

# Building a More Diverse Talent Pipeline

An Interview with Irma Livadic, Program Director, Entertainment Industry Foundation

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Irma Livadic is a Program Director with the Entertainment Industry Foundation (EIF), where she heads the EIF Careers Program, an initiative created to build a more diverse talent pipeline into film and television careers. The program has curated a database of hundreds of qualified candidates sourced from training programs and placed many of the participants in full-time, entry-level, below-the-line production and corporate enter-*



Irma Livadic

*tainment positions. In addition to this work, Livadic also manages the Foundation's impact reporting process, synthesizing data and key trends provided by EIF grantees regarding their use of grant funds to gauge and report on community impact. Prior to joining EIF, Livadic served as Program Coordinator for Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti's Evolve Entertainment Fund, a workforce development program that aims to build career pathways into the entertainment industry for underrepresented Angelenos ages 18-24. Through her role, Livadic secured 250+ paid internships and 40+ full-time roles; orchestrated 16 educational and professional development workshops, panel discussions, and events; and facilitated a mentorship program for 350+ low-income youth. Livadic holds a BA degree in political science from UC San Diego and a master's degree in public policy (MPP) from UCLA's Luskin School of Public Affairs.*

**INSTITUTION BRIEF** *Founded in 1942, the Entertainment Industry Foundation (eifoundation.org) is a multifaceted organization that occupies a unique place in the world of philanthropy. By mobilizing and leveraging the powerful voice and creative talents of the entertainment industry, as well as cultivating the support of organizations (public and private) and philanthropists committed to social responsibility, EIF builds awareness and raises funds, developing and enhancing programs on the local, national and global level that facilitate positive social change.*

**Will you discuss EIF Careers Program and how you define its mission?**

The EIF Careers Program reflects a broad spectrum of diversity across communities historically excluded from the entertainment industry,

with a particular focus on racial, ethnic, gender, disability, and socioeconomic status. We believe that the inclusion of diverse perspectives is essential to achieving systemic change.

Our guiding objectives include taking an active role in ensuring diverse voices are centered, sought out, welcomed, and valued. Additionally, we seek to reduce barriers to access and advance opportunities for historically excluded communities by using deep roots in the entertainment industry and experience with commu-

nity-based organizations. Finally, we are developing a coalition of strategic partners across the creative industry including corporate, community, industry, and philanthropy to bring new investments for career development and exploration programs.

Our goal is for EIFCP to serve as the bridge between pipeline training program alumni and industry employers looking for talent from historically excluded communities, as well as to be the convener of stakeholders committed to creating a more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible creative workforce. The program is about more than just placing individuals into jobs; it is also about ensuring underrepresented communities have the access and opportunity to participate, grow, and build long-term, family-sustaining careers in the industry.

**What are the keys to creating a more diverse talent pipeline into film and television careers?**

As is widely known, careers in the entertainment industry are especially difficult to establish. For low-income and underserved populations in particular, these difficulties

are magnified by widely recognized barriers such as a lack of industry connections, financial inflexibility to work in a freelance culture and accept lower-paying or temporary job positions (e.g., production assistant jobs), limited knowledge and/or exposure to available career opportunities, and a struggle to develop a sense of belonging in an environment where few people look like them or have similar lived experiences, among others.

Various efforts that have tried to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and access for underrepresented talent in Hollywood often have been met with minimal success. Young talent entering the entertainment industry needs ongoing support and career development beyond just their experience in a training program. We are interested in understanding the long-term needs of pathway program alumni and our role in building a more inclusive pipeline to careers in the industry.

The fact of the matter is that individual industry initiatives alone are unlikely to fully address the employment and advancement obstacles many people experience. A collective approach that includes young talent interested in creative careers, pathway programs and educational institutions that aim to build technical and soft skills, and industry employers seeking highly trained talent is critical to building a diverse talent pool for the industry.

**Will you highlight the program's accomplishments and impact?**

We soft-launched the program in September 2020 focused specifically on below-the-line production opportunities. It was formally announced in May 2021 via Variety and Deadline Hollywood. Since then, we have amassed a

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database of several hundred – and growing – diverse and qualified candidates sourced from esteemed career pathway programs in partnership with the Crewvie platform.

The program has also hosted numerous webinars to onboard alumni on Crewvie into the program. This has helped expand our job placement efforts in late Summer 2021 beyond just below-the-line production to include corporate and in-house studio roles as well. We have secured various job placements for candidates, from production assistant roles to talent agency assistants as well as trainee positions. We secured our first job placement for a candidate only a few weeks after our soft launch.

We launched a national billboard campaign to raise awareness of the program and the important work we’re doing in various markets, including New York and Los Angeles.

EIFCP has developed new partnerships and joined coalitions including the Entertainment Equity Alliance, California Department of Education Arts, Media, and Entertainment Sector, the Handy Foundation, and HBCUs in Los Angeles summer internship program. It also formed a partnership with Best Buy Foundation to integrate our work with their national Teen Tech Center program (TTC), with the goal of educating and preparing high school-aged youth for careers in entertainment through diverse programming and career exposure.

Last Fall, we hosted two “Hollywood 101” events in Los Angeles for more than 50 youth, family members, and staff members from the LA TTCs. Implemented in partnership with the Handy Foundation, the event focused on introducing communities to the range of available careers in the industry and pathways to get there. Participants had the opportunity to learn about each phase of production, from development to post-production, during group presentations and more intimate, break-out sessions with industry professionals.

Additionally, we engaged in introductory conversations with industry labor unions to explore and identify ways to strengthen the pipeline into union jobs and membership, and partnered with an industry labor union to support Master Classes within the Los Angeles Unified School District to provide hands-on training and exposure to below-the-line jobs in film and television for high school-aged students.

### **How critical are metrics to measure the impact of EIF Career Program’s work?**

Extremely. This is something we have been discussing in much more detail, particularly over the past few months. Tracking entertainment workforce data and holding the industry accountable is a challenge we, and stakeholders from the larger ecosystem, have been struggling with for a long time. There are a few different reports analyzing the diversity of the film and television sectors, including the annual UCLA Hollywood Diversity Report and the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative. However, they focus primarily on above-the-line production roles (directors, producers, etc.) and advanced career professionals. There is still a need for concrete data on the diversity of below-the-line production roles (e.g., grips, cinematographers, production assistants, etc.) and early- to mid-career talent, our program’s main population. We track our individual program data, which is incredibly important. However, the larger impact we hope to have is the creation of a more diverse, inclusive, equitable, and accessible industry. This means we need the entire entertainment ecosystem to come together to share their data so we can truly assess where we are as a collective and strategize how to address the problems we continue to see and/or hear about anecdotally.

Additionally, it is not only important to measure the diversity of the workforce; we must also think about inclusion, equity, and access. Do historically excluded communities feel a sense of belonging in their positions? Are they staying in the industry long-term (i.e., employee retention)? What types of roles are they securing? Are they struggling to advance in their careers beyond entry-level roles? Are they satisfied with their jobs? What does their compensation look like? Are they receiving internal company support (i.e., professional development, mentorship, etc.)? These questions are all critical to our larger mission and are also, unfortunately, much more difficult to measure and analyze.

Lastly, we must also consider all the different forms of diversity, inclusion, equity, and access, including the intersectionality of identities. It is more than just racial and gender diversity, which is often the focus of the conversation – there is also disability status, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status – the list goes on.

### **How do you measure success for the program?**

We measure success in several ways starting with the number of alumni and youth we serve and extending to the number of pathway programs we engage and work with. We also measure our ability to provide our candidates with access to job opportunities on productions and in corporate spaces and provide our employer partners with qualified, diverse talent.

Another marker involves our success in educating and preparing youth and early career talent for careers in entertainment through diverse programming, career exploration and exposure, and wrap-around support.

We also strive to foster collaboration and partnerships between organizations, alumni, and other stakeholders in the larger ecosystem and grow the coalition of industry leaders committed to improving hiring practices and ensuring that individuals from historically excluded backgrounds have the training, expertise, and access points to enter and advance in the entertainment industry.

Finally, we plan to track, monitor, and share relevant industry data, including policies, hiring trends, and more.

All in all, how we view and measure success is also how we view and measure our impact in creating a more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible industry.

### **What are your priorities for EIF Career Program as you look to the future?**

Our priorities for the future include developing a mechanism to give the individuals we seek to support a voice and seat at the table to share input on program strategy, while also serving as an opportunity to advance their own professional and personal development. We will bring industry stakeholders together on a more regular basis to discuss challenges and solutions to creating diverse talent pipelines.

EIFCP also plans to expand its work further to analyze gaps and areas of needed support in high school arts, media, and entertainment programs as it relates to industry engagement and career education and training. We also prioritize our efforts at being more intentional with defining the communities we serve to include those who are often left out of the conversation, such as the disabled community.

Supporting data collection, research, and analysis on the below-the-line, behind-the-camera workforce and the impact of pipeline programs and initiatives, internal and external, to the industry are essential. We will continually explore and pilot alternative pathways to employment (e.g., apprenticeships) to provide early career talent with work-based learning and practical experience.

EIFCP will track and communicate relevant areas of public policy to stakeholders (e.g., state and federal workforce policies, tax credits, etc.) while growing our partnerships and collaboration within the entertainment ecosystem, particularly with unions and community colleges. ●