

# *Rapid COVID-19 Testing* CASE STUDY

## INTRODUCTION

ACTRA Toronto is the largest branch of ACTRA (the Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists), the union representing performers in the film, radio, television and new media industries. ACTRA Toronto's Diversity and Inclusion committee is a member-run committee who strives to create a better working environment and more opportunities for Physically and Culturally Diverse ACTRA Toronto members.



## THE CHALLENGE

COVID-19 presented additional challenges for the film and television industry, where the number of performers allowed on sets was greatly decreased to help limit COVID-19 transmission by keeping personnel numbers at bare minimums.

## DETAILS

Meaningful roles available for historically marginalized performers have always been scarce, however with the overall decrease in available roles due to the decrease in production levels because of COVID-19, this meant that even less opportunities would be available for diverse performers during the pandemic.

With diverse performers often being cast in small, one liner bit roles, actors aiming to prove their talents often face a unique challenge when tasked with creating their own demo reel. It is very difficult to build momentum in your acting career when you've got the training & the talent but the opportunities are limited by your lack of demo reel footage. A strong demo reel can open doors to better auditions, good reps, and serve as a calling card for their skills & brand as an actor.

It is with that rationale in mind that The Demo Reel Initiative: A Different Lens was created, helmed by D&I Committee Co-Chairs Lisa Michelle Cornelius and Samora Smallwood, with ACTRA Toronto staff support from Jenn Paul, Taisa Dekker, and numerous other ACTRA Toronto Staff members.

Due to the Section 21 Protocols put in place to help keep the film and television industry safely operating during COVID-19, there were strict rules that we had to follow in order to be able to film during the pandemic. The added unexpected cost of COVID-19 testing can be a large burden for any production, but especially low-budget ones.

# Rapid COVID-19 Testing CASE STUDY

## EXECUTION & RESULTS

Testing sessions were held at the ACTRA Toronto office. We at PBI committed to place a representative on-site for an hour to collect the samples and perform the test on the cast and crew.

The testing process was quick, easy and relatively painless. Results were provided later that evening, with ample time to pivot should a positive test come back. Luckily everyone was cleared to go, which meant crew replacements were not necessary and filming could begin.

## SOLUTION

We offered to help cover the costs associated with testing the diverse performers selected to participate in this initiative because we believe in the importance of testing, and we have every interest in helping our immediate community, and Canada at large to get back to working safely.

This was very important to ACTRA Toronto as the performers are the most vulnerable on set, and they could not wear masks or face shields while filming their scenes. Knowing that the entire cast and crew had been tested just before filming commenced put everyone at ease, and enabled them to proceed on set confidently and safely - meeting everyone's goal!



## LEARNINGS FROM ACTRA

**Question: What are the first few words that come to mind when you think about this test?**

Answer: Quick, painless, easy.

**Question: What have you learned through this process? What would you do differently?**

Answer: We've learned many things through this process! But one takeaway now that it has been a few months since we've wrapped production is that although vaccines are now readily available in Canada and a vast majority of folks are vaccinated, it's still incredibly important to continue to be vigilant of the risk that COVID-19 poses, and do everything possible to take the necessary precautions to avoid any sickness or outbreaks on set.

Having a dedicated COVID-19 Compliance Coordinator on set was another factor that was vital in keeping everyone safe. Film sets can be very busy, so to have one person whose only job on set was to ensure that people are keeping their distance from others, wearing their masks and face shields properly, and sanitizing frequently touched surfaces when needed was instrumental in ensuring the ongoing safety of all.

We wouldn't have done anything differently. Everything went as smooth as it possibly could have gone, thanks to a great cast and crew!

**Question: What advice would you have for other companies thinking about a similar process?**

Answer: Advice that we would give to other companies thinking about a similar process would be to always hope for the best, but plan for the worst. Producers receiving COVID-19 results back from the testing facility must be ready to quickly pivot to hire other cast or crew, should a test come back positive.

It's also important to invest in proper PPE for your cast and crew. Make hand sanitizer available in many locations throughout the set. Encourage frequent hand washing. Hire a dedicated COVID-19 coordinator. Ensure that masks and face shields are always worn by crew, especially when you have unmasked talent in front of the camera. And of course, have your cast and crew tested in advance of filming.

Although these things may be considered an inconvenience, it is a small price to pay considering the very harmful potential consequences of unknowingly having a positive COVID-19 cast or crew member on set. Testing is incredibly important and played a large part in allowing the film and television industry to operate safely over the past year and a half.