaluation.
- Include banking and transfer fees as eligible budget items so that low-production capacity producers are not forced to absorb these additional costs.
- Plan for taxation realities in specific markets, particularly where grants may be heavily taxed. Structures should ensure that tax burdens do not disproportionately reduce the resources available for production.
- Anticipate foreign currency restrictions, which may block access to international payments for equipment, talent, or services. Where relevant, allocate additional planning or contingency support to navigate these barriers.
- Enable trusted financial facilitation: In cases where direct payments are blocked or unreliable, high-production capacity partners should consider holding funds in trust to facilitate international transactions. These arrangements must be fully transparent, accountable, and designed to provide secure access for low-production capacity co-producers.

Addressing Cost Disparities Between Low- and High-Production Capacity Countries

In many co-productions, production costs in Low-Production Capacity Countries are significantly lower – due to local cost[1] structures, currency exchange rates, and relative GDP. This disparity can skew financial contribution calculations, revenue-sharing agreements, and ownership stakes, especially when monetary input is the primary measure of control. If unaddressed, it can result in low-capacity producers receiving a disproportionately small share of IP ownership and revenue recoupment. To help establish fairer structures, producers can use a comparative cost analysis:

- Establish a baseline budget by either (a) treating the entire production as if it were executed in the currency and country of the originating producer, or (b) re-budgeting low-production capacity country costs using high-production capacity country rates – to fairly assess the comparative value of all contributions.
- Calculate the specific percentage of budget lines to which each producer is contributing.
- Use these percentages to determine ownership shares in the IP and revenue-recoupment model, ensuring fair valuation and equitable participation in the revenue stream.

Support Marginalized Producers in High-Production Capacity Countries

Producers from marginalized communities in High-Production Capacity Countries can face systemic barriers in accessing funding, distribution, and industry networks. Despite operating in well-resourced markets, they are frequently excluded from commercial opportunities due to systemic racism, institutional bias, and economic inequities.

By co-producing domestically, high-production capacity producers can help level the playing field, but true inclusion requires proactive steps to ensure marginalized producers have meaningful participation, financial control, and access to industry resources.

- Establish single-purpose production companies where feasible, structuring ownership so that the marginalized producer holds the majority stake, ensuring control over financial decisions, IP ownership, and revenue participation.
- Co-apply for funding as equal partners, ensuring marginalized producers have full recognition, decision-making authority, and financial control over financing.
- Leverage industry credibility to help marginalized producers qualify for financing, secure investment, and access opportunities they may otherwise be excluded from.
- Use established banking relationships to improve lending terms for marginalized producers and assist with securing interim financing and bridging funds, ensuring fair and non-exploitative financial terms.
- Facilitate introductions to market partners, including sales agents, distributors, and broadcasters, ensuring marginalized producers gain direct access to commercial opportunities.

PRODUCTION

The production and post-production phases present significant risks for low-production capacity and marginalized producers, crew, and communities, as systemic barriers often manifest in hiring inequities, workplace discrimination, financial control imbalances, and lack of creative authority over final content. Ensuring fair hiring practices, ethical on-set environments, and meaningful oversight in editing is critical to preventing exploitation and maintaining the integrity of the originating producer's vision.

Prioritize Local & Low-Production Capacity Leadership

Low-production capacity and marginalized producers frequently lack decision-making authority on set, even when they originate the content. Local and marginalized crew members are often underpaid, overlooked for leadership positions, or replaced by foreign teams instead of being given opportunities to advance their careers.

- Guarantee equal level of pay and hiring opportunities for Global Majority and local crew, ensuring fair compensation comparable to imported crew.
- Develop structured mentorship and apprenticeship programs to build long-term industry capacity, enabling local creatives to take on leadership roles rather than relying on external expertise for future productions.
- Ensure department heads reflect diverse leadership and prevent tokenistic hiring in junior roles while senior positions remain externally controlled.
- Use contracts that protect low-production capacity and marginalized department heads, ensuring their authority is not undermined during production.
- Facilitate knowledge transfer and fair representation by integrating local designers, stylists, and artists instead of parachuting in High-Production Capacity Country professionals without community collaboration.

Ethical & Culturally Accurate Casting Practices

Casting decisions must uphold cultural authenticity and prevent misrepresentation by ensuring key roles are filled by actors from the communities being represented. Productions must move beyond generic "ethnic casting" and heteronormative practices that miscast actors from one region or identity to portray another.

- Prioritize authentic representation by casting actors from the actual communities being portrayed.
- Engage local casting directors with deep community connections and expertise in language, dialect, and cultural expression.
- Ensure linguistic and cultural accuracy by working with dialect coaches and cultural consultants to prevent misrepresentation.
- Invest in local talent development by allocating resources for coaching, training, and screen testing in low-production capacity regions.
- Include authenticity clauses in contracts to safeguard accurate representation, preventing casting changes based on marketability or convenience.

Ensuring Authenticity in Artistic Departments

The artistic departments—such as set design, costume, hair, and makeup—play a vital role in shaping a story's authenticity. When individuals from outside the communities fill key creative roles, productions risk cultural inaccuracies, visual misrepresentation, and the erasure of authentic perspectives. Even well-intended productions can reinforce stereotypes, misinterpret traditions, or visually distort lived realities.

- Hire artistic department heads and teams from within the communities depicted, ensuring storytelling, aesthetics, and cultural details remain authentic.
- Prioritize set designers, decorators, and prop masters with knowledge of the community's material culture, preventing generic or inaccurate recreations of homes, religious spaces, or public environments.
- Hire costume designers familiar with the historical and contemporary clothing of the community, avoiding colonial aesthetics or inaccurate depictions of lived experiences.
- Employ hairstylists and makeup artists who understand hair textures, beauty traditions, and grooming practices, ensuring character appearances reflect real-life norms rather than industry defaults.
- Use cultural consultants in artistic departments to oversee design decisions, costumes, set dressing, and makeup choices to ensure alignment with cultural realities.
- Establish final review processes that allow community members or cultural experts to flag inaccuracies before production.

Training for Inclusion & Cultural Competency

Productions often bring external crews into communities or low-production capacity regions without proper training on cultural sensitivity, anti-racism, local customs, or issues related to religion, 2SLGBTQ+ identities, and disability. This lack of awareness can result in workplace discrimination, unconscious bias, and insensitivity toward cultural, religious, or identity-based differences.

- Include a code of conduct in all contracts for staff, crew, suppliers, and cast, establishing clear ethical and professional standards.
- Implement mandatory anti-racism, anti-harassment, and bias training for all crew, producers, and cast to foster a respectful and inclusive production environment.
- For productions working in Indigenous communities, utilize established frameworks such as PACT (The Shine Network Institute) or On Screen Protocols and Pathways (imagineNATIVE) in Canada or Pathfinder – Guidelines for Responsible Filmmaking with the Sámi People to align production practices with community protocols, cultural sensitivities, and ethical storytelling principles.
- Provide cultural briefings on local customs, traditions, and etiquette to ensure foreign crew members understand and respect the local working environment.
- Establish precise reporting mechanisms for ethical violations, with whistleblower protections to prevent retaliation.
- Ensure culturally appropriate working conditions, including prayer spaces, dietary accommodations, and observance of cultural or religious practices.
- Appoint a safety steward on set in a role of authority to support education, mediate issues, and maintain a safe, inclusive environment.

Implement Safety & Risk Mitigation Plans for High-Risk Productions

Producers from low-production capacity regions and crew working in politically unstable regions or on sensitive content (e.g., human rights issues, Indigenous land rights, or political critique) often face security threats, financial risks, or legal challenges. Productions must proactively address safety concerns and embed protections into contracts to prevent harm.

- Introduce security budgets for productions working in high-risk locations, covering personal safety, legal defence, and digital security needs.
- Develop emergency response protocols to establish clear action plans in case of threats, legal action, or physical danger.
- Ensure contracts include safety clauses, allowing crew and producers to withdraw from unsafe situations without financial or legal penalties.
- Guarantee legal protections for producers in politically restrictive environments, ensuring that international co-producers advocate for their rights in global markets.
- Ensure international production partners recognize local laws and regulations, preventing high-production capacity producers from unintentionally violating legal frameworks that may put local teams at risk.

Ensuring Equity in Travel, Work Hours, and On-Set Experience

Productions working in Low-Production Capacity Countries or with marginalized communities often create disparities in travel, accommodation, meals, working conditions, and scheduling between local and foreign crew. High-production capacity producers and international crew members frequently receive preferential treatment, reinforcing hierarchical structures that undervalue local contributions. Establishing an equitable, inclusive on-set culture fosters collaboration, mutual respect, and stronger creative outcomes, ensuring that local crew are treated as essential team members rather than secondary labour forces.

- Avoid imposing high-production capacity country norms and ways of working on the set. Remember that each country/community brings its working styles, cultural protocols, and production logic. Adapting to local approaches and co-developing a middle ground ensures more equitable, respectful, and sustainable collaborations.
- Provide equal travel standards for local and foreign crew, preventing policies where international crew fly business class while local teams receive lower-tier travel or must arrange their transport.
- Standardize per diems so local crew receive equal allowances for meals and incidentals, avoiding financial burdens due to cost-of-living disparities.
- Ensure equitable accommodations, preventing situations where international crew stay in hotels while local crew are placed in lower-quality lodging or forced into long commutes.
- Implement fair work-hour expectations across all teams, avoiding situations where local crew work excessive hours while international crew have more regulated schedules.
- Protect local crew from labour exploitation, ensuring that informal expectations of overtime or flexible hours do not result in unpaid labour.
- Ensure ethical working conditions for children involved in production, even in contexts where local regulations are weak or absent — including limits on hours, provision of rest, education support, and parental or guardian oversight.

Foster Team Cohesion Through Shared Meals, Language & Cultural Exchange

- Adopt a single working language on set to foster trust, streamline communication, and ensure clarity across multilingual crews.
- When there are significant language differences on set, hire dedicated interpreters—ideally individuals who can also advise on cultural and contextual authenticity—so that interpretation does not fall informally on bilingual crew members or add to their workload.
- If the director does not speak the principal language used in the project, bring in a creative language consultant who can help preserve nuance, ensure clear communication, and protect the creative integrity of the content.
- Encourage all crew to eat together, fostering an inclusive, team-building environment rather than reinforcing segregated dining spaces for local and international teams.
- Ensure equal meal standards for all crew, providing the same quality and variety of food and drink options regardless of role or nationality when catering is provided.
- Respect local dietary customs by incorporating traditional foods into catering options and ensuring all crew members' food preferences, including religious or cultural dietary restrictions, are accommodated equally.
- Integrate cultural traditions into the production schedule, such as religious or traditional ceremonies that mark the beginning of work, ensuring they are acknowledged in the daily call sheet and inclusive of the entire team.
- Recognize and honour cultural or religious holidays that are significant to the community or location of filming, inviting all crew to participate in observances or celebrations where appropriate.

POST PRODUCTION

Post-production plays a crucial role in shaping screen content's final narrative, emotional tone, and cultural accuracy. Decisions made in editing, music selection, sound design, and composition directly impact how a story is told and perceived. When individuals outside the represented community fill key creative post-production roles, productions risk misrepresenting narratives, altering cultural intent, and erasing or distorting authentic artistic expressions.

Hiring editors, composers, music supervisors, and sound designers from the communities represented ensures that the final product remains true to the story's cultural, emotional, and narrative integrity. Without this, pacing, structure, or musical tone decisions may unintentionally reinforce outsider perspectives, stereotypes, or generic representations of a culture. Funding rules may limit cross-border hiring, but advocating for team structures that serve your story may be important. When needed, explore hybrid models—like co-editing or co-composing—that meaningfully include community-rooted creatives.

Implement Inclusive Post-Production Practices

To ensure authenticity and equitable collaboration in post-production, productions must prioritize cultural consultation, shared approvals processes, and logistical support, especially when key creatives work across borders. This phase is not just technical but a continuation of storytelling, with deep implications for representation, ethics, and power dynamics.

- Integrate cultural consultation or community review into post-production to ensure that music selection, editorial choices, and sound design align with the story's authenticity.
- Establish a structured community engagement process before locking the edit, allowing key stakeholders to flag cultural inaccuracies, ethical concerns, or misinterpretations.
- Hire a post-production manager who can navigate cultural expectations, workflow differences, and the diverse needs of co-production teams.
- Ensure that color grading takes into account the full range of skin tones represented in the project. Failing to do so can flatten or distort the visual integrity and representation of characters, especially those with darker complexions.
- Provide adequate accommodation and support for directors (and other crew) working abroad for extended post-production periods, ensuring they can meaningfully participate in the editing process. Accommodation should meet the same standard as local housing and offer sufficient private living space, avoiding arrangements that compromise dignity or well-being.
- Wherever possible, the opening and end credits should include the local language(s) of the production, honoring the cultural and linguistic identity of the place and people involved.
- The originating producer should review and approve the final credits to ensure accurate representation and acknowledgment of local collaborators, contributors, and communities.

Hire Editors Who Understand Cultural and Narrative Context

- Prioritize editors with experience in the represented community's storytelling traditions, ensuring culturally informed decision-making.
- Ensure editorial choices align with cultural authenticity, preventing imposed conventions that alter the intent, tone, or significance of the content.
- Maintain editorial decision-making power with originating producers to prevent high-production capacity partners from making final edits that reshape the narrative.
- Use dialogue editors who understand the language to preserve linguistic accuracy and cultural nuance or work with consultants to support them.
- Hire local or junior editors to assist with foreign-language rushes or first assembly, ensuring linguistic and cultural authenticity in the early editing stages.
- If editing takes place in a high-production capacity country, ensure an assistant editor is provided who speaks the same language as the director, if the primary editor does not.
- Split the editor's time between the high-production capacity country and the low-capacity production country to immerse them in the location and culture of the film.
- Ensure archival material is reviewed by crew or creatives from the relevant community or language group to ensure accurate usage and respectful editing.

Ensure Culturally Authentic Music & Sound Design

- Hire music supervisors and composers from the represented culture to avoid inauthentic or generic "world music" scoring that erases distinct musical identities.
- Avoid stock or stereotypical sound choices (e.g., Middle Eastern scales for any Southwest Asian story, drumming for Indigenous stories) unless they are directly rooted in the culture and context of the narrative.
- Engage community-led musicians and composers to create original scores that reflect the lived sonic experience of the story's setting.

RELEASE AND DISTRIBUTION

The final distribution phase is not just about releasing content—it is an opportunity to advance equitable access to audiences, ensure fair revenue-sharing, and create long-term industry impact. Many low-production capacity and marginalized producers face distribution barriers due to a lack of infrastructure, limited financing for marketing, difficulties with festival participation, or alternative screening models that center their communities.

Producers—particularly those from high-production capacity countries—must prioritize distribution strategies, including screenings in the production locations, the communities represented in the story, and audiences traditionally excluded from mainstream markets. This may involve non-theatrical, grassroots, and community screenings alongside commercial releases, ensuring broader accessibility and engagement.

Fund Travel & Representation for Everyone

Many producers, key creatives, and cast members from Low-Production Capacity Countries cannot attend international festival premieres due to a lack of financial support, despite being essential to the content's creation.

- Allocate a budget to cover travel costs for these key contributors, ensuring they can participate in festivals or theatrical releases rather than leaving high-production capacity partners as the sole representatives.
- If only one producer can attend, prioritize the originating producer.
- Advocate with distribution funders for travel support to festivals most relevant to the content, such as a key regional festival or the festival in the country of production, rather than defaulting only to major European events.
- Advocate for policies prioritizing need-based travel funding for low-capacity creators over high-production capacity creators, ensuring equitable access to global industry opportunities and preventing gatekeeping that sidelines the voices behind the content.

Expanding Alternative & Community Distribution Models

Producers must take the lead in ensuring that content reaches audiences who may not have access to mainstream distribution platforms, particularly in the locations of production, the communities represented in the story, and underserved regions. Many productions prioritize high-production capacity markets while neglecting local and community-based audiences, reinforcing industry gatekeeping and limiting access for those most impacted by the stories being told. To address this, producers must allocate dedicated funding and develop alternative distribution strategies that prioritize accessibility and cultural relevance.

- Budget for local and community-based distribution to ensure content reaches its intended audiences, particularly in low-production capacity regions.
- Partner with local venues, community centers, schools, and organizations to develop grassroots screening initiatives and invest in non-theatrical distribution models, such as community screenings, mobile cinemas, and educational circuits.
- Ensure financial and infrastructural accessibility by incorporating sliding-scale pricing or free screenings and developing tailored release strategies, including subsidized outdoor screenings, free public exhibitions, and digital releases optimized for low-bandwidth environments.
- Prioritize culturally relevant exhibition spaces to present content in ways that are accessible and meaningful to local audiences.
- Secure dedicated funding to prevent financial constraints from limiting access to screenings in underserved regions.

Balance Revenue Goals with Social Impact

For many projects, financial success must be weighed against the need for broader accessibility and impact. To achieve both sustainability and inclusivity, producers must adopt hybrid distribution strategies that generate revenue while ensuring content reaches relevant audiences, including those in smaller or less commercially visible territories.

- Combine commercial and alternative distribution models to ensure both financial sustainability and widespread community access.
- Develop hybrid revenue models that blend traditional ticket sales with alternative funding sources, such as grants, sponsorships, and philanthropy.
- Reinvest a portion of revenue into supporting screenings in underfunded regions, ensuring long-term accessibility beyond the initial release.
- Work to secure distribution partners in smaller or less commercially prioritized territories that align with the content, expanding its reach beyond high-production capacity markets.

Ensure Producers from Low-Production Capacity Countries Retain Rights & Financial Control

Without protections, many low-production capacity producers lose control over distribution rights, limiting their ability to generate revenue or determine where their content is shown. To prevent this imbalance, originating producers must retain decision-making authority over key distribution deals and financial structures.

- Negotiate contracts that preserve rights for educational, community, and non-theatrical screenings, preventing dominant partners from restricting access.
- Ensure profit-sharing agreements recognize the value of non-traditional markets, securing equitable financial returns for low-production capacity producers.
- Establish fair recoupment structures so that revenue generated across all distribution platforms and territories benefits low-production capacity producers rather than disproportionately favouring high-production capacity partners.
- Require originating producer sign-off on all broadcaster sales, sales agent selection, and distribution company agreements to maintain financial and strategic control.
- Ensure transparency in distribution contracts so that producers retain agency over where and how their content is released.
- High-production capacity partners should not automatically claim distribution rights in former colonies or linguistically connected regions unless they present a concrete, locally informed plan for meaningful distribution and engagement.

Advocate for Diverse Leadership in Distribution

- Equity in distribution is only sustainable when marginalized and low-production capacity producers have leadership roles in shaping industry practices.
- Support the creation of Global Majority-led distribution companies, ensuring self-determined access to markets and revenue.

Encourage mentorship programs in distribution, ensuring future generations of marginalized producers gain expertise in sales, marketing, and deal-making.

CONCLUSION

This report has outlined practical strategies for embedding equity and inclusivity across all phases of co-production—from development to distribution. Producers can help reshape the global production landscape into a more just and representative space by centring on cultural authenticity, financial fairness, and ethical industry practices.

Inclusive co-production is more than just diverse participation—it requires structural change that ensures low-production capacity and marginalized producers are equal decision-makers, not secondary partners. This means fair financing, transparent contracts, authentic hiring, and distribution models that prioritize the originating producer and communities most impacted by a story.

High-production capacity producers are responsible for sharing power, profits, and opportunities, ensuring that co-productions do not extract value from communities but create lasting, positive impacts. Whether through mentorship, equitable revenue-sharing, or prioritizing screenings in the locations where stories take place, every producer plays a role in breaking down systemic barriers and fostering truly inclusive global storytelling.

ABOUT EAVE

European Audiovisual Entrepreneurs, EAVE, is a professional training, project development and networking organization for audiovisual producers. Working with a worldwide network of partners we are involved in programmes for producers around the globe.

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