

Maine Voices: Film-media community has room to become a far bigger part of Maine's economy

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By Louise Rosen

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As active members of Maine's professional media-making community and members of the board of the Maine Film Association, we are writing to express our appreciation for the Press Herald's recent coverage of film production tax incentives. Both the March 29 [editorial](#) ("Our View: In movies, Maine should play itself more often") and [Ray Routhier's April 4 article](#) ("More films could be made in Maine under new proposal") have helped bring this important subject to the attention of a wider public.

We are naturally in support of measures such as film production tax incentives that help to encourage production in Maine. And we agree it's time for an updated set of incentives for the state. While attracting out-of-state productions can be beneficial, we also want the state to more vigorously support its local media-making community in a variety of ways that includes tax incentives. This could start with the recognition that Maine does indeed have a media production community that already makes a significant contribution to the state's economy.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in May 2019 estimated that there are 790 employed in the media sector in Maine, with total earnings of \$38 million. Not counting employees of television and cable organizations, the Maine Film Association estimates there are about 300 full- and part-time employees and freelancers, accounting for an estimated \$14.5 million of those earnings.

According to the University of Maine, Maine's 2019 farmed oyster revenue was valued at \$9.6 million. Imagine the possibilities if Maine's media production sector were to receive a comparable level of public recognition, access to finance and business support and connection to Maine's other business sectors as is given to farmed oysters in the state. Maine restaurants wouldn't dream of placing Long Island oysters higher on the menu than



Not counting TV and cable employees, the Maine media production community comprises an estimated 300 full- and part-time employees and freelancers, with total earnings of about \$14.5 million. *gnepphoto/Shutterstock.com*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Louise Rosen, Advocacy Committee chair, wrote this column on behalf of the Maine Film Association Board of Directors.

those locally grown. It would be great if Maine's own media production community received a similar level of attention, whether for political campaign ads, corporate and educational video or narrative and documentary film projects.

Well-designed film production tax incentives can play an important part in expanding Maine's media-making sector. Film-media production in Maine is much more than a subset of the state's tourism efforts, and updated tax incentive legislation must do as much for local media makers as it does to attract outside productions to the state. Yes, outside productions are a "hospitality" driver: They occupy hotel rooms, use restaurants and catering, purchase supplies such as lumber, paint and props, pay location fees and employ local crew. But Maine's own film production-media making operates at the intersection of technology, arts and entertainment, education, craft and marketing. Expanding capacity is where the greatest potential lies to further develop a sector that can have a deep, long-term impact on the Maine economy.

It appears that outside of Maine's "traditional" industries – tourism, forest products, fisheries – many of the state's economic development efforts and resources have been focused on the expansion of food-beverage, agriculture, biotech and technology. While these are all important sectors, media making is as well. What can be done to enhance the media-making sector in Maine? We foresee that with a combination of professional development, skill building, seed financing, marketing support and investment, the sector can expand significantly.

We call upon state agencies, private businesses and cultural institutions to give the Maine media-making community the opportunity to work with you to grow this important part of Maine's economy. This is a scalable, clean sector based on intellectual property that can hire across Maine's existing workforce, while also helping to train candidates for specialized roles. And it's a business area with strong prospects and attraction for young people that could help the state retain its graduates.

To Mr. Stephen King: Your recent tweets and words of encouragement have been fantastic. May we suggest that in a manner similar to your [Dollar Babies](#) program, which generously makes your short stories available to student filmmakers, you consider leveraging one of your current, valuable long-form works and insist that it be made in Maine by a majority Maine production team, in both crew and key creative roles? We'd welcome the opportunity to work with you to devise such an initiative.

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