



CREATIVES EMPOWERED

IBPOC CREATIVE LEADERSHIP PROGRAM 2025

A Blueprint for Decolonial and Collective Leadership in Canada's Creative Sector

Transforming Leadership Capacity through Embodied
Practice, Cultural Restoration, and Collective Governance

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SNAPSHOT METRICS



21
participants



41
applicants

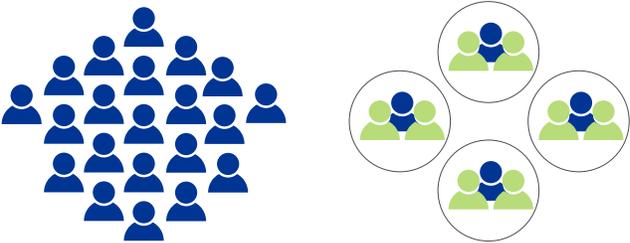


Demand: 21 participants selected from 41 applicants.

Reach: Western Canada: British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.



Focus: 4 intensive days spanning 3 weeks.



Outcomes: 21 unique individual leadership models and 4 cohort-developed, collective leadership models.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

The IBPOC Creative Leadership Program 2025 is the second successful iteration of a transformative leadership initiative responding to the persistent barriers faced by IBPOC creatives in Canada's Eurocentric creative sector. The program doubled in size this year, demonstrating strong demand for **culturally informed leadership development**.

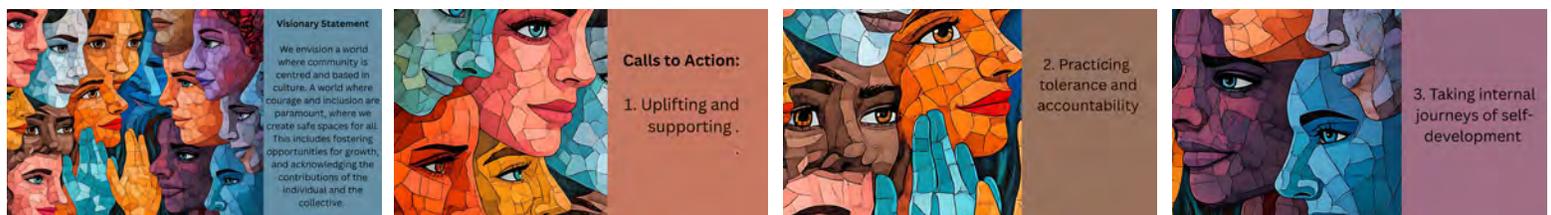
INNOVATION & PHILOSOPHY

The curriculum is holistic and decolonial, centering embodied leadership, collective governance, cultural restoration, and trauma-informed practices. It created a sacred space for participants to explore leadership models rooted in cultural knowledge and ancestral wisdom, moving beyond traditional Western models.



KEY OUTCOMES

Participants developed 21 unique individual leadership models and collaborated on four cohort-developed collective leadership models.



The program forged a community of practice, provided trauma-informed mental health support, and built capacity to navigate systemic racism in professional settings.

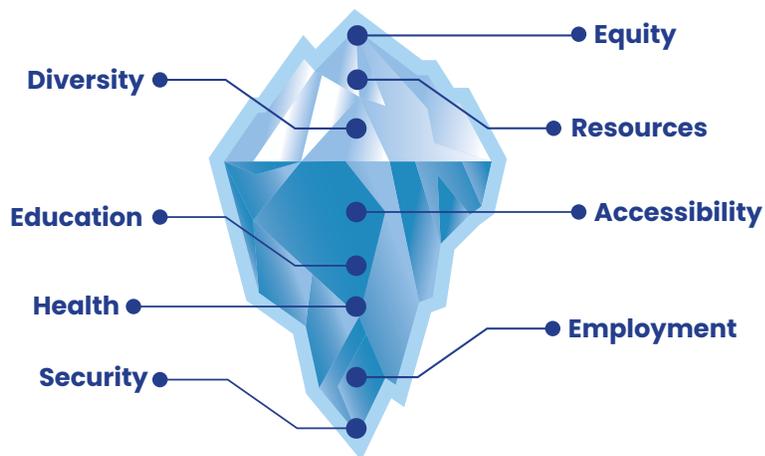
CONCLUSION

The IBPOC Creative Leadership Program provides a model for equitable sectoral transformation, affirming that IBPOC leadership is not about assimilation but about fundamentally changing how leadership, community, and cultural work are understood in Canada.

CONTEXT & THE NECESSITY OF “BY-AND-FOR” DESIGN

THE CHALLENGE

Canada’s creative sectors are shaped by settler colonialism and white supremacy, leading to persistent barriers such as limited access to culturally relevant opportunities and repeated exposure to tokenization and microaggressions. Existing leadership models fail to recognize Indigenous knowledge systems and non-Western governance approaches.



THE “BY-AND-FOR” SOLUTION

The program’s greatest strength is its authentic by-and-for IBPOC design, ensuring that all curators and facilitators are IBPOC leaders with deep expertise. This design centers IBPOC voices and experiences, creating a space free of racial and unconscious bias that frees up creative energy and empowers health.

“If we want to create change in Canada – if we want to have more people from communities who aren’t only represented – the answer isn’t to move towards tokenization and propping people up. The answer is to give people the tools to prop themselves up.”

~ Sarah Jama

Co-Founder, Ontario Disability Network

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

The cohort consisted of 21 leaders from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds (Black, Indigenous, South Asian, East Asian, Middle Eastern) and career stages. They included playwrights, actors, musicians, visual artists, cultural administrators, arts educators and content creators.



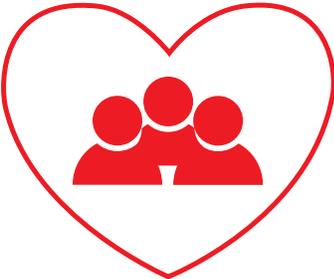
INNOVATION IN PRACTICE: HEALING AS LEADERSHIP

DECOLONIZING THE PACE

The program actively worked to decolonize time, pace, and productivity expectations, honouring the body and spirit through sacred space agreements. This approach fosters sustainable leadership.



Collective Care Over Perfection



Honour Confidentiality



Decolonize the Pace

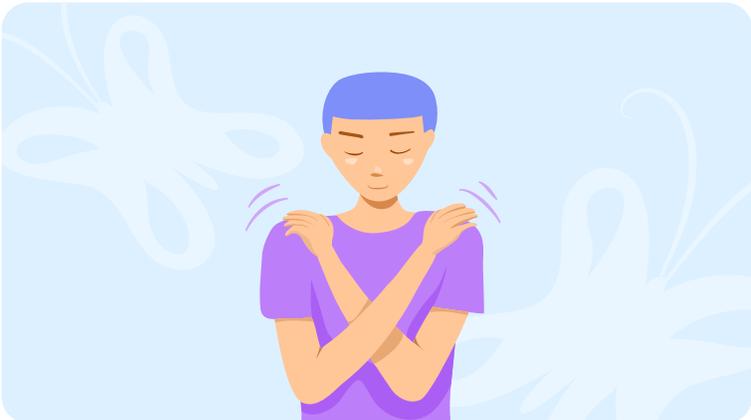
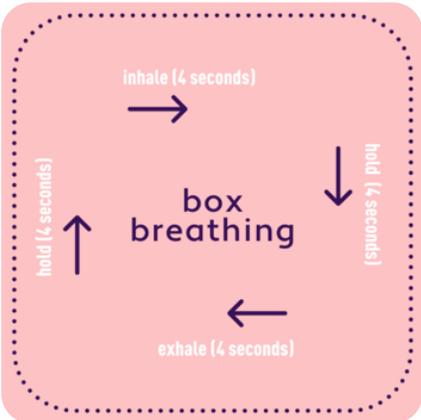
TRAUMA-INFORMED INTEGRATION

Leadership development for IBPOC creatives cannot be separated from healing work due to navigating racist systems. The partnership with BIPOC Healing and Wellness Centre to inform program design and offer mental health support proved essential.



PRACTICAL RESILIENCE TOOLS

Participants learned trauma-informed somatic practices for grounding and stress management, including Box Breathing and the Butterfly Hug Technique (bilateral stimulation). The optional module, "Handling Racism in the Moment," provided practical tools to respond to microaggressions and tokenism through specific approaches (Educate, Curious, Process, Boundary modes).



INDIVIDUAL TRANSFORMATION: SUPERPOWERS & CULTURAL GROUNDING

CORE ACTIVITIES

Participants were encouraged to move beyond Eurocentric molds, embracing their authenticity and crafting personalized leadership models rooted in identity, history, and community. This started by identifying their superpowers (unique skills, perspective, resilience, cultural insights).

Unique Skills

"What is something you excel at that others often seek your help or expertise with?"

Perspective

"How does your perspective add depth or authenticity to your work?"

Resilience

"What qualities help you bounce back from challenges in your creative journey?"

Cultural Insights

"How do your cultural roots, traditions, or values shape your creative identity?"

ILLUSTRATIVE MODELS

These individualized models reflected deep personal and cultural commitments. For instance:

EXAMPLE 1:



"Fruit of Authenticity" Model: focused on creating safe spaces through radical joy.

EXAMPLE 2:



"River of Authentic Leaders" Model: emphasizing finding the right flow and community.

THEMES

A key trend was the centering of water, flow, and ancestral wisdom in individual frameworks (e.g., "River of Authentic Leaders," "Indigenous Medicine Wheel" Models). These individual concepts directly informed and provided the core metaphors used in the collective visioning sessions.

THE COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP MODELS

SHARED THEMES & FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS

The cohort's work resulted in **collective visionary statements** for IBPOC leadership in creative futures. Common themes across all collective models included: **water/river metaphors, collective over individual, decolonization, interconnectedness, authentic leadership, cultural grounding, and transformation.**

The foundational framework for this work was **Decolonial Participatory Action Research (DPAR)** and **Diasporic Futurism.**

COLLECTIVE MODELS:

CULTURE-CENTERED COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Vision: "A world where community is centered and based in culture".

Highlights: Culture is the foundation for connection and identity, emphasizing returning to ancestral teachings.

Calls to Action

- **Uplifting and supporting fellow artists** to be their true selves.
- Practicing tolerance and accountability through open-mindedness.
- Taking internal journeys toward authentic leadership.



CONFLUENCE LEADERSHIP: RIVERS CONVERGING

Vision: "We are rivers... flowing toward the confluence, where we meet, where we become one".

Highlights: Leadership involves individuals (rivers) shaped by unique cultures and geographies, meeting to flow together as one, and transforming challenges into opportunities.

Calls to Action

- Be proactive in **building connections** (e.g., creating a Discord group for sharing resources).
- Reach out for mentorship opportunities.

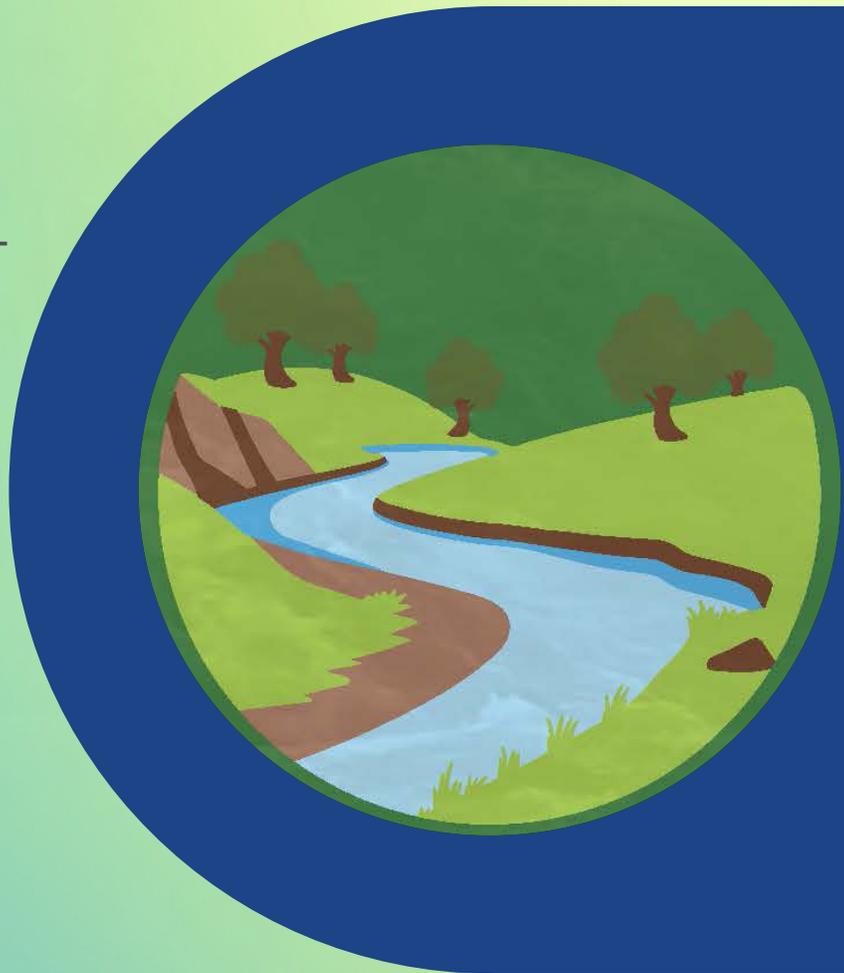
CREATIVE CIRCLES COLLECTIVE: ECOSYSTEM LEADERSHIP

Vision: “Nurture a living ecosystem where artists, cultural workers, and communities co-create through shared leadership, trust, and reciprocity”.

Highlights: Embraces **circles of leadership** versus hierarchical power structures (a web, not a pyramid). Shared responsibility between generations for knowledge transfer.

Calls to Action

- Practice **stewardship over hierarchical power** regarding knowledge, relationships, funding, and energy.
- Collective allyship to create spaces of success.



THE RIVER MODEL: TRANSFORMATIONAL FLOW

Vision: “Creation of a harmonious ecosystem... erasing hierarchy of colonialist ways”.

Highlights: The River symbolizes ancestral knowledge and shared resources. Mountains represent challenges, requiring research and confidence to dismantle systems.

Calls to Action

- **Erasure of hierarchy while maintaining individuality** within the collective.
- **Stewardship over capitalism.**
- Transformation without pressure – “no mistakes, only redirection”.

VALIDATION THROUGH EXPERT LEADERSHIP & VOICES

THE EXPERT ADVANTAGE

The program's curriculum was led by high-calibre IBPOC leaders, ensuring content was grounded in lived experience and domain expertise.



Soni Dasmohapatra
Curator & Facilitator



Rochelle Grayson
Curator & Facilitator



Reena Samra
Curator & Facilitator



Shivani Saini
Curator & Producer

CASE STUDIES IN RESILIENCE

Featuring successful IBPOC creative leaders provided tangible examples of leadership in action. Key insights from guest speakers:



TONYA WILLIAMS

OFFICER OF THE ORDER OF CANADA, FOUNDER OF REELWORLD SCREEN INSTITUTE:

Emphasized that the creative industry is a business that requires strategy. Focused on building audience, understanding your market, and distinguishing between work/money and creative practice. Stressed the importance of building your own agency and confidence.



CRYSTLE LIGHTNING & HENRY CLOUD ANDRADE

CO-CREATORS OF BEAR GREASE THE MUSICAL:

Shared lessons on persistence ("For every 100 no's there is the one yes") and reframing setbacks ("It's not failure, it is a redirection of life"). Highlighted the power of turning trauma into triumph ("Took our trauma and made it into something beautiful").



SABLE SWEETGRASS

BLACKFOOT TRANSGENDER PLAYWRIGHT OF AWOOWAAKII:

Shared the importance of maintaining creative control and the transformative impact of training on Indigenous trans issues for shifting institutional behaviour.



PARTICIPANT VOICES

Reflections highlighted liberation from Eurocentric leadership molds, valuing the community of practice, and the importance of leading from their “whole self”. Shared experiences fostered belonging and peer support, reinforcing the program’s relational approach. Leadership was described not as positional but as relational, culturally grounded, and transformative.

“As an Albertan community leader, filmmaker, and artist, it is often difficult to find national programs that are created with the experience of us in mind... The IBPOC CLP was filled with not only knowledge and resources, but holistic practices that grounded me during the curation of my individual and collective leadership model... My struggles were validated whilst being given tools and tangible plans to overcome future obstacles. The structure of the program allowed for intimate connections with my fellow cohort members, we truly got to know each person and their practices, weaving together a creative tapestry... The lineup of mentors and guest speakers gave me real world examples of success for people who look like me and can empathize with my journey... I was able to build a new community that I know will go beyond this program... The creative ecosystem of Canada is yearning for programs like this...”

~ **Kamika Bianca Guerra-Walker**
IBPOC Creative Leadership Program Participant



Photo: Wyatt Sawyer

CHALLENGES, LESSONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

LESSONS LEARNED: COMMITMENT & ENGAGEMENT

The program successfully fostered a supportive environment; however, some challenges were noted around transparency of participant engagement, highlighting the need for enhanced commitment and a willingness for participants to respect and meet the program's expectations. Future iterations will strengthen the application process and clarify attendance and engagement requirements to maximize ROI and honour the sacred space agreements.

KEY GROWTH AREAS

Some participants expressed a desire for a longer program duration (e.g., six days over several weeks) to allow for deeper relationship building and learning integration. The desire for hybrid delivery (virtual with one in-person gathering) was noted to foster deeper connection while maintaining accessibility.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SECTOR CHANGE

To ensure sustained impact and sectoral transformation, future investment is required for:

- **SUSTAINABILITY & SCALE**

Seeking multi-year funding to build sustainable infrastructure for the program. Expanding support to include alumni programming and formalizing the network.

- **KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION**

Investment in documentation, including engaging graphic designers for visual representations of participant leadership models, and creating publications or webinars to share frameworks with the broader field.

- **ENHANCED SUPPORT**

Supporting follow-up coaching or mentorship opportunities to sustain leadership development beyond the program duration.



CONCLUSION & CALL TO ACTION

SUMMARY OF IMPACT

The IBPOC Creative Leadership Program is a vital contribution to creative leadership development, fostering clarity of purpose and renewed agency for IBPOC creatives. The program positions graduates to influence their organizations and model collective and culturally grounded leadership that can transform both creative ecosystems and the broader arts sector.

Participants completed the program with clearly articulated leadership models, an understanding of personal superpowers, practical tools to navigate systemic barriers, and action plans for implementation. Collective outcomes included strengthened peer networks and a shared vision for community-rooted leadership practices.

The program demonstrates what is possible when IBPOC creatives are given resources and support to lead on their own terms. The goal is not adding diversity but fundamentally transforming the Canadian creative ecosystem.

FINAL QUOTE

As one participant articulated in their leadership model, leadership is about **“creating bridges that connect and uplift communities”**, and the IBPOC Creative Leadership Program is building those bridges, one cohort at a time.

CONTACT INFORMATION

creativesempowered.ca

info@creativesempowered.ca

