



# Independent Film Alliance

CHICAGO

PRODUCER SURVEY  
REPORT AND PROPOSAL

*June 2021*

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## About the Survey

At the core of IFA Chicago is our mission to provide the community and resources needed to build a diverse and sustainable industry of independent content creators. We believe that producers are integral to that mission and, in developing programming for them, felt that it was important to understand the specific needs of Chicago's independent producers. This led us to develop and launch the Chicago Producer Survey in February 2021.

The survey, completed by 110 producers, was open to Chicago-based producers working in all mediums and formats. The questions asked related to producers' affinity for the position, their understanding of the different facets of producing, level of experience, obstacles, areas for possible impact and demographic information.

## The Report

The report will provide an analysis of Chicago's producers from three angles:

- Who they are
- What they know
- What they need

The results give us an understanding of the demographics of the producing community, their level of experience, the obstacles they face, and what their needs are.

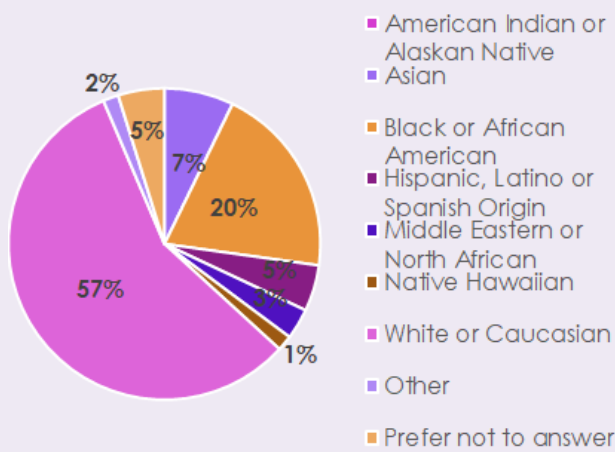
## The Proposal

Based on analysis of the results, in-depth discussions of the reality of the landscape, a town-hall conversation with the producing community, and our ability as an organization, we present a proposal of programming geared towards addressing the needs of Chicago's producers.

# CHICAGO'S PRODUCERS: WHO THEY ARE

## Demographics

### Race and Ethnicity

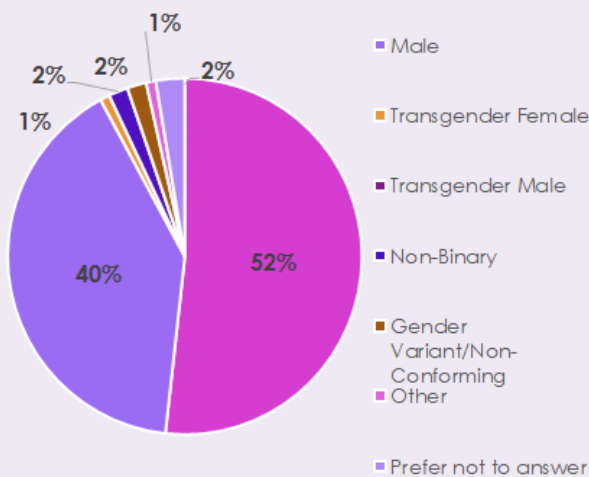


To identify their racial and ethnic background as well as gender identity, producers were asked to select as many options as applicable to them. Results showed that White or Caucasians represented almost two thirds of respondents.

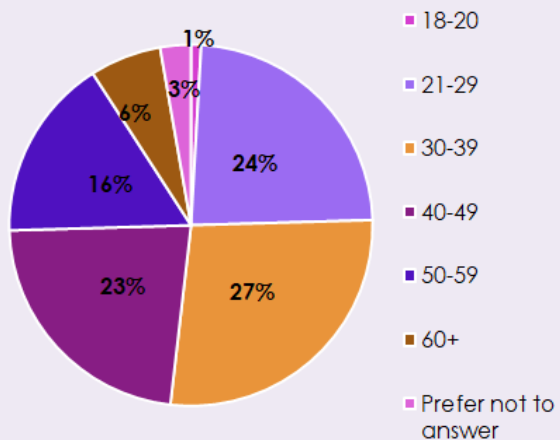
Female identifying people made up half of the responses. 5% of respondents identified as transgender, non-binary or gender non-conforming.

To select their age, respondents were asked to select from an age range. The majority of respondents were between the ages of 30-39. Only one respondent was under 21 years old.

### Gender



### Age



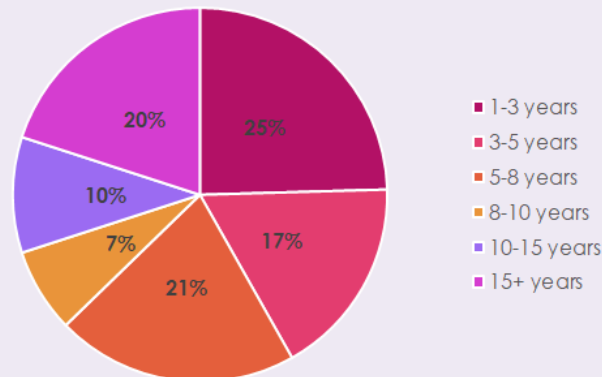
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# CHICAGO'S PRODUCERS: WHO THEY ARE

## Experience

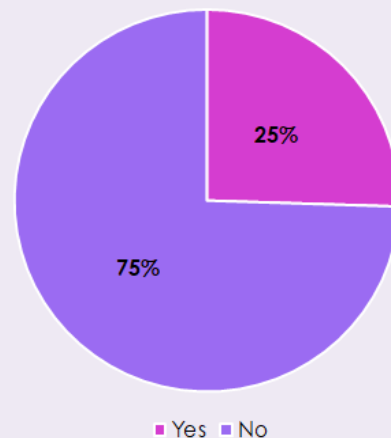
To gauge the level of experience, we asked respondents to identify how many years they had been working as producers by selecting from a list of year ranges. 70% of respondents have been producing for a decade or less, most of whom have been producing for less than 5 years. This indicated to us that we are primarily a population of young to mid-level career producers and need to be catering to those specific needs.

### How many years have you been working as a producer?



We also asked respondents if they had ever participated in a producing lab or a producing specific degree program. 75% of respondents have not participated in either.

### Have you ever participated in a producing lab or producing specific degree program?



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# CHICAGO'S PRODUCERS: WHO THEY ARE

## The Why

We were interested in understanding Chicago's producers' affinity for the role, so, we presented respondents with a series of statements and asked them to rate the degree to which they agree or disagree with each one on a scale of 1 to 5. 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

The first statement was:

**I took on producing because it is my preferred role.**

42.7% of respondents strongly agreed with this statement and 15.5% agreed.

The second statement was:

**I took on producing because I didn't know anyone else who could do it.**

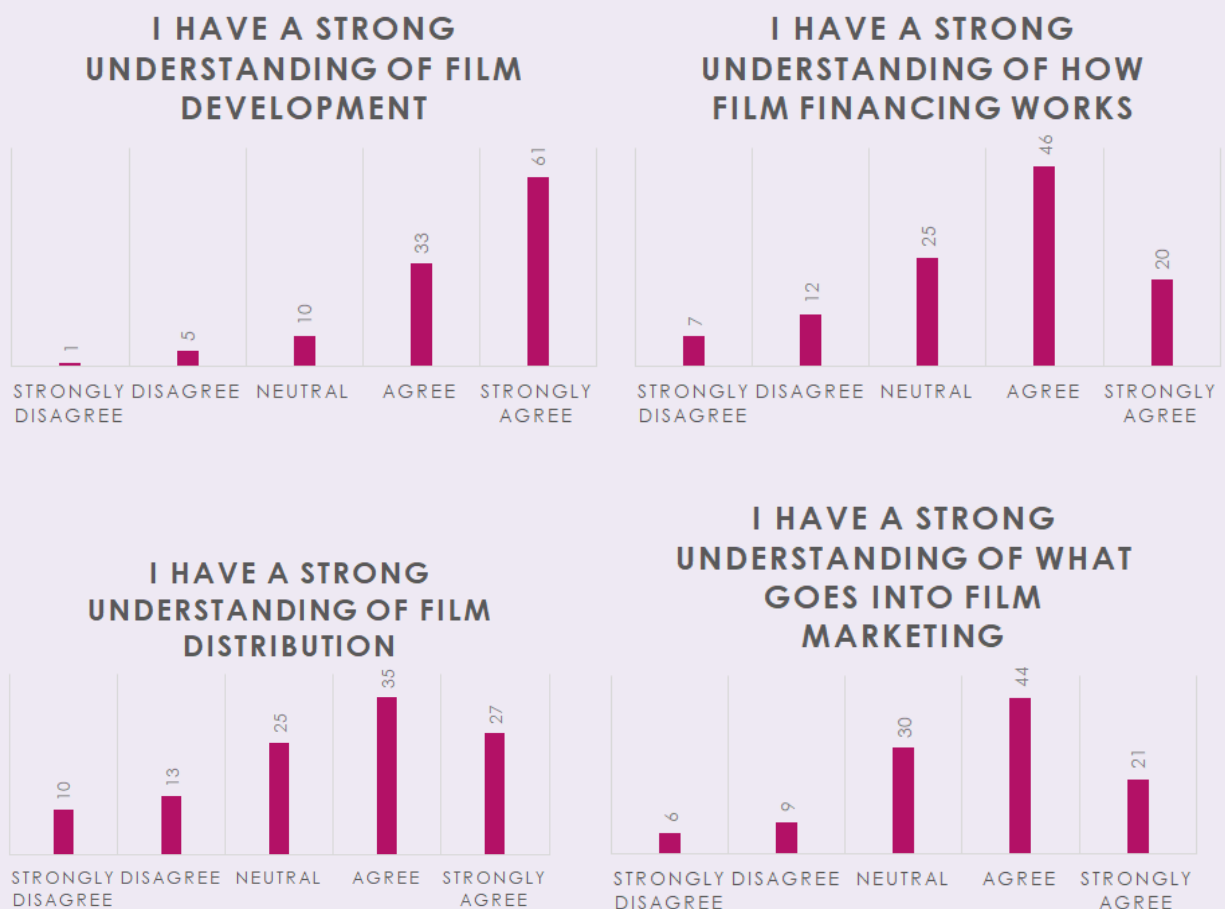
11.8% of respondents strongly agreed with this statement and 34.5% strongly disagreed with it.

The results indicate that we have a community of producers who are passionate about producing as a craft and intentionally took it on.

## CHICAGO'S PRODUCERS: WHAT THEY KNOW

A pressing issue regarding the role of the producer in the media industry is the breadth of knowledge, outside of production management, required to be able to perform the job optimally. We determined four key areas of producing: development, financing, distribution and marketing, and asked respondents to gauge the degree to which they believe they had a strong understanding of each.

More than half of the respondents strongly agree that they have an understanding of film development. With the financing, distribution and marketing, the results were more scattered although, with each case, most respondents did agree that they had a strong understanding of the area.



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## THE CITY. THE COMMUNITY

We presented respondents with a series of statements geared towards understanding the degree to which they believed they could succeed as producers in Chicago and asked them to rank the degree to which they agreed with each statement.

The first statement was **I believe I can have a sustainable career in Chicago**. 19.1% of respondents strongly agreed with this statement while 5.5% strongly disagreed and 28.2% were neutral.

45.5% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement **I have the creative and crew resources to execute my projects**.

When presented with the statement, **I have the financial resources to execute my projects**, only 7.3% of respondents strongly agreed. 34.5% disagreed and 26.4% strongly disagreed.

The last statement was **I feel supported by my community**. 26.4% of respondents strongly agreed with it.

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## CHICAGO'S PRODUCERS: WHAT THEY NEED

### What is the biggest obstacle to producing in Chicago?

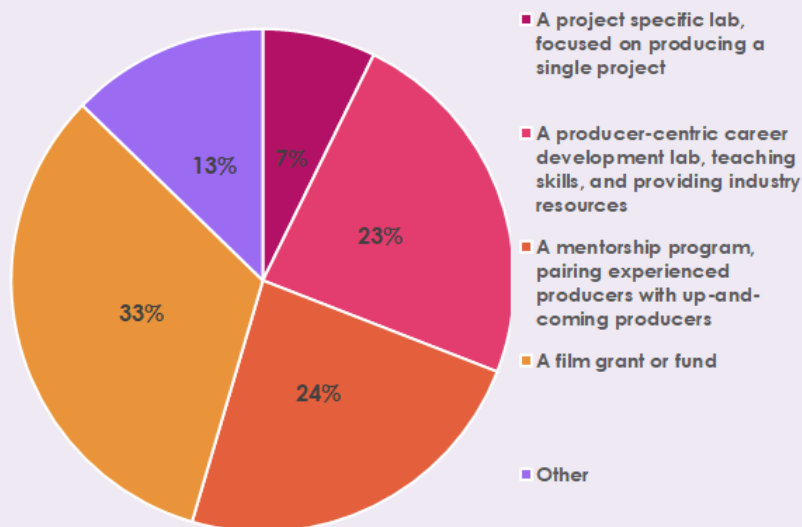
This was posited as an open ended question to the respondents. We aggregated the responses to see which words and phrases were used most often. The most recurring word was “financing.” Words like “access” and “finding” also pertained to money and investors. Other notable phrases had to do with connecting with crew, other projects, distributors, as well as building community with fellow producers.





## WHAT WOULD BE MOST IMPACTFUL TO YOU?

We asked respondents to choose one option from a list of potential opportunities based on which they believed would be most impactful. The list included a project specific lab, a career development lab, a mentorship program and a film grant or fund. We also gave the option to enter a different answer. A third of respondents chose a grant or fund as the most impactful opportunity.



Opportunities to produce & pitch to investors.

A mid-career level lab that combines money with access to financiers, buyers and other creatives.

Deep dive master classes on specific subjects.

An effort to cultivate a new class of investors, and a way to connect those investors to fiction filmmakers, either via a granting fund or yearly pitch session with a real commitment to fund a project or two after pitching occurs.

## WHAT OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRODUCERS WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE IFA PROVIDE?

This was also posited as an open ended question. We implemented the same method, used previously, in aggregating the responses to see which words and phrases came up the most.



The most recurring words from respondents were “networking” and “mentorship.” Words like education and workshops also popped out. We found this to be an interesting contrast from the responses given to the questions about producers’ understanding of the different elements of producing, which the majority claimed they had a good understanding of. The need for networking, mentorships and connections does, however, align with the data point that showed only 26.4% of respondents felt supported by their community.

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## A Word from Our Executive Director, Angie Gaffney

As we look towards the future of producing and independent content in Chicago, I'd encourage us all to build with an eye towards sustainability. Chicago's film industry has grown because of a large increase in physical production over the last 10 years, and, as a result, the number of projects developed locally has also increased. However, with the increase in production over the past decade, we've also seen an increase in under-developed projects. It makes sense: filmmakers have a lot more exposure to the production process, and are hoping to get there as soon as possible. There is nothing quite like bringing your project to life amidst cameras and catering and locations and cast, *it is quite magical*, AND I'd challenge all of our Chicago producers, myself included, to spend more time in development.

Spend more time developing the script or concept, whatever your medium is -- get feedback and more feedback and do table reads and test shoots. Spend much, much more time developing the business and the intention behind your project -- are you just seeking donations or are you soliciting investment? How will the film or project make its money back, literally? Who is the talent or crew or musician attached that adds value to your intellectual property?

Throughout this survey, we found many are seeking access to financial resources. We agree that the financing pool in Chicago for independent content needs to grow, but I would caution folks about viewing financing as the "quick fix" to building the local content economy. Yes, financing is a part of it, AND the creative and business development behind the projects must be stronger, or the money we so seek to cultivate will not stick around.

As an independent, feature-film producer, I personally dream of a world where there are multiple \$2-\$20mm films shooting in Chicago each year. I dream of a community with enough resources where at least 50% of those projects are developed and financed locally, and where those projects make enough money to fuel the next one. Your dream may be different - there is room for many, many dreams, after all - but keep an eye on long term sustainability and notice if you're focusing on "just getting to production" without thinking about what happens next.

We at IFA Chicago are working hard towards long-term sustainability for producers and independent content creators, regardless of your medium. We promise to keep you updated as we continue to develop programming and resources, and are always open to feedback on how we can serve you better.

Sincerely, 

Angie Gaffney

Executive Director - IFA Chicago

## THE PROPOSAL

The team at IFA Chicago took quite a bit of time developing our proposal and deciding what we felt was best to offer to the community. We spent time analyzing the data to get to the core of what the needs are, investigating some of the contrasting results that came up in the results as well as discussing the realities of the industry and our specific market.

We decided that rather than providing a single solution, it would be impactful to offer a number of opportunities that catered to different needs and could serve as the building blocks for some higher level programming. We identified four programming areas that would meet the needs of the community and formed the base of our proposal.

<b>Learning &amp; Development</b>	<b>Community Building &amp; Networking</b>	<b>Mentorship</b>	<b>Resources</b>
A case study series in which film producers cover, in depth, the process of getting a film made from development through to distribution.	Quarterly Producer Meetups  A Producer Database	A shadowing program in connection with a network, studio or organization.	A development and production fund

The learning & development area is geared towards addressing the need for education and helping producers develop a better understanding of all the elements that go into producing a project from inception through to marketing and distribution.

To address the need for community, network and support, we will be planning quarterly producer meetups which will be a space exclusively for producers to network as well as seek advice and support for their projects and careers. Based on feedback from the town hall, we will also be creating a virtual space where producers can connect with each other. The producers database will serve as a resource to both producers, as a way of finding one another, and the general filmmaking community to help connect other artists with producers.

The mentorship and resource elements are longer term projects we are developing.

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These offerings are only the beginning. As our community grows and evolves, we hope to grow and evolve with it and continue to work on creating and adapting our programming to align with the needs of Chicago's producers.

Thank you for participating in this survey and for lending your voice to our community. We look forward to supporting each of you in telling your stories in the years to come.

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## CONTACT

For more information about the Independent Film Alliance or this survey and report, please visit us at [www.ifachicago.org](http://www.ifachicago.org) or email our Operations Coordinator, Ese Obrimah at [ese@ifachicago.org](mailto:ese@ifachicago.org).

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