



GEAR UP: Gender Equity in Audio Recording and Music Production  
Manitoba Taskforce

**COLLECTIVELY SUPPORTING CHANGE:**  
ADDRESSING GENDER INEQUITY IN  
AUDIO PRODUCTION IN MANITOBA

April 2023



GEAR UP: Gender Equity in Audio Recording and Music Production, Manitoba Taskforce

# Collectively Supporting Change: Addressing Gender Inequity in Audio Production in Manitoba

**Released April, 2023**

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# GEAR UP Taskforce

The GEAR UP: Gender Equity in Audio Recording and Music Production Manitoba Taskforce was formed in early 2022 to address the need for real and long-lasting change for women and gender diverse people working in audio recording and music production in Manitoba. This includes but is not limited to reducing systemic barriers, increasing professional development, establishing safer working conditions, and working towards a more equitable local music industry.

The taskforce members endeavour to share their lived experience, gather additional information, make recommendations, and track progress on issues of gender equity in audio recording and music production in Manitoba.

The goal of this work is that women and gender diverse people participate equitably in the audio recording and music production sector in Manitoba by increasing gender diversity in the sector and raising the number, wages, profile, and recognition of women and gender diverse participants.

**Description** The taskforce has been made up of eight women and gender diverse people connected to the recording and production communities in Manitoba. The makeup of the taskforce strives to reflect the diversity of our community and include BIPOC voices, and a balance of skills, genres, and experience including artists, songwriters and beat-makers, business owners, freelance workers, educators, and experienced producers and audio engineers.

**Sponsors** The taskforce is sponsored by Manitoba Music and Manitoba Film & Music. They have committed to providing financial and administrative support and to supporting the taskforce in its work, providing the taskforce with information, and promoting its work. They are

committed to accepting the recommendations of the taskforce, sharing them with the community, and doing their best to incorporate them into their own policies and programming.

**Scope** The taskforce aims to contribute to creating a safer and more equitable sector over the next two to five years. The taskforce is committed to learning about, discussing, and providing direction and recommendations relating to systemic and specific issues of equity, discrimination, oppression, bias, and harassment affecting women and gender diverse people in audio recording and music production in Manitoba.

The taskforce considers the role of artists, audio engineers and producers, engineering schools, music education programs, studio owners, musicians, music businesses, media, associations, guilds, and agencies. Issues in the Manitoba music community more broadly, and issues facing the broader national and international music community, were included in the scope. The taskforce is not directly creating specific programs or resources.

**This report is the result of the taskforce's first year of work and is intended to represent the beginning of a journey, with more work to come by all participants and stakeholders in the sector.**

# Envisioning an Ideal Environment

Drawing on their past experiences and desired future, the GEAR UP taskforce members envisioned an ideal environment for women and gender diverse people in audio production and recording. Their description is an environment that includes:

- Trust among those participating and clarity around expectations and comfort levels.
- A supportive environment for risk-taking, exploration, and honesty.
- Patience shown to all involved, creating a relaxed, unrushed environment and a sense of safety.
- Confidence that all voices will be heard and respected.
- Confidence that expertise and experience will be respected.
- Seeing one's identity represented at multiple levels or roles (e.g. artists, collaborators). Importantly, having leaders or mentors that reflect one's identity.
- The assumption that at least one woman/gender diverse person will be involved in an audio production and recording session to be the norm and not a surprise. This might resemble the way women/gender diverse people have come to be well represented in film audio production in the state of California.

It should be noted that the limited positive experiences GEAR UP members drew on were experiences led by women and non-binary people who acted intentionally to create a safer and supportive space.

The impact of this type of environment would offer women and gender diverse people the freedom to participate fully in the sector and allow their full creative and technical skills to be accessed, both by themselves and the sector at large. These reflections served as the inspiration and lessons to further reflect on the moments when this type of environment was achieved, and the current barriers and systemic obstacles to realizing it more often.



# The Current Context for Women and Gender Diverse People in Audio Recording and Music Production

Societal gender oppression combined with the lack of representation within audio recording creates vulnerabilities and disadvantages for women and gender diverse people in the sector.

The taskforce identified challenges and barriers faced by women and gender diverse people as well as strengths and opportunities to address their lack of representation in audio production and recording. Discussion focused around seven general areas within the music sector.

## Women and Gender Diverse People Within the Sector

On an individual level, women and gender diverse people encounter multiple barriers in recording and audio production. Given the lack of representation and the ways in which systemic gender oppression is expressed in these creative environments, women and gender diverse people are often second-guessed, judged, dismissed, and not taken seriously. This requires them to put time and effort into defending themselves. It also leads them to question their own skills, ideas, or knowledge and to develop imposter syndrome. Women and gender diverse people's experiences can also be impacted by marginalisation of their other identities (e.g. race, Indigeneity, disability). Managing these environments draws their energy and attention away from creative work.

There is a lack of awareness of others working in the field and few opportunities for networking among women and gender diverse people. Directories and hubs enable artists and other partners to connect, learn


about each other, and discover each other's work but are fairly new.

Finally, there is a lack of data and research around the participation of women and gender diverse people in audio production and recording. However, a recent study in the US by the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative noted the percentage of female producers in 2022 was a mere 3.4%, while the percentage of female production credits tallied 2.8% across a sample of 1,700. The study also noted the ratio of men to women producers across 800 popular songs was 34 to 1, empirically demonstrating the disparity of the gender gap.

While the community is diverse and starting to grow, the representation of women and gender diverse people within production and recording is small.

## Pay Disparity

Pay disparities between genders is well documented across all sectors of the economy in Canada. Gender discrimination in the sector results in



decreased opportunities for women and gender diverse people to earn revenue. Women and gender diverse people are more likely to be hired by women, but less likely to be hired by men or invited to be part of larger projects. Men may also be provided opportunities to learn on the job, whereas opportunities extended to women and gender diverse people are often unpaid. This results in difficulty in earning, accumulating, or securing financial resources necessary to establish a business or commercial studio.

Women and gender diverse people also experience discrepancies in pay and the financial valuing of their work. They are often paid less than male counterparts, treated more casually when negotiating participation in a project, and are often faced with surprise when they present their fees, as it is assumed their fees would be less.

### Funders and Finances

There are funding and financial challenges for women and gender diverse people in audio recording and production. Music sector business development grants do not apply to studios, and funders do not cover equipment or business development costs. In some cases, funding application and adjudication processes reinforce discriminatory barriers. Funding opportunities are competitive and may exclude the necessary coverage of expenses that support women and gender diverse people's participation such as childcare costs.

Funders whose grants and processes intentionally encourage women and gender diverse people to apply include the Manitoba Arts Council (MAC) through their BIPOC Leadership Grant and Indigenous 360 program and the Canada Council for the Arts (CCA), which creates and shares mentorship opportunities that have proven critical to the success or growth of women and gender diverse people in the sector.

### Music Sector Awards and Arts Service Organizations

A disproportionately small number of women and gender diverse people apply for awards and grants in the music sector, in part because aspects of these opportunities are inaccessible to them. There are limited examples of women and gender diverse people represented within production award categories. Recently, award associations and organizations have intentionally reached out to women and gender diverse people, encouraging them to put their names forward for awards. These are important efforts that should be expanded. However, gender discrimination in the sector results in women and gender diverse people more often being invited to participate in a project that would act as a stepping stone as opposed to larger or high profile projects that get the attention of award organizations.

Selecting women and gender diverse people for awards increases their media coverage, which increases opportunities for dialogue about women and gender diverse people in the music industry, which increases awareness around the experiences, challenges, and needs of women and gender diverse people in audio production and recording. Panel discussions at events have not only brought attention to the barriers faced by women and gender diverse people, but also the roles and opportunities that could be expanded or created for women and gender diverse people. Panels are most effective when they achieve equitable gender representation and when the moderator is a woman or gender diverse person.

Though this information could be helpful in recognizing current realities and creating change, gender-based data is often not collected or publicly shared by award bodies or other service organizations.

There are other organizations beyond awards-focused associations that have been supportive of equity work. These organizations can be drawn on

to inform future projects and partnerships, or provide ongoing support to women and gender diverse people. A cursory list includes:

#### **National and/or International**

- Femme House
- Gender Amplified
- Music Publishers Canada (Women in the Studio National Accelerator)
- National Arts Centre (global network for women producers)
- She Is the Music
- Women in Music Canada
- SOCAN Foundation (Equity X Production Program)

#### **Local**

- Seven Oaks School Division
- Good + Plenty Producer's Club
- We Rock Winnipeg
- SYNC'D UP

### **Recording Studios**

Recording studio environments can create significant barriers for women and gender diverse people, particularly when impacted by harmful attitudes of studio staff or owners. A lack of women and gender diverse people represented among studio engineers, managers, and owners contributes to these negative environments.

Working in studios is an intimate experience, as people interact in small groups or pairs. The isolated nature of this work can enhance vulnerability. It is also difficult to “shop around” for a respectful or empowering engineer or studio given the nature of studio intake processes.

In audio production and recording, there is great value in observing others or learning through in-studio practice, making internships ideal.

However, there are few internships within the sector and those that exist are often informal and based on personal connections. As the field is male dominated, women and gender diverse people have fewer connections, resulting in fewer internship opportunities.

Cost can also contribute to making studios inaccessible. When purchasing equipment for their own studios and projects, women and gender diverse people can also experience poor treatment.


At the same time, studios can encourage the participation of women and gender diverse people in audio recording and production by offering access to gear and technology otherwise inaccessible and by becoming more mobile and supporting collaborations across distances. Some studios are developing safer spaces and code of conduct policies that ensure and enforce guidelines around engagement with staff and clientele.

### **Educational Support**

There are various ways to develop and improve skills in audio recording and production. For women and gender diverse producers and engineers, self-education is very accessible, especially for those with high confidence, strong networking skills, and access to financial resources. However, self-education can take a comparatively long time. Mentorships and internships can create safer and more efficient and effective learning spaces, particularly when they are designed for and taught by women and gender diverse people. Unfortunately, these types of opportunities are rare.

Many traditional learning environments are not safe, comfortable, or friendly to women and gender diverse people. There are limited training institutions in Manitoba, and the instructors at these institutions are generally always male. Educational settings have no standards or guidelines to ensure safe and accessible spaces for everyone. Women and gender diverse people feel pressured to fit in to engage in small classes





of predominantly male peers. Women and gender diverse people can experience sexual violence or gender discrimination by classmates and leaders in educational institutions.

The financial cost associated with education can also be a deterrent. Additionally, childcare and access to related fees are generally not made available within learning programs or events.

Some training institutions have purposefully created welcoming learning environments for women and gender diverse producers and engineers. Examples include the NIMBUS School, PBL Elements, and independent women-in-the-studio programs. MET Schools, Seven Oaks Tech, and other Manitoban secondary school programs allow interested students to earn a high school diploma while networking within the industry.

### Within and Beyond the Sector

Because of gender oppression, society views the roles of producer and engineer as synonymous with men. Few people think women and gender diverse people are or can be involved in audio recording and production.

Sexualization further limits society's imagination around the roles and capabilities of women and gender diverse people. This can be countered by bringing awareness to the audio recording and production work done by women and gender diverse people, easily accomplished through increased media coverage and sharing the successes of women and gender diverse people in the sector, and further encouraging panels, education opportunities, and mentorships with more equitable representation.

# Addressing Gender Oppression

The GEAR UP taskforce suggests multiple ways to address gender oppression in audio recording and production to ensure safer, respectful, and increased participation of women and gender diverse producers and engineers. These recommendations represent important and achievable steps that address the issues the taskforce has identified at the current moment, and would be a part of ongoing work, re-evaluation, and updated future recommendations.

## 1. Increase Opportunity and Representation Throughout the Sector

Given the critical role women and gender diverse people have had in creating safer and more supportive environments, the taskforce strongly believes that increasing their representation in audio production and recording will have a positive impact not only for them, but for all those involved. Women and gender diverse people require access to more paid opportunities in the industry in order to successfully grow and maintain their careers.

## 2. Ensure Equitable Remuneration

Pay within the sector needs to be equitable. The sector needs to demonstrate an active commitment to reducing the gender bias pay gaps between men and women and gender diverse people. The sector can develop transparency around the remuneration of all project contributors and develop pay standards. Fees associated with project contributions need to be negotiated respectfully and transparently in advance of the project start.

As rights associated with creating a recording are linked to remuneration, best practices should have these negotiated before projects start. The percentage of copyright ownership and neighbouring rights needs to be reflected in a transparent and equitable way.

## 3. Ensure Women and Gender Diverse People Are Credited for Their Work

We can respect, amplify, and make visible the work of women and gender diverse people in audio production and recording by ensuring they are credited for their work, including:

- Labels and artists credit all who participate on a recording
- Studios detail how all artists should be credited within their contracts, including giving artists production credits when appropriate
- Producers and engineers include the naming of credits within their contracts
- DSPs (digital service providers), including music platforms, list credits
- Independent artists include full production credits in song metadata, including in DSPs

#### 4. Increase Opportunities for Connection

Women and gender diverse people forming connections, supporting each other, and/or collaborating is critical to combatting gender oppression.

Efforts that support networking and collaboration are important. Directories of women and gender diverse engineers and producers need to be accessible. Those who host directories, such as music industry associations (MIAs), should actively invite artists to be cross listed as producers and/or engineers when they have experience in audio production and recording.

MIAs should offer specific and intentional outreach to women and gender diverse producers and engineers (e.g. for awards or accelerator programs), and create networking opportunities specifically for women and gender diverse people, including mixers, conferences, or panel discussions where women and gender diverse producers and engineers could meet each other as well as others within the industry (managers, labels, artists).

#### 5. Enhance Current Educational Spaces and Opportunities

The sector needs to create targeted and intentional training opportunities for women and gender diverse people at multiple levels of experience, age (youth and adults), and avenues. This includes opportunities through formal training institutions as well as mentorships, internships, or workshops.

Learning spaces, whether institutions or occasional workshops, must shift the dominant culture to make spaces respectful for women and gender diverse participants. It is also critical to involve women and gender diverse people in the design of educational programming in authentic and meaningful ways. This includes involving them in leadership roles in

educational program development and execution and having mechanisms in place for meaningful consultation.

Subsidized or free classes could be offered, as could classes exclusively for women and gender diverse learners. If a training school offered subsidies for women and gender diverse students, representation would increase while building the school's credibility in the community.

Hands-on learning opportunities, such as mentorships or standalone courses for all ages and levels of experience (not just entry level) would also improve educational experiences. One-off courses can cover technical, creative, or business (studio) management topics.

For mentorships, a participant would ideally be able to request a mentor of their gender.

Studios could develop internships with the goal of building educational opportunities for women and gender diverse people involved in production and recording.

#### 6. Improve Recording Studio Working Conditions

Studios need to commit to dismantling gender oppression in their spaces. This includes addressing and dismantling environments that make sexual harassment or assault possible and/or environments that demean or limit the participation of women and gender diverse people. This commitment can include creating policies and procedures that address harassment, providing staff with anti-oppression and safer spaces training, and ensuring the increased representation of women and gender diverse people on staff and at a leadership level.

Studios can also become more accessible or welcoming by providing studio visits and tutorials.

Women and gender diverse people need support knowing which studios are actively committed to creating a safer space and offer environments where they can thrive creatively. A sector organization could provide a type of accreditation for studios actively challenging gender oppression. The accreditation could be based on multiple factors, including staff training, policies, processes, or staff make up.

External partnership, with possible coordinator or support from a sector organization, could ensure studios and educational institutions have assistance, guidance, or support to become safer spaces for women and gender diverse people through the development of policies, practices, training, etc.

## 7. Enable Access to Equipment

An affordable means of accessing equipment would increase the participation of women and gender diverse people. For example, a collective or program where membership enables access to recording equipment (modelled on Video Pool) would be beneficial.

Funders could make it possible to utilize grants for equipment and studio buildings. This would require changing current practices around equipment expense eligibility in grants or the availability of supports for studio/business start-up and development.

## 8. Commit to Ongoing Research and Data Collection

Gender-related information and statistics from organizations and institutions within the sector are limited. When data is collected it is rarely tracked or analyzed. There are few qualitative research studies regarding the experiences of women and gender diverse producers and engineers.

A national network (potentially supported by MIAs) is needed to develop a methodology for tracking, analyzing, and making public gender data from each province. Additional qualitative research could be done to better understand the experiences of women and gender diverse producers and include their recommendations for change.

## 9. Create Supports for Survivors of Sexual Assault and Harassment

Ensure women and gender diverse people have the support and resources needed to report sexual assaults that occur during audio recording and production.

Both studios and educational settings need clear systems, policies, and training that addresses sexual assault and harassment and building safer spaces.

Organizations in the sector can play a role in building support and accountability within the sector by acting as a hub for accessing or navigating resources and supports. This could include, but is not limited to:

- a) Identifying and sharing community resources to help those within the sector build safer spaces policies.
- b) Addressing instances of gender discrimination within the sector.
- c) Assisting those who have experienced assault or harassment while engaging in audio recording/production to access resources for counselling and reporting. It is noted that sector organizations do not have the expertise to offer counselling or crisis support services and would therefore need to identify relevant community-based organizations.

## Next Steps

The GEAR UP Taskforce shares these observations, findings, and recommendations with the goal of women and gender diverse people participating equitably in the audio recording and music production sector in Manitoba, leading to increased gender diversity in the sector and raising the number, wages, profile, and recognition of women and gender diverse participants.

The taskforce challenges and encourages all participants in the sector including organizations, funders, educators, studios, awards, workers, and artists to look for the opportunities in these recommendations where they can participate in moving this work forward.

The taskforce sponsors will endeavour to monitor progress in the sector and continue to update the successes, achievements, and challenges in the sector, new and ongoing, for the progress of women and gender diverse people in the audio recording and production sector in Manitoba.

**Contact the GEAR UP Taskforce: [info@manitobamusic.com](mailto:info@manitobamusic.com)**

